

COVID-19 and Kent Street construction: Lindsay's downtown double whammy

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It's been a challenging year for downtown businesses, but there is light starting to shine at the end of the economic tunnel.

"We knew the construction was already going to pose a challenge," said Lindsay Downtown Business Improvement Association general manager Melissa McFarland.

Last year's construction on Russell and Peel streets had an impact on many businesses. The BIA was already helping by advocating to the municipality, developing plans and assisting businesses capitalize on such things as government programs like the Digital Mainstreet and social media. The city piggy-backed Enbridge Gas's natural gas pipeline replacement project and had hoped to complete its own project by the end of July.

Then COVID-19 forced the shutdown of nearly every business.

"Businesses have been doing the best they can," said McFarland. "Some have reopened their doors and figured out how to get back to business while ensuring the safety of their staff and customers. They don't want to just throw open their doors because they can."

City of Kawartha Lakes economic development manager Rebecca Mustard said her department continues to provide training through workshops to help businesses reorient their models to keep their operations running safely and to help stabilize their revenues.

"We are working one-on-one with businesses to meet their respective needs," she said.

But there is still the construction to contend with, noted McFarland.

"Fortunately, we have pretty wide sidewalks even when they're under construction," she said, noting businesses that have back entrances continued to use them and the project seems to be running close to schedule despite the wrench thrown by the coronavirus.

Juan Rojas, director of engineering and assets, said, to date, engineering has had no issues with the project.

"We have had a few visits from the Ministry of Labour and are in compliance for construction work," stated Rojas. "While construction continues, we are keeping businesses top of mind and will continue to look for opportunities to allow people to shop safely and conveniently."

Sidewalk replacement work has begun and is expected to be completed in mid-June.

However, city staff are considering options to create more space for shoppers to physically distance and will present these to the Economic Recovery Task Force for consideration. Rojas noted the Kent Street portion of construction will be finished and open to traffic by July 1. Ongoing landscaping will continue for the first half of July.