

Take this seriously and stay home

March 30, 2020 By Chris Drost

The Bancroft Times reached out to local mayors and reeves to ask them how well they think their communities are complying with the call to physically isolate during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reeve Barb Shaw of Wollaston Township is concerned because "I don't think people are following all the precautions. I am hearing from community members who have concerns. People who have been away are popping into the post office or accessing the public water tap. We have no hand sanitizing facilities at the water tap." While Shaw is happy how far people have come in changing our behaviour in the past 10 days, she says, "I am concerned we are not doing enough. We have been given good guidelines but we need to follow them. People should not be going off their property. Every time we allow someone in our home it is a risk. The worse part is that this virus is shedding before you even have symptoms." There is a need to protect essential workers and our own families. She hopes there is still time to teach new behaviour such as only one person in a family shopping. "If we can lock this down, we can stop this but I don't have a high level of confidence," she says. Shaw thinks we have the advantage in a rural area of having physical space but the disadvantage is not having enough infrastructure in terms of medical care. "If we lose that advantage, I don't know what the future looks like. I am proud of how far people have come but we have to do more," she added. According to Bancroft Mayor Paul Jenkins, "everybody needs to take this seriously." He sees the self-isolation situation is expanding in stages. "I see many people self-isolating who are ramping it up to restrict their outings for necessities. The food and drug stores have implemented measures but there needs to be an expansion of no-contact curbside pick-up," he says. Within town operations, Jenkins says that public works is doing shifts and are currently preparing for potential flooding. Staff are connecting regularly through conference calls as people are working from home. The provincial list for what can and cannot stay open is "confusing" according to Jenkins. "They might better have said what cannot be open," he added. In the interim, the town is putting out regular media releases on its website and Facebook page. Property tax payments for the first instalment have been extended to April 30 with no penalties and water and wastewater payments have been extended also to April 30 with no penalties. "We are working to ensure that the health and well-being of our residents and employees continue to be a priority during this time of uncertainty. I believe our local residents are complying well with the physical distancing although we are disappointed that some returning from elsewhere have not adhered to it," says Mayor of the Township of Carlow/Mayo Bonnie Adams. Adams says that most of their residents are seniors and they immediately had no problems discontinuing activities to protect everyone. In a press release dated March 25, the township lists the municipal buildings that are now closed and will remain so until further notice. The Carlow and Mayo waste disposal sites will remain open but with limited services. Staff will still respond to calls through the township office. The March 31 deadline for property taxes has been extended to April 30. Payments can be made by mail, dropping a cheque off through the slot in the front door of the municipal office or through online banking. Press releases are posted on www.carlowmayo.ca. Building permit applications will continue to be accepted electronically and through the slot in the front door and payment can be made by mailing a cheque, dropping one in the front door or paying by credit card. The building official will not be entering any private residences during this period and the normal processing timelines for other inspections may not be met. Adams and the rest of council are currently arranging for a telephone chain to be established that will include calling every resident in the municipality to ensure they are well and have everything they need. Hastings Highlands Mayor Vic Bodnar says that Canadians are a polite and patient people and he is glad to see the community dealing with the situation, often while "keeping their sense of humour." Bodnar cites the response by local stores to taking physical distancing seriously, is good to see. Within the administration at Hastings Highlands, Bodnar explains that they have moved into "Microsoft teams" that use video conferencing to connect on a regular basis. "I am very proud of our staff, those who are working from home and those who have to still come in to work," he says. During the crisis the municipality will continue to use the newspapers, its website and Facebook page to keep constituents current on this evolving situation. Bodnar also posts regular updates on his Mayor's Diary on Facebook. Reeve Dennis Purcell of Faraday Township believes the majority of residents respect the request to stay home and isolate from others. "However, there are still a few whose attitude is that nobody is going to tell me what to do and I will go anywhere I want. Thank goodness they are the minority," he says. Purcell added that the daily reports from the media are helping to educate us and remind us that we are all in this together and need to respect our fellow citizens.