



Regular Council Meeting

To:	Mayor and Council
Date:	June 15, 2020
From:	Brigid Ayotte – Economic & Community Development Co-ordinator & Wayne Hancock – Director of Public Works
Report Number:	ECD-2020-03 Joint Report with Public Works
Subject:	Temporary Closure King St. Between Tupper St. S. & Allen Lane

Recommendations:

1. That Council receive the report and provide direction to Staff on the King Street Closure; and
2. That Council direct Staff to research a comprehensive COVID-19 recovery strategy and report back to Council.

Overview:

At the May 19th Regular Meeting of Council, Council passed a motion directing Staff to investigate the temporary closure of King Street from Tupper Street to Allen Lane for a trial period in July and/or August and report back to Council at the June 15th Council meeting.

The intent behind the proposed closure would be to provide an initial response to social distancing measures required by retail operations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It would also create additional outdoor pedestrian space for residents and cyclists. As part of background research, Staff found that a number of communities are implementing COVID-19 recovery strategies that included, among other things, road closures for additional space.

Over the last few years, the Township has embarked on a number of revitalization activities for Downtown Millbrook notably the Revitalization Strategy, Detailed Streetscape Design Guidelines and most recently a Community Improvement Plan (CIP). One of the programs available through the CIP is a Sidewalk Patio Grant Program. Council also made amendments to its Municipal Alcohol Policy in order to enable interested merchants to establish an outdoor patio with the appropriate Provincial licensing and insurance requirements.

Staff are putting forward a proposal (to all relevant agencies) for a full road closure on King Street (County Road 21) between Tupper Street (County Road 10) and Allen Lane for a one-month period as part of a pilot project starting July 1st to July 31st. The proposed dates are flexible. Staff sought any potential concerns that County Staff might have with a full closure for a period of one month. Should Council move forward with

the project, no significant issues arise and feedback is positive at the conclusion of the pilot period, Council may want to consider extending/modifying the closure for another month.

On June 8th, the Province announced it was moving forward with a regional approach to Stage 2 re-opening of the economy. "Restrictions are being eased in communities where it is safe to do so". Peterborough County is one of the regions identified. The Province also expanded the limit on social gatherings from 5 to 10 people. With proper health and safety measures in place, certain businesses such as "outdoor dine-in services at restaurants, bars and other establishments, including patios, curbside, parking lots and adjacent properties" are permitted to open. Peterborough Public Health is currently working with the City of Peterborough on a policy document which may assist our municipality and others once finalized. Staff recommend that, should Council opt to move forward with the closure, that it take place later in the summer in order to allow time for those guidelines to be put in place and clearly communicated.

Initially, Staff considered the closure as the provision of additional open space to be utilized by both residents and businesses. Through consultation, the County raised three major concerns: emergency access; garbage and recycling pick up; and the need for an Emergency Detour Route. Peterborough County EMS, Cavan Monaghan Fire Department and Peterborough Police all expressed concern that the closure would reduce response times to emergency. Particularly if items such as retail inventory had to be removed in the case of an emergency. To address that concern, Staff suggested that downtown merchants be able to expand out to the sidewalk and corresponding parking space (pending Provincial guidelines), and the road be closed to pedestrian/cycle access only which can easily be cleared in the event of an emergency. County Waste Services inquired about the ability to pick up waste and recycling. In response, Parks & Facilities Staff will collect garbage in the closed area and deliver it to a central location for pick up.

Staff confirmed with the Ministry of Transportation the requirement for an Emergency Detour Route. The detour route will remain the same which is along King St. through Downtown Millbrook. The detour route is only used in instances of a major accident or highway blockage on Highway 115.

It is important to emphasize that this pilot project be reinforced as an opportunity to increase outdoor space both for retailing and resident enjoyment as part of a broader COVID-19 recovery strategy. It is not intended to be an opportunity for people to gather. Requirements of social distancing are still in effect and guidelines for adherence have been provided to all business operations. Should Council move forward with the pilot project, it will be imperative that the Township provide adequate signage reminding people to practice social distance.

To that end, Staff are not recommending the use of portable washrooms as part of this pilot and access to the washrooms at the Millbrook Arena will remain closed until further notice.

Staff consulted with the Millbrook Business Improvement Area (BIA) about the pilot project. The BIA are not in support of the pilot closure at this time. The BIA conducted an informal survey of their membership that would be directly impacted by the closure (i.e. merchants on King Street). Of the 18 that they surveyed, 10 were not in support

while 4 supported the initiative and 4 were neutral on the proposed closure. Concerns predominately centred on parking particularly direct access to store fronts for seniors or patrons carrying heavy equipment. BIA members also expressed that it “just wasn’t the right time” due to the fact that businesses are already having to adapt to new circumstances, requirements for operating a business under social distancing guidelines, applications for funding relief among other considerations. This was perceived as adding another element of stress and uncertainty to the situation. It was suggested that perhaps there are other recovery strategies that could be explored such as COVID-19 business recovery kit including PPE equipment. A number of other communities across the Province are looking at comprehensive recovery strategies that include among other things, multi-media marketing campaigns, expanding financial incentive programs for businesses under the existing CIP. To that end, Staff are recommending that Council direct Staff to research and develop a comprehensive recovery package that addresses present and future economic challenges and restrictions to local businesses and residents.

Staff also monitored social media comments about the proposed closure and can confirm that parking was a common concern shared by residents. To address this possible barrier, conversations with a private land owner for use of vacant space for additional parking is on-going. Residents also expressed concern with access to County Road 21 for larger vehicles particularly farm machinery. As part of the road closure proposal to relevant agencies, Staff proposed a detour route for large vehicles.

It is important to note that through the review of social media comments, Staff found that comments for and against the closure were relatively equal with a slightly higher proportion expressing opposition. However, the supportive comments had a higher ratio of “likes” per posted comment. This may suggest that a large percentage of residents want to support local business through this difficult time but are not sure how. If a road closure were to enable these businesses to expand their business footprint it is an initiative they might be in support of.

Peterborough Public Health released a guideline for using streets as additional outdoor space. Entitled *Streets for Pandemic Response & Recovery*, the document offers recommendations (for Councils considering road closures) to “re-organize streets to best manage this crisis and support economic recovery”. The document stressed the need for Council to consider local context, history and need when deciding to open streets for pedestrian access. Specifically, it recommended that decisions be examined using the following criteria:

1. Supports the most vulnerable people first

COVID-19 has definitely impacted the most vulnerable in our society. In this community that would be individuals with mobility challenges.

Response: Decisions to remove additional parking spaces on the main street would create barriers for those with mobility challenges. Any portable patios must avoid accessible parking spaces and perhaps should be done in consultation with the BIA to determine the most appropriate location.

2. Amplifies and supports public health guidelines

Physical distancing has been the key component in the Province’s strategy for reducing exposure to the virus. Increasing the amount of outdoor space will make it easier for

people to comply with public health guidelines however caution should be taken that these spaces not facilitate opportunities to gather.

Response: Now that the Province is moving forward with a regional approach to easing restrictions there is the concern that the road closure might become an attraction for visitors.

3. Safer streets for today and tomorrow

Essential workers must be able to travel safely. Whether it is a health professional or a transport driver carrying medical equipment.

Response: Road closures can create a barrier to performing their duties. In addition, as restrictions start to ease, more people will be travelling the roads creating safety concerns for pedestrians and abnormal traffic volume on other streets. For example, Centre Street is an area of concern for many residents particularly when vehicles don't observe stop signs.

4. Supports the local economy

Unemployment rates have increased significantly in the last few months and that is of great concern for Staff and Council.

Response: While stores and restaurants are essential to our local economic health it is important that we remember that they are not the only economic driver in this community. Agriculture and transportation services are also key contributors to our local economy. These are businesses who rely on County Road 21 as a viable route to access fields, transport product/equipment etc. In removing a barrier for one sector we have to ensure that we are not creating a barrier for another.

5. Bring communities into the process.

Decisions that are required during emergency and recovery response efforts often happen quickly. To that end, it is critical that communications be frequent, decision making be transparent and that opportunities for feedback be provided.

Response: The proposal to close King Street would happen quickly and as such should have clear metrics and timelines as well as ensure that key stakeholders have a voice in the decision.

Staff are recommending that a strong and continuous communications strategy be implemented. One that includes both on- and off- line communications with residents, business community and the Millbrook BIA.

Financial Impact:

If this proposed pilot project is supported, possible financial considerations will include:

1. Temporary fencing will need to be rented.
2. Staff time will be required to i) set up fencing, ii) set up road closure with pylons and signage.
3. Staff time will be required to set up detour signage and routing for large equipment and large trucks to avoid using King St. and downtown Millbrook.
4. Staff time will be required to relocate the downtown garbage bins and provide weekly collection of these bins. In conjunction with this, they will be required to move recycling and waste from this area to a collection point at one end of the closure for the Contractors. The bicycle rack will be temporarily relocated during closure.

5. On-going inspection will be required by staff to ensure all safety devices are in place.
6. Staff time will be required to remove all barricades, fencing and cones and put garbage bins, etc., back to original location.
7. Final inspection of roadway to check for debris and/or need for street sweeping.

To manage this, an upset limit for such associated costs will be capped at \$ 5,000.00.

Attachments:

1. ECD Report 2020-03 Attachment 1 – King Street Pilot Project Rendering
2. ECD Report 2020-03 Attachment 2 - Press Release – Ontario Permits More Businesses and Services to Reopen in the Coming Day – June 8, 2020

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