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More service cuts coming: 'People are going to notice,' says mayor

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Mayor Andy Letham says “people are going to notice” the service cuts that are coming

to Kawartha Lakes because of the pandemic.

“Ditching and brushing, reduction of staff as we move into the fall, grass cutting, street sweeping and capital projects that aren’t do or die for the city,” Letham itemized.

“People are going to notice — they can’t help but” notice, he says.

“Service centres, arenas and community centres are also going to be impacted (by this budget crunch),” Letham added.

While Letham was pleased to announce the re-opening of a number of city arenas beginning mid-August, he made it clear that “arena openings and operation will be based on demand.”

“We have too many reservations that need to become bookings to justify facilities opening. We will be flexible with the user groups and see what happens.”

The mayor says we need to keep moving forward at a slow and steady pace. “There could be a second wave of COVID so we need to be patient.”

The city is facing a \$2.5 million deficit.

“Our goal is a zero year-end deficit,” Letham stated, “and there are going to be sacrifices between now and the end of the year.”

Letham asked Jennifer Stover, director of corporate services to join in on the deficit conversation.

“We forecasted a \$3.2 million deficit, but after property taxes were deferred and individuals still found themselves unable to pay the actual deficit increased to \$4.5 million,” Stover said.

Stover continued, stating that the city has found \$2 million in cost savings so far

through the laying off of staff, not hiring summer students and reigning in discretionary spending.

The two were queried whether the federal money earmarked for municipalities in Ontario might be the answer to their deficit quandary.

“We don’t know how much of that money we will be getting,” the mayor said, “and our goal remains to have a zero deficit.”

“Who is going to pay for all these transfers from one level of government to another?” Letham challenged the press, “There is only one taxpayer. This problem (COVID) is not going away. We expect to have problems next year and serious challenges for the next couple of years. The provincial and federal governments are struggling. Come January we are going to have challenges ahead.”

“We need to deliver services better, and as much as we might like it, things are not going back to the way it was before,” Letham added.

When asked if the deficit could further expand from its current \$2.5 million Letham stated, “If council had opened up all services at our meeting on Tuesday, yes. There would have been no way to pay the deficit down. Things are changing quickly. We will try our best to hit zero but there are too many unknowns. What if things shut down again and our revenues are impacted?”

The mayor says they are concerned about service levels and realize residents like the services they get.

“We will be doing what we do at reduced levels. We might not get to zero, and we are not prepared to close everything to get to zero,” Letham concluded.

On more positive news, the mayor called the announcement of a new senior’s residence to be built behind Loblaws in Lindsay “a very good news story.” Letham hopes construction will start this fall on the eight-storey facility that sounds similar to the Adelaide Place model on Adelaide Street.

A new 140 home subdivision was also approved near the current Jennings Creek development on Angeline Street North in Lindsay. Letham believes that projects like these will help attract commercial businesses like Walmart to the area. Letham reminded the press that companies like the massive discount retailer will “only come if we are growing.”

Letham also addressed a proposal brought up by Ward Five councillor Pat Dunn. Dunn suggested that the city assist homeowners impacted by flooding that may have been caused by being attached to city sewers.

“It is not a good situation (when flooding occurs),” Letham shared, “but we don’t want to overreact. We are open to helping people. I think the proposal needs to be scoped down to residents where flooding has already occurred. I think it should be a

subsidy rather than a grant.”

The scrum concluded on an interesting note, discussing the city’s decision to no longer allow waxed paper coffee cups to be recycled. One reporter shared that this had been the story that had caused the strongest response from the public this week.

“Nobody likes it,” Letham responded, “but there is no market for the product. There is no point in picking it up if the stuff is being

picked out at the location of the recycling plant, put in their landfill site and we get billed.”

“Recycling is now a cost. People aren’t buying the stuff like they did before. This goes for Styrofoam too. We simply need to make adjustments as we go along and continue to work to reduce what goes into our landfills,” Letham added.

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KIRK WINTER LATEST POSTS



Kirk is a retired high school history teacher and coach who has had a lifelong interest in politics at all levels. Since retiring, Kirk has spent the last three years doing freelance writing of all kinds for various platforms. Kirk can often be found sitting in the press gallery at City Hall observing and reporting on the vagaries of local government.

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