

Where's Kawartha Lakes at? Mayor talks Pinecrest, COVID-19 testing & downtown

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The City of Kawartha Lakes is hosting press conferences every other day to help keep residents in the loop amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

Wednesday morning (April 1) Mayor Andy Letham, as well as an assortment of city staff, took questions regarding the recent deaths of residents at Pinecrest Nursing Home, novel coronavirus testing and if the city's non-essential business will continue if the pandemic lasts.

An outpouring of support for Pinecrest Nursing Home

Both the Lt.-Gov. Elizabeth Dowdeswell and the province's Minister of Long-Term Care, Merrilee Fullerton, have reached out and spoken to the mayor on the [COVID-19 outbreak at Pinecrest Nursing Home](#).

Letham said Dowdeswell told him she had visited Bobcaygeon in the past and sent her best wishes. He said Fullerton expressed her support as well and was working closely with Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock MPP Laurie Scott who has been the city's liaison with upper levels of government during COVID-19.

"They wanted me to pass on to the community that they know what's going on up here and they're certainly in their thoughts and prayers," he said. "We seem to be getting messages from all across the country to be honest with you from different mayors and different municipalities."

Some contract workers and service providers have been sent to the Bobcaygeon long-term care facility to assist, he said. Much of Pinecrest's regular staff has tested positively with COVID-19.

The outbreak at Pinecrest brings up questions of precautions being taken at other long-term care facilities across the municipality, as well as city-owned Victoria Manor.

Letham reported there have been no positive cases of COVID-19 at Victoria Manor. He said staff at the manor were doing a good job and taking precautions. He added it was "locked down" and should there be a shortage of staff that city staff can be moved around to help out as a part of the municipality's declaration of emergency.

Speed of testing and results should increase

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit has faced some criticism following a lag in reporting cases and test results since the COVID-19 outbreak began.

Letham reminded residents in an earlier press conference that everyone was doing

their best and that the community was facing the pandemic together.

That said, in the April 1 press conference, Letham announced that testing of local COVID-19 cases would no longer be done in a lab in Toronto. He said the health unit was now sending cases to Kingston.

“We had a couple of police officers that had an accident on the weekend that were exposed. They were sent into isolation and swabbed on Monday. They’re test results came back on Tuesday which was absolutely awesome, and they were both negative,” Letham said before noting the health unit was still waiting on other swabs sent last week to Toronto for comparison.

“It’s going to make a big difference if we can get those swab results back earlier, then we can get people back on the front lines and people sort of know where we stand.”

Letham said he’s also had news that new testing is in the works that is “almost instantaneous.”

“Looks like that part of the process is getting better, and better, and better,” he said.

City will remain “status quo” in coming weeks, looking at solutions for projects in COVID-19 continues

Before COVID-19 and the subsequent shut downs across the province, [the city began a major downtown pipeline replacement](#) and had other major projects planned throughout the year. Letham addressed what could happen with city projects if the pandemic goes on for some time.

Letham said the city is working in two week blocks while also planning for two months in the future. He said for now the city is maintaining the “status quo” with municipal buildings shut down and only essential city services continuing.

“This isn’t going to be over in the near future and when it is over what does that mean?” Letham asked.

“From a business continuity there are certain things we can put off for a few weeks like fixing potholes and stuff but we can’t put them off for the whole summer. We’re going to have to figure out a way to get some of our staff back from essential services and start looking at some of the ongoing works of the city that we’re going to have to maintain at some point.”

Letham said the city was looking at getting back to a semblance of normal while taking into account the health and safety of workers and their families.

“We can’t put four guys in a pickup truck and send them out to fill potholes anymore,” he said.

When it comes to work downtown, Letham said that work is continuing as scheduled.

“The contractor has told us that they want to continue that work and we’ll let them. The province has told us that infrastructure is for the most part an essential service, so we’re working within those parameters.”