

City mapping a path forward for COVID-19 recovery

June 4, 2020 — While efforts continue to slow the spread of COVID-19 the City of St. Catharines is mapping a path forward towards recovery from the impacts of the virus on the City, its residents and its economy.

This week City Council endorsed the STC Framework for Recovery, the strategic document that will guide the City in its efforts to reintroduce services; reopen facilities; and support both residents and businesses as they adapt to a new post-COVID-19 context. The framework outlines dozens of action items across all City departments, all focussed on a return to pre-COVID-19 levels of service where possible, while maintaining best practices to slow the spread of the virus and prevent a local resurgence.

“This is a completely new exercise for us as a City,” said Chief Administrative Officer Shelley Chemnitz, adding, “first and foremost we need to prioritize the health and safety of residents and staff while balancing the financial impacts on both the City and our community with the importance of City services and facilities. It’s great to be looking toward a post-COVID future, but we must move cautiously to ensure we emerge from the pandemic healthy and prosperous.”

The STC Framework for Recovery is built on health and well-being; organizational; and economic pillars. All balance the criteria of safety, community impact and feasibility in the planned restoration of services and reopening of facilities. The framework outlines four total stages of recovery, the first three mirroring the Provincial recovery plan, with a fourth added to present efforts after a vaccine has been administered or the risk of COVID-19 is deemed to no longer exist.

“The fight against COVID-19 has been unprecedented for our City. Our residents and businesses have risen to the challenge, and we have done everything possible to slow the spread of COVID-19, but it has come at an enormous cost,” explained Mayor Walter Sendzik. “While there is no blueprint for recovery, City staff have created a roadmap for our community to recover that I believe will guide us towards a stronger, more resilient and sustainable future. These are unsteady times – but we have a Council and staff who are more than ready for the challenges ahead of us.”

While the framework lays out four stages, their advancement will depend on continued success in the fight against COVID-19, direction from the Province of Ontario and guidance from Niagara Region Public Health. Sendzik was quick to note it is important the City and residents alike continue to follow the advice of Public Health — such as continued physical distancing and regular hand washing — to ensure the City moves forward, rather than taking a step back.

As part of the framework the City will investigate how to best support residents and local businesses hard hit by the pandemic, including an ancillary plan from the City's Economic Development and Tourism Services Department. The plan outlines numerous steps to help businesses adapt to the new economic and operational contexts introduced by COVID-19, building local economic resiliency, with coordinated efforts based on directives from the federal and provincial governments. Actions items range from establishing new public spaces for pedestrians and business that allow for greater physical distancing; training assistance for businesses dealing with new operational restrictions; promotional efforts to bring visitors back to the city; and advocacy with upper-tier governments for financial and information support.

"While the COVID-19 crisis has undoubtedly shifted the direction of our work, this new recovery strategy builds on the vision of our 2017-2022 Economic Development Strategy in a new, comprehensive context," said Brian York, the City's director of economic development and government relations. "By redefining how to utilize corporate expertise, existing assets, capacities, partnerships, strengths and resources, change can be directed in a way that will ensure the economy is more resilient and adaptive to future challenges."

For more information on the City's recovery efforts visit www.engageSTC.ca.

STC Framework for Recovery highlights

Stage 1:

- Reopening of the St. Catharines Farmers Market
- Opening of parks for passive use
- Resumption of all Planning and Building Services with the exception of inspections of occupied dwellings

Stage 2:

- Reopening of City splash pads, the Garden City Golf Course and beaches
- Full use of City Parks permitted
- Restoring use of City sports fields to user groups
- Reopening of City Hall and its in-person public service desk, with protective barriers and physical distancing guidelines in place
- Restoration of some City Hall services — such as issuing of business licences — in altered formats

Stage 3:

- Reopening of City arenas; St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canal Centre; St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre; community centres and older adult centres
- Reopening of the St. Catharines Enterprise Centre

Stage 4:

- Reopening of the Lakeside Park Carousel, outdoor pools, Morningstar Mill buildings, and Happy Rolph's Animal Farm

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Contact:

Shelley Chemnitz
Chief Administrative Officer
schemnitz@stcatharines.ca

Brian York
Director of Economic Development and Tourism Services
byork@stcatharines.ca

Walter Sendzik
Mayor
mayor@stcatharines.ca