SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNCIL
10:00 am Council Chambers, Fingal

For the purpose of a discussion on COVID-19 and the passing of a by-law

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTEREST
3. REPORT
4. BY-LAW
   (a) By-law No. 2020-20 being a by-law to amend By-law No. 2018-23, being a by-law to provide rules governing the proceedings of Council and the conduct of its members.

4 ADJOURNMENT: NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF COUNCIL
TUESDAY APRIL 14, 2020 @ 7:00 P.M.
Council Chambers, Fingal
DATE: March 24th, 2020

PREPARED BY: Katherine Thompson, CAO/Clerk

REPORT NO.: CAO 2020-17

SUBJECT MATTER: COVID-19 Update March 24, 2020

Recommendation:
THAT Council receive this report for information.

Purpose:
To provide Council with up to date information about the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the situation at the Township of Southwold.

Background:

As of Monday March 23, at 3:00 p.m. there were 503 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Ontario with 6 resulting deaths. At this time one (1) Elgin-St. Thomas resident has tested positive for the virus.

As of Monday March 23, at 3:00 p.m. the province has mandated the closure of all non-essential businesses at 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday March 24th for 14 days. At this time no information has been provided as to what that might mean for municipal operations. The province will issue a list of businesses and organizations that are considered essential on Tuesday March 24th.

Comment:

Declaration of Emergency

Late last week there was considerable discussion amongst Elgin County municipalities and the City of St. Thomas regarding the municipal declaration of emergency in response to the province’s declaration earlier in the week. There was a consensus amongst the group that all municipalities should declare in conjunction with one another for consistency of messaging and impact. The CAO was given direction by the Mayor to wait until the County of Elgin declared and then to follow suit.

As Council is aware, evidenced by the multiple emails with changing information that were sent over the course of Thursday to Saturday, the group’s position changed hourly. The Town of Aylmer and then the Municipality of West Elgin both declared based on resourcing concerns. On Friday afternoon it was still the position of the County and its Solicitor that it was best to wait to declare an emergency. Late Friday evening the group received notice that Central Elgin would declare on Saturday morning. Saturday morning the group received notice that The City of St. Thomas would also declare that day. Based on this information the County of Elgin decided to declare an emergency to be consistent with these municipal partners and at the Mayor’s request, the Township of Southwold declared as well.
The Township of Southwold has declared primarily for the following four reasons:

- Protection of volunteers acting on behalf of the Township during an emergency.
- Protection of staff and elected officials from litigious situations that may arise as a result of an emergency.
- Assistance in applying for and receiving any availability of funding that may be offered as a result of the emergency, and to provide private citizens increased validity for their own claims that may come about during the emergency period.
- Indicates to residents the seriousness of the situation and creates awareness around government responses.

Now that an emergency has been declared, the Township of Southwold has convened its Emergency Control Group and has activated its Emergency Plan. This group will meet weekly (or more frequently as needed by changing circumstances).

The County has also requested that the Mayor and CAO/CEMC of each local municipality be included in a County-wide Emergency Control Group as the emergency is County-wide. The Mayor and CAO would bring information from the Health Unit, EMS Services and the Elgin OPP back to Southwold’s local Control Group which would continue to meet regularly as well. This is consistent with Southwold’s Emergency Plan which recommends that a County-wide emergency be dealt with through a County-level Emergency Control Group.

**Township Operations**

**Council**

The province of Ontario has passed legislation through Bill 187 to allow for Councillors participating electronically to count towards quorum in a situation where an emergency has been declared, provided that the municipal procedural by-law is amended to do so. Staff have included an amended procedural by-law for Council to consider at this meeting. This will allow the operations of the Township to continue as much as possible during a time where social distancing and self-isolation is encouraged and may be required in the future.

**Administration**

The Township of Southwold has closed its offices to public traffic; however, most staff are still able to report to work at this time. The practice of social distancing has been implemented. Staff are answering inquiries by telephone and email and are taking payments over the telephone and online. The CAO is currently in self-isolation after returning from outside Canada but has been able to work remotely. There are also work from home accommodations being made for certain staff who have no access to childcare because of the mandatory closure of daycares. Meetings are being held over teleconference. Bookings at the Keystone complex have been cancelled and new bookings are not being taken at this time.

**Public Works**
There are a few cases of self-isolation in the public works department. The Public Works Department continues to operate in its usual manner but is practicing social distancing methods as well.

The province has indicated that in the event that municipalities are not able to maintain their roads due to significant illnesses or absences related to COVID-19 that Councils would be able to temporarily close roads to all or some traffic by by-law pursuant to its powers under the Municipal Act and the road will be deemed to be in a state of repair in respect to all conditions under the Minimum Maintenance Standards Regulation.

**Parks**

The Mayor in conjunction with the Emergency Control Group has decided that all playground equipment in the Township will be closed until further notice to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Signage is being erected and caution tape put up to discourage access.

**Water/Waste Water**

The OCWA has issued a memo indicating that they are taking all measures possible within their organization to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They are enacting contingency plans and continuity of business plans to ensure adequate staffing levels and that they continue to provide water and waste water services to their clients. Please see the attached client memo from OCWA.

Any water work usually done by the Township that needs to be done immediately is currently being done by a plumber to make up for self-isolation absences in the water department.

**Fire Department**

Southwold Fire has suspended training, prevention and inspection activities. Firefighters have been instructed to avoid the fire stations all together, except for emergency calls. After calls, personnel are to clean halls, perform truck and equipment inspections and look after other necessary tasks - while practicing social distancing. Medical call response has been adjusted to minimize the number of firefighters that both attend the call and contact the patient(s). PPE protocols have also been upgraded for medical calls and extra PPE has been purchased. Southwold has 4 firefighters in self isolation, representing approximately 10% of our responders.

**Remote Access**

While the CAO believes that when possible it is best for staff to work from the office, due to self-isolation requirements, lack of childcare and possible provincial orders working from the office may become impossible for some or all of Southwold’s staff. In this case it will be important to have alternative arrangements to ensure that essential services are provided during this time. Staff, in conjunction with the Township’s IT provider, have been investigating options to route phone lines and to install remote desktop access on personal staff devices to allow for access off-site. With the installation of this software, staff will be able to access Township files and programs.
(Laserfiche, Keystone) from their homes and will be able to continue essential work. The system would be secured through VPN access.

Respectfully Submitted by:
Katherine Thompson, CAO/Clerk
CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF SOUTHWOLD

BY-LAW NO. 2020-20

Being a by-law to amend By-law No. 2018-23, being a By-law to provide rules governing the proceedings of Council and the conduct of its members.

WHEREAS Bill 187 an Act to Amend The Municipal Act, 2001 permits electronic participation during the period where an emergency has been declared by the Premier, Cabinet or the Municipal Head of Council under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act.

AND WHEREAS it is deemed necessary and appropriate to amend By-law No. 2018-23

NOW THEREFORE the Council of the Corporation of the Township of Southwold enacts as follows:

1. That section 1 of By-law No. 2018-23 be amended by adding the following:

   (r) “electronic participation” means participation in a Council meeting by a Councillor or member of a local board or committee through the use of electronic means; whether it be through teleconferencing, video conferencing or any technology that is considered appropriate by Council and available to the Township.

2. The following provisions be added as Section 38;

   38 Electronic Participation During Declared Emergencies

   38.1 During the period when an emergency has been declared to exist in all or part of the municipality under section 4 or 7.0.1 of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, a member of Council, of a local board or of a committee can participate electronically and can be counted in determining whether or not a quorum of members is present.

   38.2 During the period where an emergency has been declared to exist in all or part of the municipality under section 4 or 7.0.1 of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, and despite Section 238, Subsection 3.2 of The Municipal Act, 2001; a member of Council, a local board or a committee can participate electronically in meetings that are closed to the public.

   38.3 During the period where an emergency has been declared to exist in all or part of the municipality under section 4 or 7.0.1 of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act the existing rules under Section 239 of The Municipal Act, 2001 outlining criteria for items that can be discussed in closed session must be adhered to.

   38.4 Meetings held under these provisions are required to follow existing meeting rules including providing of notice of meetings to the public, maintaining meeting minutes, and subject to certain exceptions, that meetings continue to be open to the public.
This by-law shall come into force and take effect on the final passing thereof.

READ a first and second time, considered read a third time and finally passed this 24th day of MARCH, 2020.

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Mayor                                        Clerk
Grant Jones                                   Katherine Thompson