

Mayor's Report – Thursday May 21, 2020

It has been 5 weeks since our last Council meeting.

As COVID-19 related announcements often come through daily federal and provincial televised media briefings there is a time lag for us to receive the details and unravel the implications in our community. Often activities that were restricted one day will not apply the next. I wish to thank the staff for their quick response to legislated changes “on the fly”.

Some of the latest announcements include: campfire ban restrictions lifted; boat launches opening depending on safety and water levels; Provincial parks open for day use only and private campgrounds beginning to prepare for seasonal contract holders.

I attended the County Council virtual meeting on April 29th. The virtual meetings may take longer but it does eliminate 2 hours of travel! All of the reports from the Senior Leadership Team were focussed on each departments’ response to these unprecedented times. COR staff is reshaping the world of work and in some cases saving time and money, especially around travel.

The Deep River and District Hospital continues its weekly Mayors electronic meeting every Thursday afternoon for updates from HCM, Laurentian Hills, Deep River and Petawawa. Unfortunately, I am missing one this week. These meetings are invaluable for the in-depth understanding of our local healthcare situation.

Since early in the COVID-19 pandemic we have heard dire warnings of our vulnerability. Over the past weeks, we have learned how our local hospital is in jeopardy of closing with the slightest hint of an outbreak. On more than one occasion we have also been warned of a possible closing due to lack of staff. We have contemplated the stark reality of insufficient morgue facilities. Although access to PPE supplies has improved at the DRDH, we have also learned that during an emergency such as this, supplies could be redeployed to other hospitals in the province without notice.

On May 1st, the Mayors of Petawawa, Deep River, Laurentian Hills and I felt compelled to express our concerns about the risk of Coronavirus exposure to our local frontline workers and essential staff who work in facilities caring for our most vulnerable. Together we sent a letter to Premier Ford voicing our concerns about non-essential travel to rural areas until the end of May. It is my understanding that other small-town mayors have also asked the Premier for similar action.

Community health and safety should be a great concern to all of us as we contemplate not only COVID-19 but also Mr. Antler’s letter in correspondence, a suspected arson in Bissett Creek, followed by a forest fire on the boundary of Algonquin Park and our municipality. It is my hope to make contact with OPP Detachment Commander Neufeld to discuss these issues and any others the Council may have.

Mayor Debbi Grills