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## MEMORANDUM

**CSC-C 7-2021**

**Subject:** COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Corporate Services  
**Date:** February 17, 2021  
**To:** Corporate Services Committee  
**From:** Todd Harrison, Commissioner, Corporate Services/Treasurer

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Corporate Services delivers efficient and innovative service excellence to external and internal customers in an integrated and timely manner.

During this pandemic, our staff have continued this support function for core businesses within our group and for operating departments. In addition, Corporate Services has provided critical support to the Emergency Operations Committee (EOC).

The following provides an overview of activity that has taken place and a projection of expected service delivery moving forward:

### ***CONSTRUCTION, ENERGY AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT (CE&FM)***

The CE&FM group is divided into two main groups, Construction and Facilities Management. This team continues to be an essential component of the Region's EOC.

Some of the functions performed in this capacity are:

- Maintaining Vine Portal for EOC supply chain requests allowing for increased efficiencies and tracking of delivery;
- Coordinating the sourcing of essential supplies in collaboration with other departments;
- Continuing Operations and Maintenance of all opened facilities including enhanced cleaning protocols to ensure safe working environment for essential staff not working from home;
- Coordinating emergency procurements of PPE and other supplies that are critical to business continuity for essential services;

- Coordinating shipping/receiving and securement of critical supply needs;
- Providing dedicated and secured storage areas to assist LTC pandemic supply requirements;
- Upgrading facilities with social distancing barriers, protective screens;
- Responding to internal client needs for changes in normal operations, special moves and health & safety concerns;
- Providing enhanced security monitoring of sites with reduced and or no staff on site; and
- Redeployment of CE&FM staff to support REOC and facilities operations.

## **Operational Outlook**

### **1/3/6 months**

#### *Construction:*

- Continue to work with contractors on construction sites for work that resumed as of mid-May.
- For projects not in construction, staff is proceeding with procurement for projects deemed to be critical to proceed.
- Working with OH&S, determining what physical changes are required to re-open Regional office locations to the public.
- Completed installation of glass/plexi barriers at SAEO Niagara Falls, Welland, St. Catharines, Fort Erie, and Port Colborne public waiting areas.
- Completed installation of glass barriers throughout POA courts building.
- Modified Campbell East entrance for temporary staff screening and additional security.
- Working with communications, developed new Region floor decals and signage for physical distancing. Decals are installed at Welland POA Courts, SAEO offices at Niagara Falls, Welland and St. Catharines and partial installation at Niagara Region HQ based on operational need.
- Completed working with dental clinics to review air exchange requirements in order to resume in person appointments.
- Reconfiguration of Vaccine storage room and complete upgrades to electrical and HVAC to accommodate COVID vaccine.
- All capital projects at Niagara Region are considered essential construction and are not affected by the Province's lockdown order.

*Cleaning:*

- Staff has extended the current enhanced COVID cleaning requirements for facilities managed by CE&FM and EMS stations.
- Renegotiated cleaning contract to extend for another 6 months based on right sizing operations to meet PH guidelines.
- Procured additional cleaning and janitorial supplies to meet divisional and client needs.
- Addressed multiple emergency workplace disinfection requests following positive COVID findings in the workplace.

*Supply Chain and Deliveries:*

- Dedicated staff for delivery and reception of all Region Headquarters deliveries to loading dock to limit personnel entry to Region Headquarters.
- Have met all client and division's support requests for procurement of PPE, hygiene and cleaning supplies.
- Sourced face shields, N95, cloth and surgical masks for use by region staff based on operational needs.
- Increasing inventory of critical PPE supplies for fall flu season (including anticipation of second wave).
- Working with REOC and PHEOC to prepare for storage, security and distribution of COVID vaccines and immunization supplies.

*Building Security:*

- Continue to monitor security and facility access control systems to meet program delivery needs.
- Continue to keep all Region sites functional, safe and secure for eventual return to normal operations.

*Non-essential maintenance and repair work:*

With opening up of maintenance and repair work by the Province in early May, continue with critical maintenance repair work and services and any other work required for the efficient building operations.

## ***FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING (FMP)***

### **Current Status of Operations**

As indicated, all of the Corporate Services Departments continue to deliver core services while at the same time perform a significant number of duties to support the Regional EOC.

FMP staff have continued to support core business functions during the pandemic. Some highlights of these actions include:

- Complete the 2019 year end audit;
- Submission to the Province of the 2019 Financial Information Return;
- Publication of the 2019 Annual Report;
- Develop 2020 tax bylaws and provide required necessary report and bylaws;
- Work with Public Works to update financial implications of SNF water treatment plant for inclusion in the 2021 budget;
- Publication of the 2020 Budget Summary;
- 2021 budget planning and preparations;
- Successful sale of \$34 million in serial debentures (\$15.5 million Regional) on July 31 at all time historical low interest rate of 1.43% for 10 years;
- Preparation of 2021 Capital and Operating Budget timetables and planning report for Council and establishing strategies for budget preparation; Budget Review Committee of the whole approval of the 2021 Water, Wastewater and Waste Management Operating Budget and 2021 Capital Budget.
- Reported to Council on the second and third quarter financial results and year end forecast;
- Completion of Service Sustainability Review project and reporting to Council;
- Update of Standard and Poor's credit rating, reaffirming the Region's AA stable credit rating; and
- Creation of new Development Charge Policy regarding payment instalment options and related interest.

Additionally, FMP has a main role in the Region's EOC as part of the Finance and Administration Unit. Highlights include:

- Development and implementation of procedures for cost reporting and tracking;

- Coordination and collaboration with municipal treasurers of assumptions and information for consolidated financial impact information for advocacy to provincial and federal governments;
- Review of Regional capital projects in light of provincial legislative essential construction business and Regional capacity to complete;
- Implementation of on-line/credit card payments for services such as business licenses, garbage bag tags including direct sales to residents, planning and transportation permits, long term accommodations, etc.;
- Support HR in development of cost tracking system to facilitate staff redeployment to essential services in pandemic including ongoing update of EOC costing assumptions;
- Support HR in establishing process to administer pandemic pay. Finance is leading completion of significant additional reporting requirements for various different Ministry;
- Extensive cash flow and collections analysis and planning in conjunction with local municipalities;
- Analysis and reporting related to Council motion to consider deferral of 2020 water/wastewater budget increases;
- Preparation of COVID-19 recovery planning documentation and consolidation of corporate plan;
- Complying with reporting requirements for \$12.8 million in provincial Safe Restart Phase 1 funding along with the completion of additional COVID-19 extraordinary cost claims and reports to various Ministry; and
- Successful in application to Provincial Safe Restart Phase 2 for \$9.2 million in COVID-19 funding for 2020 and 2021.

## **Operational Outlook**

### **1/3/6 months**

- Ongoing financial reporting submissions for COVID-19 extraordinary cost claims including Safe Restart and Personal Support Worker Wage Enhancement.
- Supporting the 2021 Operating Budgets preparation.
- Supporting GO implementation, Niagara Regional Transit Governance, Canada Summer Games, Incentive Review, Airport Master Plan RFP, sponsorship revenue, Asset Management Planning, Niagara Regional Housing ASD.
- Beginning work on Development Charge Bylaw update with consultant and other teams involved in master plan updates.

- Evaluation of the HRIS RFP.
- Coordinating debenture issuances with infrastructure Ontario for Region and Area Municipalities.
- Supporting Procurement in actioning the recommendations from the non-competitive procurement audit.
- Analysis and reporting of 2021 tax policy decisions to set the 2021 tax rates.
- Finalizing 2020 year end reporting to Council and completing 2020 financial statement audit, financial information return and annual report.

## ***PROCUREMENT AND STRATEGIC ACQUISITIONS (PSA)***

### **Current Status of Operations**

Similar to other departments within Corporate Services, PSA staff have delivered by supporting core business functions while taking on additional projects to support the Region's EOC.

Highlights of activity during the operational period includes:

- Facilitating new and ongoing procurements culminating in award;
- Realty related works for inflight projects, leases and licenses;
- PeopleSoft Change PO's, Supplier and PCard administration; and
- Sourcing critical PPE and supplies needed for the EOC response to the pandemic.

### **Operational Outlook**

#### **1/3/6 months**

The Region's review of essential projects both capital and operational has resulted in a prioritization of formal procurements moving forward. This will continue throughout the pandemic and afterwards.

## ***INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES (ITS)***

Similar to other departments within Corporate Services, ITS staff have delivered by supporting core business functions while taking on additional established projects to support the Region's EOC.

Highlights of initiatives completed during the pandemic include the following:

- Modifications to various web applications to support the AODA 2021 compliance regulations.
- Updated external COVID reporting on website to simplify information and added vaccination data.
- Provide support for Community Services in the onboarding of an online financial assistance application (OLAF).
- Creation of new reports to support the HR Redeployment tool- currently reactivated for use in the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of COVID.
- Produced and/or iterated a variety of Power BI reports for Public Health as it relates to COVID, including:
  - PH and REOC dashboards;
  - The public COVID metrics on niagararegion.ca;
  - LAM specific report for public health to deliver weekly to each Mayor and CAO and other requested senior staff;
  - A repatriation report for HR and public health visualizing the COVID redeployment effort;
  - Outbreak COVID reporting;
  - Public COVID Info-Line and Online Chat Wait Times; and
  - Public Health COVID Response Tracking.
- Additional Power BI reports were produced for:
  - SAEI Intake – to assist in assessing the impact of CERB etc. to their call volume and intake load;
  - Customer Service Call Volume – to assess the impact on dispatch with forwarding all HQ call attendant calls to dispatch; and
  - CAMRA Reporting for capital project budget decision making.
- Produced a data solution for school outbreak COVID reporting in the EOC (both EOC's).
- Devised and are continuing to implement a long term data solution for public health COVID information and contact tracing, including integrating with the Provincial CCM application.

- Automation of the public daily COVID report publication which was manually completed 7 days a week for ~ 5 months.
- Provided the Homelessness Reporter suite of applications to Community Services for outreach workers to use with the homeless during COVID.
- Support for onboarding the 2 new WM collection contractors - modifications and enhancements to various applications were required to support this initiative.
- Implemented a public facing website with automation of the application process for qualification of Specialized Transit services offered by Niagara Region.
- Modifications to EMS Tools to adhere to recently revised Ministry of Health regulations for Incident reporting.
- Modifications to HSMS (Hauled Sewage Management System) for WWW to enable GIS/mapping services connectivity, data capture for Source locations, enhance search capabilities, enhance filtering capabilities and usability.
- Modifications to various web applications to support the AODA 2021 compliance regulations.
- Security enhancements to ChildCare EReg to further safeguard sensitive data.
- FOI Application upgrade to stay current with security and functionality offered by the vendor.
- Assisted the City of Thorold by producing economic development maps to be used with prospective clients/developers for the City. Five different maps were produced in total.
- Worked collaboratively with NH on rebuilding the application 'Transfer of Care' which will improve efficiencies and tracking in the life cycle of a patient beginning care with EMS up to the hand off (transfer) of care to NH.
- Support for Legal in looking for a new application for time tracking, case management and insurance management.
- Support for HR on the Talent Map Survey regarding work conditions in the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- User survey conducted on cyber readiness for all staff.
- Continued education on cyber training to staff and council through the Niagara Region phishing program and broader corporate communications.
- Continue to monitor and enable features of the Region's security access controls and invest in vulnerability software to safeguard the corporation's assets and data.



## **Operational Outlook**

### **1/3/6 months**

- Continued support for COVID-19 initiatives while supporting and enabling staff to work from home. Prior to COVID-19 daily average for the number of remote connections was approximately 90 users, current daily average is 1270 users.
- Ongoing updates to the screening questions used by EMS in their tool 'EMS Tools'.
- Ongoing COVID-19 data analytics including internal operations supports and external data visualizations - Launched enhanced stats on external website including municipal breakdown.
- Implemented technology and processes to accommodate electronic public participation in Council and Committee meetings.
- Went live with the "Homelessness Reporter" for Community Services that will allow staff to track and monitor homeless in Niagara.
- Automated Public Health EOC status report for daily briefing and Ministry submission.

## ***LEGAL SERVICES***

### **Current Status of Operations**

As indicated for all of the Corporate Services Departments Legal Services continues to deliver core services, while at the same time providing a significant level of support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to the Region's EOC and all operating departments.

The Legal team performs a key role in the Region's EOC providing risk management and legal advice. The team provides ongoing legal support to the Region's EOC and operating departments in particular related to the interpretation and implementation of new provincial legislation and Emergency Orders that have been issued throughout the pandemic. Highlights of advice and legal support provided include:

- Advice and legal support related to the development and implementation of the Region's face covering by-law;

- Advice related to impact of emergency orders on procurement and construction to ensure the continuation of essential Regional capital projects and help minimize pandemic-related project costs and disruptions;
- Advice to Public Health to support the issuance of Orders under the Health Protection and Promotion Act;
- Legal support related to enforcement of and compliance with a broad range of regulatory requirements imposed in response to the pandemic;
- Risk management advice on building screening and security issues; and
- Advice related to recovery planning/reopening of Regional facilities.

## **Operational Outlook**

### **1/3/6 months**

The Legal team continues to provide advice and support to operational departments on core business activities, including risk management and insurance advice and litigation support. Litigation and claims management have become increasingly active in the latter half of 2020 into 2021 as Courts and lawyers adapt to pandemic constraints and remote working alternatives. The team also continues to provide additional support for REOC and COVID-19 related matters as required, with the majority of the team working remotely.

## ***COURT SERVICES***

### **Current Status of Operations**

The Court Services team is overseen by the Region's legal department on behalf of the joint board of management, between the Region and area municipalities.

Highlights of operational changes to Court Services:

- In alignment with the Stay at Home Order, the Niagara Region's POA Courthouse building closed temporarily to the public with alternative services being offered effective Friday January 15, 2021.
- At this present time, Court Administration & Collections staff remain onsite to provide customer service via telephone and email, as well as conduct remote

court matters as scheduled to enable the public and stakeholders to continue to access court services during the lockdown.

- Court Services continued to accept the filing of charges and informations by enforcement agencies onsite 8:30am-4:30pm while the public entrance remains closed.
- Direction from the Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG) has been received indicating that all in-person Provincial Offences matters have been adjourned to at least January 25, 2021. There has been ongoing collaboration with Facilities and Corporate Health & Safety to prepare for resumption of in-person court matters, utilizing the initial Recovery Secretariat Guidelines provided by the MAG. A site assessment by the Public Services Health & Safety Association (PSHSA) is required to support the resumption of in-person court matters. Court Services is presently awaiting an assessment date in order to move forward with resumption.
- Since July 6, 2020 judicial pre-trial matters and early resolution guilty pleas have been conducted remotely where eligible, before a Justice of the Peace via audio conference.
- Since October 19, 2020 non-trial remote matters have been conducted remotely where eligible, before a Justice of the Peace via audio conference.
- Court services is well equipped to deliver these services remotely, and has begun to do so, based on extensive preparation for remote and virtual matters in addition to the modern technology available onsite at the courthouse facility. The Courthouse is now Zoom enabled (which is the video platform required by MAG), which will support Court Services in conducting trials by video when permitted.

## **Operational Outlook**

### **1/3/6 months**

Continue to provide customer service support remotely wherever possible, and in-person via counter service where required. Continue to conduct eligible remote court matters via audio while awaiting resumption of in-person and commencement of virtual court proceedings by video

## **ASSET MANAGEMENT OFFICE**

### **Current Status of Operations**

AMO staff continue to support core business functions during the pandemic. Some highlights of these actions include:

- Planning and leading the development and submission to the Province of the 2021 Asset Management Plan in accordance with Reg 588.
- Initiated development of a corporate Asset Registry focusing on the asset hierarchy to support the 2021 AMP.
- Continuing development of the Region's Enterprise Risk Management Framework.

Although redeployed staff have returned, they have now been seconded to assist with a priority ITS project. Backfilling of the position is underway and until complete, start-up of other projects is delayed. Only one of the positions will be backfilled to maintain cost efficiency for the Department. The position should be filled by February.

Projects to improve the Region's Asset Management System (AMS) require participation and collaboration from staff across the organization. Given the impact of COVID-19 on divisional plans and resources, the ability of Region staff to focus time on the AMS projects is limited and will have further impact on the schedule of 2020 projects. A schedule assessment indicates the majority of planned 2020 projects are now delayed while some are on hold due to the previous staffing levels.

The overall 5-year plan has been impacted and will be re-evaluated in Q2 2021 with short-term adjustments made over the next few months. A strategy to rework the 5-year plan has been developed and will be put into place in the next one to two months.

### **Operational Outlook**

#### **1/3/6 months**

The Asset Management System development projects that are underway (Priority 0) and those planned in the coming months (Priority 1) are tabled below. These projects are directly related to the requirements of the 2021 Asset Management Plan.

Table 1: Asset Management System development projects

Priority	Service availability by Phase	Current status	Project
0	PNM	Delayed	Region AM delivery structure ID 112
0	PNM	Delayed	AM program foundations ID 430
0		Pilot completed	CAMRA - Risk Management Framework ID 248
0	PNM	Delayed	Develop data analytics capabilities- Microsoft BI ID 530
0	PNM	Delayed	Develop AM performance management KPIs ID 410
1	PNM	Inaugural meeting held	Niagara Region AM working group ID 512
1	PNM	Completed	Process for preparing the AM Plan ID 210
0	PNM	Underway	Capital planning process ID 262
0	PNM	Scope revised	Enterprise Risk Management Framework ID 249
0	PNM	Scope revised	Develop Asset Registry - hierarchy and relationships ID 242
1	C	On hold pending resource evaluation	Project Resource Estimating - cost model ID 310
0	PNM	Initiated and on track	2021 AMP ID 630

Notes: PNM: No changes but delivered differently - e.g. working remotely

C: Cancelled pending redeployed/ staff vacancies and resource evaluation

Other planned 2020 projects not tabled above, and that have only an indirect bearing on the 2021 Asset Management Plan, or are related to supporting Niagara's local municipalities are also on hold until staffing issues have been resolved.

## **BUSINESS LICENSING**

### **Current Status of Operations**

Similar to the other departments in Corporate Services, the Business Licensing department continues to operate with core service delivery as well as playing a role in the Region's EOC and response to Provincial O.Reg enforcement. These activities are identified separately.

### Business Licensing

- Continue processing, and issuance of business licenses including fee payments and response to enforcement and inspection requirements.
- Developing office protocols for streamlined business licensing processes under COVID-19 restrictions including the issuance of licenses at set times in the lobby of the facility.
- Investigating permanent eCommerce licensing sales and software database updates. Currently using Region website ecommerce credit card payment options for license fee payments.
- Establishing industry specific contacts with various law enforcement agencies including NRPS, OPP, MTO, MOE and AGCO as well as local by-law enforcement agencies.
- Preparing for the procurement of a modernized licensing/incident/inspection/enforcement database with a projected Q3 2021 delivery.

### Provincial Order Enforcement

The provincial government requires continued enforcement of provincial orders by municipalities. Business Licensing staff maintain availability for active enforcement and inspection measures for the orders and provide support to local municipalities and Niagara Regional Police. They provide both random inspections and complaint driven inspections 7 days a week.

- 3 staff from Business Licensing have been re-assigned to enforce the Provincial Orders and are providing 7 day a week coverage. Staff remain assigned to this until further notice or when the orders and state of emergency are lifted. Hours of operation and days of service are assessed weekly and are adjusted to meet demands and pressures.
- Beginning December 06, 2020, two staff Tobacco Enforcement have been assigned to augment Business Licensing staff assigned to provincial pandemic O.Reg. enforcement and inspection. These staff will be assigned to this detail until the end of January 2021 at which time their deployment will be re-assessed.
- Staff respond to Provincial Order and Regional Face Covering By-law complaints to assist the local response and also conduct random compliance inspections. Staff also continue to ensure Region licensed businesses are following order requirements and adherence to the Regional Licensing Bylaw.

- Provincial Order enforcement, including education, warnings, charges and summons for the Re-opening Ontario Act.
- Regional Face Covering By-law enforcement including education, warnings and summons.
- Provide Provincial O.Reg enforcement data to the Ministry of the Solicitor General and the local area municipalities weekly.
- Publically post general weekly inspection and enforcement statistics for O.Reg enforcement.
- Provide background justification for business closure orders that consistently fail to comply with Reopening Ontario Act O.Reg.
- Provide support for changing O.Reg stages of opening.

## **Operational Outlook**

### **1/3/6 months**

- The Business Licensing Manager will continue to work with local municipalities, NRPS and other Regional departments and external agencies in a coordinated approach to enforcement of Provincial Orders and the Regional Face Covering Bylaw until the pandemic eases.
- The Business Licensing Manager will be available to assist with security measures surrounding COVID-19 vaccinations and deployment.
- The business license bylaw review is ongoing and will come before Council in February of 2021.
- The Business Licensing Manager is reviewing COVID-19 pandemic impacts on licence holders licensed by the Region.
- The Business Licensing Manager will be developing a “return to normal operations” plan for implementation when the pandemic measures ease.

## ***INTERNAL AUDIT***

### **Current Status of Operations**

Preparing detailed scoping documents for planned audits for 2021 including two audits in IT – cyber security and penetration testing, two follow up audits including the Corporate PCard program and several other Audit Committee approved audits.

Continuing to work with other clients on the development of an Enterprise Risk Management Plan.

### **Operational Outlook**

#### **1/3/6 months**

RFP to be posted for an audit on cyber security. Scoping out a full audit plan for a continuation of testing sample POs that were part of the recently completed Non-Competitive Audit.

Finalizing 3 three year audit plan to be presented to Audit Committee at February 8, 2021 meeting. Audits will focus on current and future risks with coverage across all business lines. Following presentation to Audit Committee, council members will have an opportunity to introduce and/or discuss other areas for potential audits to be included in 3 year plan.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Todd Harrison, CPA, CMA  
Commissioner, Corporate Services/Treasurer