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Grocery sales down 40 per cent over long weekend compared to last year

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Kawartha Lakes Mayor Andy Letham says grocery sales were down 40 per cent over a typical long weekend in the city because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a wide-ranging media scrum Letham and CAO Ron Taylor shared their thoughts on the disappointing business trends from the recent Victoria Day weekend and what issues the city will be facing moving forward next month and even into next year.

On the grocery store numbers, Letham says that “unless residents use their local businesses they are going to lose them.”

On the other hand the mayor was pleased that the Ontario Provincial Police and Kawartha Lakes Police Service — as well as bylaw enforcement — had a very quiet long weekend. The mayor complimented residents for “getting back to being outdoors responsibly.”

Letham says that while a quiet weekend was good in the eyes of law enforcement officials, it was a tough weekend for local businesses. While some local businesses are doing very well, he notes, some are struggling with declining sales and others “are teetering on disaster.”

The mayor says he drove all over the city last Monday and found it was “quiet.”

“There were fewer cottagers. It was not a typical long weekend. It was much more like a weekday. It was partially the weather but typically on May 24 the weather doesn’t interfere that much. With many businesses, restaurants and bars closed there was less choice and fewer options.”

Letham is putting his faith in domestic tourism to help businesses salvage their season. The mayor believes, “there will be fewer trips from out of province or out of country. I think Kawartha Lakes should be close enough to the GTA to be considered a day trip and I hope people will come and explore local lakes and parks.”

The meeting then pivoted to issues directly impacting the running of the city.

Taylor said the library board has recently met and is contemplating curbside drop off and pickup beginning in early June.

The CAO suggested that the only farmer’s market likely ready to be open for May 30 will be Lindsay’s. He is hopeful that four or five others across the city will be ready to safely open in June, although Bobcaygeon’s

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market organizers have already indicated it will not open this year.

Both Letham and Taylor spoke to some of the long term changes the city may have to implement to keep staff and residents safe as COVID lingers for the foreseeable future.

Taylor stated that the city will be looking at staff perhaps being allowed to continue working from home. Taylor continued that the city is trying to figure out how they can allow for public participation during virtual city hall meetings and committee meetings. Taylor was very concerned that as the city restarts, health and safety protocols have to be at the forefront for staff and the public.

Letham said the city has been putting Plexiglas between drivers and assistants in city vehicles, and added that four to five staff in city vehicles together will no longer be allowed.

Taylor said there will be no substantial

changes right now to operations at Victoria Manor, noting the Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus which Letham chairs will be doing a full review of long term care homes once the pandemic ends. That report will be submitted directly to the ministry of health.

Taylor said there will need to be improved design standards for new long term care builds coming in the future. He hopes that the replacement for Victoria Manor being anticipated by Kawartha Lakes will benefit from best practices gleaned from the COVID-19 outbreak.

While none of the laid-off city staff has yet to be recalled, Taylor hopes that once the province allows more service delivery in the future months more staff will be activated. He believes that as the province opens up more recreational options for the summer the city will revisit recalling staff to care for fields, diamonds and pools.

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