

Town of Caledon holding off on several projects as COVID-19 crisis takes its toll

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

Since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in early March, the world is slowly beginning to adapt to its new norm.

The Town of Caledon are continuing to put the community and residents first and listen to the needs coming from the public. With changes being made every hour of every day, it's been a challenge to keep up. Mayor Allan Thompson discusses with the Citizen the many challenges the Town has been going through, while highlighting the many initiatives they are currently working on.

'I think everybody's starting to get a little tired. At one point during this pandemic, things were changing every hour and I think things are kind of leveling off,' he explained. 'We kind of know where we're going.'

Many staff from the Town are working remotely from their homes, with Mayor Thompson explained that the Town is down to 'a bare minimum'. The Town feels comfortable enough that Caledon residents understand the severity of the pandemic, and what they can do to stop the spread and keep each other safe.

With constant reassurance and encouragement of these matters, the Town has moved on to focusing on local businesses and how we're all going to come out of this pandemic in the weeks and months ahead.

'We do have reserves that will get us through the year. Even if things got really bad, we're good for the year. We're going to come out beat up, no question about it,' he said. 'But because of the reserves, we're going to be okay.'

Because of those Town's reserves, which total over \$20 million, the Town was able to defer resident's property taxes payments for 90 days. Caledon Council unanimously agreed on March 24 to defer property taxes for three months to assist residents financially.

'We're going to get there. It's going to be a challenging year, but we'll get through it,' he said.

Just like most organizations, the Town has had to make some crucial changes to its plans, staff compliment and day to day operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All council meetings have been held on telephone conferences, with the majority of councillors working from home. As far as projects already pencilled in for 2020...

'We put 280 employees on emergency leave at this point,' said Mayor Thompson. 'The real challenges are some council projects that have had to park and some projects that we are keeping moving forward. There's a lot of prep to get a lot of other projects underway, so we're constantly working on that.'

The Town of Caledon has released a list of business support programs provided from the provincial and federal government to keep local businesses and residents informed and updated on the latest information. Staff are consistently working on what needs to be done to benefit the future for local businesses and the economy.

'I think we've made all the hard customs we need to get us through, but we can't just react now, we have to realize, what does this look like next year? Or in five years? We've had to be extremely strategic on how we make those decisions and I think council has done a really good job giving the support to the staff. And the staff has been working around the clock to figure out what our next steps are,' commented Mayor Thompson.

Council is constantly working with local community organizations to make sure they have everything they need to provide their much-needed services to area residents. A program called the Caledon Community Connections Team was recently developed, which is dedicated to connecting what the community needs with community services.

?What we're trying to do is keep our community moving forward,? said Mayor Thompson.

Nothing has been confirmed just yet, but the Town is looking to host carious webinars to connect local businesses with various stakeholders in Caledon. The webinars are a key component of the Town's recovery plan, to ensure we all get through this pandemic as well as we possibly can.

?Our new normal is definitely going to be different. This year's normal isn't normal at all. Our key focus right now fulfilling our community's needs,? said Mayor Thompson.

For more information of upcoming plans and updates from the Town of Caledon, please visit Caledon.ca.