

## Municipal offices reopen to public as of Feb. 10

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By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

With the recent reopening of businesses in Hastings Prince Edward County and Renfrew County from lockdown to green status, the municipal offices of Carlow Mayo Township, Tudor and Cashel Township, Limerick Township, and South Algonquin Township all reopened to the public on Feb. 10. Faraday Township's office remains closed and is open to the public by appointment only since Feb. 10.

With the provincial lockdown on Dec. 26, they were forced to close their doors to the public and conduct business by phone, email or Zoom. With this reopening, restrictions are still in place of course, including a limit on the number of people allowed in the office at any given time, mandating mask usage for anybody coming into the office unless they cannot for medical reasons and sanitizing their hands when they enter.

The clerks from the aforementioned townships had the following comments on the reopening of their municipal offices last week.

Jenny Snider, the deputy clerk and treasurer with Carlow Mayo Township, said that it is much nicer to see people in person.

"So, we were very happy at 9 a.m. on Feb. 10 when we were able to reopen our doors to the public," she says.

Snider says that during the last shut down, staff were able to continue working from the office, they scheduled check in and check out times so no two staff were entering or exiting at the same time and they were able to work in separate offices. Even though they were closed to the public, they were on site and able to assist people reasonably well by telephone or email. With the reopening, they're only allowing one person into the office at a time and they have to wear a mask.

"Our residents have been very understanding and supportive through the trials of COVID-19. We are very proud of our residents and all of Hastings County residents are being so conscientious and diligent through these trying times. Without them we would not be able to open our doors to their smiling faces," she says.

Nancy Carrol is the clerk and treasurer for Tudor and Cashel Township, and says the reopening is still too young for them to have any comment on the effect on their ratepayers.

"We are not a high traffic facility to start with. Staff were very adaptable during the lockdown and used the mediums available to us to support those that required our assistance and services," she says.

Carrol mentioned that their library, which is located within their municipal building, also reopened to the public Feb. 10, and staff have seen some residents coming in to take advantage of that service.

"Our hope is that Hastings County is able to remain open while continuing to keep residents safe."

Holly Hayes is the clerk and treasurer for South Algonquin Township in Renfrew County, and she says that they are open and staff are back in the office.

"Last summer, we moved staff around so that most of us have our own dedicated space or are a distance away from others. During the time we were closed we had one staff member in the office at all times. We have a few new systems that allow us to work

completely from home. There are a few things that we need to come to the office for, and we've been juggling that," she says.

Hayes thinks that generally people are happy to see any aspects of their lives go back to some version of normal, considering how difficult it has been with COVID-19.

"It feels like there is finally a bit of light at the end of the tunnel. I'm happy to be back in the office to interact with my co-workers face to face as human interaction is such a big part of being part of a team," she says.

Lisa Hall is the deputy clerk and treasurer for Faraday Township and says that the municipal office is staying closed to the public for the time being.

"Staff are in the office regular office hours, Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and the public can attend the office by appointment only. If anyone needs the office they have been coming to the door where staff can assist without them entering the building or they can use the drop box for any payments or paperwork that needs to be dropped off," she says.

Victoria Tisdale is the clerk and treasurer for Limerick Township, and says that their township is excited at the prospect of getting back to normal, they are going to be taking a cautious approach.

"Our council meeting was rescheduled to Monday, Feb. 22 [due to Family Day]. At this meeting, I will be suggesting to council that the office be open to the public by appointment," she says.

Tisdale says that the municipal office staff remained working throughout the stay-at-home order. As they all had separate office spaces, they were able to meet the distancing recommendations and they followed the mask and sanitizing protocols while there.

"Some of the regular public visitors are happy to be able to come back to the office in person to discuss issues at hand. However, most have adapted well to phone calls and video calls," she says. "We look forward to being able to open the office up completely in the future, should the COVID-19 numbers across the province continue to decline and all regions open back up to the public."