Kawartha Lakes won't mandate masks just because GTA does: mayor

Sarah Sobanski

Kawartha Lakes' urban neighbours are making masks mandatory, but that doesn't necessarily mean the city will follow suit.

Mayor Andy Letham says Kawartha Lakes isn't looking at mandating masks right now, but the city is continuing to have health and safety conversations with public health. The city could reconsider if public health advises mandating masks.

"We are not the GTA. We are not Peel or Durham," the mayor said. "I respect their decision, that's fine, but I don't know how you enforce something like that … I don't want to do something just because someone else is doing something."

Dr. Lynn Noseworthy, medical officer of health for the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit, said health units and municipalities should ask if mandating masks when visiting businesses or riding public transit is a reasonable approach to COVID-19 in their areas.

She added they should ask questions such as if the order can be enforced, if it can be tolerated by community members with chronic illness, young children or mental health issues such as anxiety, and if people can afford masks.

Letham said the city is in "good shape" and "very consistent" when it comes to its COVID-19 numbers and fighting the pandemic. He said he wasn't concerned about GTA residents having to wear masks at home but not here, because Kawartha Lakes has a lot of "wide-open space" where it's easier to physically distance.

But just because the city isn't mandating masks doesn't mean that business owners and other public spaces shouldn't enforce their own mask policies, said Letham.

"If businesses are more comfortable making their customers do that, then they should mandate it," Letham said. "If customers don't want to go in because of that, they shouldn't."

Noseworthy advised that face coverings should be worn where physical distancing is a challenge or isn't possible.

"The Health Unit has continuously been reminding people to treat everyone they encounter as if they have the virus; maintain physical distancing, wear a mask if you are out and cannot guarantee a distance of two metres (six feet) from other people, wash your hands frequently, stay home if you are ill," she said.

"These are the measures that will help keep us all healthy – more so than knowing that someone in your town tested positive."

Letham has seen people out and about wearing masks. "I think that's good," he said. "If they feel comfortable wearing a mask, they should."