

# 'THERE'S NO PLAYBOOK FOR A PANDEMIC'

## MAYOR DISCUSSES TRYING YEAR FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

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Speaking to members of the business community, Rick Bonnette did not try to sugarcoat the past 12 months.

"2020 has been a very unusual year; and it has not been a good one," the Mayor told members of the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce on a video conference call. "To those of you who have been personally affected or had a loved one fall ill or worse, my heart goes out to you."

Local businesses have been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and have had to adjust to doing business in a new way. Bonnette praised those who shifted away from their core products to not only produce personal protective equipment, but to donate it to local



Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce photo

Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce general manager Melanie Frazer and Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette led the virtual meeting with Chamber members to discuss the past year, and the plans for helping businesses recover in the coming year.

front-line workers.

The Town has also tried to be adaptable, he said.

"There's no playbook for a pandemic," Bonnette said. "We tried to get medical advice and made decisions based on that information."

The Mayor spoke to chamber members on a number of topics:

### ASSISTING LOCAL BUSINESS

Bonnette said more than 20 ini-

tiatives were implemented or modified to assist business, including Digital Main Street, which helped the transition to e-commerce.

He said the town worked to raise awareness of provincial and federal assistance programs to make sure local business are taking advantage of all the programs available to them.

Other plans include:

- A business concierge program that will help businesses streamline the review process for non-residential developments.

- A Corporate Calling program to connect businesses with local resources and collect data on business needs so they can be incorporated into future initiatives.

- A strategy to attract new investment and jobs from the international market.

### PUBLIC TRANSIT

The town conducted a public transit study in 2019, but Bonnette said nothing is planned for 2021 due to budget constraints brought on by COVID-19.

### UPDATE ON THE MCGIBBON HOTEL DEVELOPMENT

Amico, the same company developing the Memorial Arena site, submitted a development plan to the town. Though both staff and the public have raised some concerns, Bonnette said, "I think they can all be overcome."

Amico's plans would increase the number of units from 125 to 160, without increasing the size of the building. Bonnette said Amico hopes to have plans finalized by

the spring of 2021.

"I believe this will be a great project for downtown Georgetown and it will be a great infusion for the businesses and make downtown Georgetown even more vibrant."

### WIDENING OF TRAFALGAR ROAD

The Mayor said the project, which will see Trafalgar Road between 10 Sideroad and Hwy. 7 increase from two to four lanes, is not expected to start until 2024. It is a Halton Region project that will cost \$111.5 million.

### HIGHWAY 413

Bonnette outlined the town's opposition to the highway, which would cut across the south-east corner of Halton Hills.

"We would be hypocrites to say in May of last year that we declared a climate change emergency and then say, 'Great, let's bring in a highway that is going to create more greenhouse emissions.'"

Bonnette said mass transit and high-speed rail are better solutions, especially given that there will likely be less traffic as more people continue to work from home after the pandemic.

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