

# THE LINDSAY ADVOCATE

KAWARTHA LAKES' FINEST MAGAZINE

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## Mayor talks budget, COVID planning; City gets \$5

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# million from feds

Published on August 23, 2020 — in Municipal — by Kirk Winter

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Mayor Andy Letham shared with reporters at his weekly media scrum updates on many pressing municipal issues and an extensive list of important municipal and provincial dates of interest.

## Five million in funding for COVID relief

The city has received notice that Kawartha Lakes qualifies for \$5 million on COVID assistance money from a fund set up by the federal government and administered by the provincial government.

“That should help us fill some holes,” Letham said, “but we are still aiming for a balanced budget.”

Letham told reporters that the money is a one-time only grant, with the possibility of a second round of funding available by application only and based on proven municipal need.

“We haven’t received the money yet,” Letham told reporters, “and the money once received will be applied to pandemic costs this year and next year. It will give us some nice options for 2021.”

When asked by reporters about the difficulties of budgeting in the age of COVID the mayor was forthright.

“It’s hard. We are only able to make educated guesses.”

“Schools opening up are going to be a real wild card and we remain concerned about a second wave,” Letham adds.

When asked if the city is better prepared for a second wave of COVID Letham said, “Emergency responders now have protocols in place. We are much more ready for the second wave than we were for the first last winter.”

“We set aside one hundred emergency beds last time. We never needed more than six. We will deal with the next wave as it happens. We really don’t want to go there,” Letham continues.

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“It would be so tough on local businesses that have just really re-opened to have to shut down again.”

## **PPE**

CAO Ron Taylor reported that the city has spent \$500,000 on additional PPE, Plexiglas partitions and COVID-related cleaning.

“The Plexiglas partitions are going to help in the long run,” Letham said. “Our PPE inventory is being built up. We are not going to get caught like the world did last time.”

## **Budgets 2020-2021**

Letham spoke on what he expects budgets to look like from groups like the public health unit and Kawartha Conservation who rely upon municipal funding.

“These organizations have been adjusting their business models accordingly right across the city,” Letham said.

“Many of these organizations have been shut down,” Letham continued, “and they also have the options of tapping their reserves if they find their costs have been impacted by the pandemic.”

“I expect that public health might go up considering that they have been front and centre this year,” Letham added.

When asked about the adequacy of a \$5,000

provincial grant in place to assist local agricultural and horticultural societies the mayor was blunt, “The province is doing everything they can. Agricultural societies are important members in our communities but there is a limit to the pot of money available. There only is one taxpayer. The financial repercussions of COVID will be around for many years.”

“Adjustments in how we all do business are coming,” Letham concluded, “and if we don’t change we are in trouble.”

## **In person council meetings**

Letham was asked by reporters why Kawartha Lakes council has returned to in-person council meetings rather than continue Zoom meetings like many surrounding municipalities.

“We have a large newly renovated council chamber,” Letham said.

“Councilors are screened, cleaning is going on and no additional staff are present. We can control that environment.”

“There is better debate in person,” Letham continued.

“I have no idea when council will be open to public. We have no time frame in place but it will only be when it is safe,” Letham concluded.

## **Rural broadband**

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The mayor told reporters that the push for rural broadband continues with a goal of 95% of eastern Ontario being able to access this service.

At a recent virtual Association of Municipalities of Ontario with numerous provincial cabinet members in digital attendance, the expansion of rural broadband is viewed almost unanimously as “crucial to the recovery,” Letham said.

“It will be a big cost but it will be for a big result. Broadband is vital for pleasure, business, education and health moving forward,” Letham said.

### City/provincial updates

August 10 – fitness classes began at the Lindsay Recreational complex

August 17 – the twin ice pads at the Lindsay Recreation complex have re-opened with the hope that arenas in Fenelon Falls, Emily-Omemee and Little Britain will be activated in September if demand is there

August 31 – fitness facilities will re-open to the public by registration only

September 8 – Coboconk Service Centre re-opens

September 11 – local courts may re-open

September 21 – provincial State of Emergency Order extended

Late September – Omemee Service Centre may re-open along with a “service counter” somewhere in Lindsay

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