
For Information

REPORT TITLE: Update on Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on the Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Region has taken concerted efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of the residents and businesses throughout the community.
 - Consistent with Ontario’s Framework for Reopening Our Province and the guidance of Peel Public Health, the Region is taking steps to prepare for the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - The Region’s Demobilization and Recovery Plan (the Plan) has been developed and reflects that many of the Region’s services have continued throughout the pandemic. Recovery will therefore focus on resuming those programs and activities that were paused, modified or reduced when emergency measures became the priority.
 - The Region’s Plan is organized by an overarching framework anchored in three key pillars and is accompanied by a phased approach designed to scale up or down the pace of recovery efforts based on the trajectory of the virus.
 - Preparations for implementing the initial phase of short-term recovery are underway and fall under the four domains: Regional facilities and workplaces, health and safety, digital enablement and communications, and change management. Timelines must, however, remain flexible based on the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic within the Region.
 - During the mid and long-term recovery phases, emphasis will also shift toward establishing a “new normal” of Regional services and operations. This reimagining of how work is done will help take advantage of opportunities revealed through the COVID-19 crisis.
 - As Regional services resume, employees will continue to coordinate with community partners and stakeholders to ensure that complementary community services are also resuming and safely available.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has represented an unprecedented impact on all aspects of society and the economy. Throughout the pandemic, Regional Council has taken important steps to protect the community. This included the declaration of a state of emergency, promotion of Public Health measures, financial relief efforts, the prioritization of essential

Update on Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

services as well as support for the community's most vulnerable populations. These steps have been made possible through partnership among different levels of governments, healthcare partners and various community organizations.

The Region is now taking steps to plan for recovery. The Region's recovery from COVID-19 will reflect the fact that approximately 80 per cent of its service activities have continued throughout the pandemic. For instance, although most Employment Support services have continued, specific activities such as the delivery of employment workshops had to be paused due to the pandemic. The Region's Plan will therefore focus on gradually resuming the 20 per cent of overall service activities that were impacted when emergency measures became the priority.

The Region's Plan also incorporates valuable advancements derived from its emergency response. For example, recovery will continue to leverage technology that was introduced to enable virtual health care consultations between hospitals, doctors, specialists, health care providers and Long-Term Care residents and staff. These improvements will make the Region's recovery more resilient in a "new normal" where co-existence with COVID-19 is an increasing reality.

2. COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

The Region's Plan has been developed in close partnership with Public Health. It also aligns with Ontario's Framework for Reopening Our Province for Peel Region which outlines the criteria that will instruct when the province can begin to ease public health measures.

The Region's Plan is guided by an overarching framework anchored in three key pillars:

- **Delivering Valued Services and Community Supports** which focuses on the safe resumption of service activities and operations required by the community
- **Creating Safe Environments and Healthy Workers** which focuses on ensuring all people and places are safeguarded from risk
- **Redesigning for the New Normal of Regional Operations** which focuses on rethinking how Regional business will be performed in post-pandemic era

This framework is accompanied by a phased approach designed to scale up or down the pace of recovery measures based on the Region's circumstances with COVID-19 cases. This includes a short-term, mid-term, and long-term recovery phase.

Peel Public Health, in partnership with other health units, has also deployed a set of indicators that are being monitored at the Regional level to identify areas that require further attention as reopening decisions are taken. These indicators were shared by Regional Council on May 28, 2020 and will be monitored for the remainder of the pandemic and will inform the Region's understanding of readiness for initial and further recovery phases. Phases of recovery will be carefully monitored in two to four week increments to allow time to assess the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic to determine if it is necessary to reinstate public health measures.

3. Short-Term Recovery Phase

As the initial phase of the Region's recovery, the focus will be on resuming a limited number of service activities that were paused or modified as part of the emergency response. The full list of service activities planned for resumption in the short-term recovery phase is found in Appendix 1. Examples include:

Update on Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

- TransHelp will resume some client assessment and administrative processes
- Housing will resume activities related to the Housing and Homelessness Plan, client placement processes, asset management, landlord and tenant mediation processes
- Water, through Operations Support, will resume activities related to meter readings and revenue collection
- Waste will resume activities related to program planning, specific curb-side collection practices (e.g. bulky items), infrastructure development and asset management/state-of-good-repair projects

In coordination with the limited resumption of these service activities, approximately 55 Regional employees of those redeployed to support essential services and COVID-19 related programs will be gradually recalled to their regular position during the short-term phase.

a) **Regional Facilities and Workplaces**

Short term recovery will include measures to prepare all Regional buildings for safe, but limited, levels of reoccupation by the public and employees. In accordance with leading practices, Regional facilities will be limited to no more than 40 per cent of normal occupancy levels in order to satisfy public health advice to maintain physical distancing.

Regional buildings will also adopt practices such as point-of-entry screening, signage and ground markings to designate directional flows as well as clear barriers at service counters. In addition, enhanced and more frequent cleaning and disinfection procedures will be in place that are consistent with provincial and public health guidelines. This includes cleaning protocols to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 as well as disinfect areas should exposure to the virus take place.

During the short-term recovery, where possible, Regional staff will continue to work remotely in order to practice physical distancing. Adopting a “remote first” work principle also serves as the most effective way to reduce building occupancy pressures.

On March 19, 2020 the *Municipal Emergency Act, 2020* was enacted to provide that a municipality’s procedure by-law may be amended to provide that members of councils and committees may participate in meetings electronically, in open and closed sessions, including being counted for quorum and voting. The provisions which allow for the electronic participation in municipal council and committee meetings expires upon the termination of the declaration of emergency. To prepare for the resumption of in-person council and committee proceedings, Regional Council chambers will have clear protective barriers installed between individual Council member seating, staff and media seating, as well as occupancy limits to the Council lounge and the public gallery.

b) **Health and Safety**

As part of recovery efforts, the Region’s health and safety measures will focus on supporting both the physical and mental well-being of employees, particularly those in frontline positions. This includes additional resources, toolkits, videos, guides as well as the Employee and Family Assistance Plan aimed at nurturing mental well-being during the pandemic.

The Region’s people leaders have also been equipped to assist employee enablement and engagement throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included offering flexible workplace practices that help balance personal and professional priorities, empowering

Update on Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

work life integration and encouraging self-care. For instance, the practice of virtual “town halls” has become a new way for employees to interact with one another, stay connected and decrease feelings of isolation. These measures continue to foster an organizational culture that is inclusive and where every employee can feel a sense of belonging, safety and trust.

In order to assess employee wellbeing, a “pulse survey” was conducted in June 2020. The survey examined employee experiences with remote work, personal wellbeing, future workplace requirements and feelings about returning to the workplace. Overall, the survey achieved an assuring response rate of nearly 50 per cent and revealed employee sentiment is over 70 per cent positive across many categories.

Approximately 70 per cent of Regional employees that regularly operate in administrative settings will continue to work remotely during the short-term recovery phase. To enable remote work, updated health and safety policies, ergonomics standards, online learning resources as well as instructions for those self-isolating but still working are now in place.

For those employees returning to the workplace, educational supports are in place to support a safe transition back to worksites. This includes learning about new health and safety protocols that will be in place upon return such as health screening, practicing frequent hand hygiene, appropriate use of both non-medical masks and personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning and disinfection processes, understanding new signage as well as how to practice physical distancing in various workplace and community settings.

c) **Digital Enablement**

The short-term recovery phase will continue to build on digital practices introduced through the COVID-19 response. These digital features include:

- Emergency communications tool for Public Health to update staff during an emergency. This Public Health communications tool uses active Public Health employee contact information for time-sensitive notification purposes related to the COVID-19 emergency.
- Case and Contact Management Call Centre implementation of Five9’s technology for Public Health which enabled employees to transition to remote work.
- Enhancements to the Mass Communication Tool (“MCT” Callout Tool) to send automated information via email messages and voice calls with pre-recorded information to family members and loved ones of residents in all five Regional Long-Term Care homes.
- Virtual parade meetings for Paramedic Services prior to shift deployment. The implementation of the technology allows Paramedics to take part in a virtual parade meeting, prior to deployment, thereby removing of in-person meetings.
- Transitioning over 200 Human Services caseworkers to remote service delivery within five days, which provided community members the ability to apply and speak with their caseworkers without having to visit the Regional offices.
- Introducing virtual exhibitions at Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives (PAMA) including: Morphology, Simon Hughes: 2001-2020, and Home: Expressions in Abstraction. PAMA@Home also offers daily and weekly activities for families to encourage hands-on home arts education.

Update on Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

In addition to these advancements, digital features such as live chat capabilities, translation resources and comprehensive reporting of COVID-19 cases will continue through the Region's website. This includes an interactive mapping dashboard of COVID-19 cases to assist the community with greater information surrounding the characteristics of the pandemic.

All employees working remotely have safe and secure access to all Regional applications, networks and information management tools. This includes use of Microsoft Teams, which provides employees the capability for virtual meeting, scheduling, audio/video calling, chat and document-sharing. Through existing Regional computers and mobile devices, remote employees can operate and collaborate as if they are in their regular workplace.

d) Communications and Change Management

The Region's Plan will be supported by communications for the community and employees. This will include change management supports designed to assist the community and to ensure employees are prepared to adopt new service delivery and workplace realities.

A comprehensive communications plan has been developed to support each phase of recovery with specific messages and tactics to ensure clear, open, timely and consistent communications to Regional Council, the community and employees with respect to:

- Region's recovery planning efforts
- What services will be resumed and what facilities will be reopened to the public and when
- How Regional buildings are being prepared for safe service delivery including creating extra spaces to ensure physical distancing, installing directional signage and plexiglass barriers and health and safety measures such as cleaning and disinfection
- New digital tools being put in place to improve access to services and enhance online service experience
- Where to find information and resources about the Region's recovery planning
- What emergency measures are being scaled down

This information, along with the Region's Plan, will be shared through a variety of channels:

- Region's COVID-19 website at www.peelregion.ca/coronavirus/recovery
- Posts on the Region's social media platforms
- News releases
- Connect2Peel newsletter
- Mobile signs
- Internal channels such as COVID-19 Peel Employee portal, emails and town halls

The Region will work in partnership with local municipalities to leverage their external channels in informing the community about the Region's recovery planning and resumption of service activities.

Update on Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

e) Working Timelines

Working timelines for the short-term recovery phase are estimated to commence in July and may last until September 2020.

4. Mid and Long-Term Recovery Phases

The transition to the mid and long-term recovery phases of the Region's Plan will be subject to the Ontario's Framework for Reopening Our Province as well as guidance from Peel Public Health monitoring. In some cases, Regional services disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, such as Public Health and Long-Term Care, may continue emergency response measures while others progress with recovery efforts.

During the mid and long-term recovery phases, emphasis will also shift toward establishing a "new normal" of Regional services and operations. This reimagining of how work is done will help take advantage of opportunities revealed through the COVID-19 crisis such as the need for seamless, contactless digital services, greater flexibility and cross-functional skills from the workforce, pursuing cost-effective ways to operate and balancing service levels with the pressures of budget constraints. Transformative opportunities also include:

- Enabling new practices, policies and codes of conduct that support a "remote first" workforce with greater collaboration, productivity, flexibility as well as health, safety and wellness
- Re-examining the future of Regional building use, occupancy levels and the long-term impact on workspace design, overall space needs and reducing its carbon footprint
- Strengthening integration and partnership between Health and Human Services for vulnerable populations, i.e. building on the success of the isolation and recovery sites for the homeless
- Optimizing the contact centre services and client navigation across the organization to increase their efficiency and effectiveness
- Bolstering more convenient service delivery, including re-examining traditional service hours, the ongoing ability to conduct appointments by phone as well as expanding safe and easy online payment options that can be conducted from any location at any time

The working timeline for the mid and long-term recovery efforts are estimated to commence in the Fall 2020. Transition into these phases is contingent on the results of the short-term recovery efforts, the continued slowing of the spread of the virus, the province's lifting of emergency orders and restrictions as well as direction from Peel Public Health.

5. Community Impact

As Regional services resume, employees will continue to coordinate with community partners and stakeholders to ensure that complementary community services are also resuming and safely available. The Community Response Table (CRT) emerged during the early days of the pandemic to support vulnerable and at-risk populations in identifying and responding to emerging needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CRT, which is comprised of over 90 community partners, agencies and not-for-profits, has served as a positive vehicle to share crucial information and collectively identify and address problems facing both community agencies and residents in real time during the pandemic. A significant outcome achieved by this collaborative is the cross-boundary partnerships developed through formalizing links and communication between community

Update on Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

partners, the municipalities, Regional Human Services and Health Services, not-for-profits, capacity builders and non-traditional partners. These groups have worked together on complex issues such as mental health, health equity, access to services and poverty. The system level benefits and opportunities that have materialized through the cross sector planning table will continue to be leveraged to support the sector to be agile and adapt collectively during the recovery phase and to ensure that supports are safely available to better service vulnerable and at risk populations for our community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored disparities experienced by equity-seeking groups across Peel Region. Recovery efforts, including those already underway through the CRT and partnering community groups, are being carried out acknowledging that many community members have experienced discrimination, racism, obstacles to accessing programs and services, among other systemic barriers. The CRT, along with several community groups and leaders, continue important conversations that seek to address concerns about the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 and the importance of applying an equity lens to recovery.

The Region's recovery efforts are rooted in its vision of a Community for Life, where everyone enjoys a sense of belonging and access to the services and opportunities they need to thrive at each stage of their lives. The Region's Plan includes the collection of race-based data (which started in April, 2020) and an equity approach to how the Region plans and delivers programs and services to Peel residents. Leading practices will be leveraged in order to identify and remove systemic barriers, advance inclusion and ensure recovery creates more equitable outcomes for all members of the community.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Although the Region's Plan signals a transition toward recovery from COVID-19, the risk of multiple scenarios surrounding the future of the pandemic continues to pose challenges. In the short, mid, and long term, localized outbreaks, reoccurring waves of the virus, the potential for concurrent emergency events, cyber security and privacy risks all pose a high risk to the Region's recovery. To mitigate these risks, the Region's Plan has been designed to allow it to quickly adjust to ensure the health and safety of employees and the community as well as includes policy and process changes to reduce the Region's risk exposure.

Risks related to an economic downturn and cash flow reductions have already been realized. In order to help minimize the impacts of these risks the Region is regularly reviewing its short and long-term financial situation, developing strategies and approaches to mitigate financial impacts and continues to pursue continuous improvement initiatives.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Preliminary financial estimates surrounding the Region's Plan are based on initial health and safety measures required for facilities and workplaces. This includes added COVID-19 signage, installation of clear protective barriers to service areas as well as limited workstation adjustments to enable physical distancing. As further recovery efforts are prepared, additional cost estimates will be made available. Initial cost estimates for these measures are \$250,000, which includes approximately \$90,000 for Council Chambers. There are sufficient funds in existing capital budget to fund these initial recovery methods.

Update on Region of Peel COVID-19 Demobilization and Recovery Plan

CONCLUSION

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Region has taken concerted efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of the residents and businesses throughout the community. While important public health measures continue to work toward reducing the spread of the virus, the Region's Plan sets out a purposeful approach that combines the careful and phased resumption of services, creating safe environments for the community and employees as well as preparations for a "new normal" that starts now.

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