

# Kawartha Lakes optimistic for 2021 budgets, second wave preparedness

*Sarah Sobanski*

Kawartha Lakes Olde Gaol Museum wants the city to consider offering it COVID-19 relief funding.

Barbara Doyle, museum director, told council at its Aug. 20 meeting that the museum had been hard hit by the pandemic.

She said much of its mostly senior volunteer base had been staying home as a safety precaution and they would likely continue to do so. The pandemic had stressed the need for the museum to employ some full-time, paid staff.

“The consistency of a paid staff is integral to COVID response, but also for the growth of this organization,” she said. “We’ve really grown since being a small country museum, this is a municipal museum now.”

Council said it would consider the request as a line item for its 2021 budget, but the ask draws attention to the fact that many local organizations and city agencies may not be able to toe the same stay-the-course line they did when it was time for 2020 budget deliberations.

Mayor Andy Letham said the city has asked local groups and agencies to let them know if their 2020 budgets have been impacted by the pandemic. The city’s typical PPE budget increased by an estimated \$500,000 in 2020, for example.

“Police, for instance, if they’re going to come in way over budget, we need to know that,” Letham said. He added the city understood that some budget adjustments would be needed.

“They’re in the same boat we’re in,” he said. “There’s a lot of unknowns out there and everyone is trying to work within the budgets they have.”

Kawartha Lakes is getting \$5 million in COVID-19 relief funding from the province as part of a multi-billion-dollar provincial assistance package. Letham has said this will help take “some of the pressure off,” but as of July the city was forecasting \$4.5 million in revenue losses alone.

“We have some extra funding now and that’s good, but it is pandemic related and it does come with conditions,” he said. The city continues to target a zero-deficit balanced by reduced services.

“We’ll need to separate that for our boards and agencies: what’s the regular part of your budget and what’s the part of your budget that might be required as a result of the ongoing pandemic.”

Letham said so far things were looking OK; feedback from local groups suggested they were managing their 2020 budgets and adjusting their business models

accordingly. That said, agencies such as the health unit had completely different years to what they may have expected.

“We’ll make those decisions accordingly,” Letham said, noting some organizations had reserves they could tap into. “Certainly not expecting a big rush of organizations coming forward way, way over budget and saying, ‘We need money.’”

Letham said it’s hard to plan for 2021 not knowing what the pandemic will look like in the coming months. He said all staff could do is make “educated guesses” and set “realistic expectations.”

“There’s some real concern out there about a second wave,” he said, noting he continues to meet with the city’s emergency control group. “We’re gearing up equipment wise.”

Having been through the first wave, Letham said local groups and the city now have protocols in place that make them better prepared for a second wave.