

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

County of Simcoe Statement: County Looking to Find Appropriate Balance in Pandemic Framework

Midhurst/March 2, 2021 – We understand and appreciate that many residents and businesses are concerned about the recent decision by the Province of Ontario to implement further restrictions on our region by placing Simcoe-Muskoka in Grey-Lockdown. We understand the major impacts this has on our local businesses, industries, and restaurants and the County continues to work hard to support these sectors.

While the County provides funding to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU), it is a separate entity and the SMDHU reports directly to the Ontario Ministry of Health. We regularly meet with our local Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Charles Gardner. We believe the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit continues to work hard to safeguard our residents and attempts to prevent significant impacts during a potential third wave of COVID-19. The SMDHU is also very concerned about further spread of variant cases in Simcoe Muskoka. These concerns were expressed by the SMDHU to the Province of Ontario, which ultimately sets the COVID-19 framework levels for each region.

We understand that the change in our status after only a short time in the Red designation has put significant stress on our small businesses and communities as a whole. This, coupled with the timing of the Provincial announcement regarding our move to Grey, and regions adjacent to us being moved to green levels, only adds to the frustration. We know that these changes make it difficult to operate a viable business.

Given these concerns, County representatives convened meetings with area partners and a local MPP on Monday. As a result of these discussions, we have asked the Province to reconsider its decision with a focus on finding the proper balance between supporting our economy/businesses and continuing to meaningfully safeguard public health.

We have also shared these perspectives with the SMDHU. We have asked Dr. Gardner to look at alternate ways that would allow businesses that can and have operated safely to be able to reopen, while maintaining other required public safety measures and restrictions to reduce community transmission, particularly with the variants in our region.

We have been assured that the Province is actively looking at the situation and are encouraged that the Province and the SMDHU understand the issues and will work to resolve this local challenge.

The risks of variant strains and a third wave are significant. However, Dr. Gardner confirmed that the criteria that supported his previous recommendations is variable and fluid and they are reviewing their options to re-address the situation as outlined above.

This pandemic has been difficult and these changes in our status are challenging for everyone. However, to limit impacts of a third wave and spread of the variant virus, we must as a community continue to follow all Public Health guidelines by staying home except for essential needs, physical distancing, wearing a mask and practicing hand hygiene. The SMDHU has begun rolling out a large vaccination program (based on eligibility and vaccine availability) and we encourage all residents to

follow their roll-out timelines and be vaccinated once it becomes available to them. The combination of the efforts and guidelines including vaccinations and safety protocols is what will ultimately get us to where we all wish to be.

At the County level, our employees continue to work hard to deliver critical services and programs. This includes important assistance to individuals through our Social, Community and Health services, as well as supports to businesses/industry (small businesses, tourism partners and restaurants) through Tourism and Economic Development, among many other critical County services.

Tourism Simcoe County:

- Continue to run shop local digital campaigns
- Pivot Tourism website for Covid-19 supports for restaurants, businesses, and tourism assets
- Promote local businesses, restaurants through social media and partnership
- Increased to \$600,000 our recently launched Tourism, Culture and Sport grant program to support not-for-profits and municipalities with tourism development with a focus on recovery
- Represent region on Boards to provide direction and support, relaying information on all relief programs to Simcoe County stakeholders and operators
- Co-coordinate the Digital Main Street & Beyond Program (going beyond provincial program to support eligible businesses throughout Simcoe County with digital pivoting supports)
- Assist operators with product and Experience Development (e.g. Agritourism Toolkit)
- Develop destination marketing initiatives – e.g. signage program, operator photo and video shoots

County of Simcoe Economic Development Office:

- Manage Covid-19 Business Resources Portal - resources, funding programs, events and education available to support the business community
- Partner to Ask an Expert Series - virtual webinar series to assist businesses during the pandemic (13 sessions and counting)
- Automation Accelerator Program (launching March 9 for regional manufacturers)
- Social media support for local businesses promotion and business resources
- Lead the Made in Simcoe County Campaign (includes showcasing local businesses switching to PPE production)
- Co-coordinate the Digital Main Street & Beyond Program (going beyond provincial program to support eligible businesses throughout Simcoe County with digital pivoting supports)
- Continued advocacy (in partnership with Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus for broadband internet (SWIFT) and Covid-19 business supports)
- Industry and ecosystem best practice sharing around COVID-19 business strategies

Ontario Works and Social Services:

- Administration of the Canada Recovery Benefit, Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB)
- Co-ordination of the Ontario Works Financial Support program for qualifying individuals who are temporarily unemployed or experiencing a business closure
- Co-ordination of the Housing Retention Program to support qualifying individuals who are experiencing rental, utility or mortgage arrears

Above, we have listed some services and programs offered by the County to assist residents and business partners; however, we know that our businesses and employers need to be open to be viable and survive this challenging time.

Please continue to stay safe, and remember we are stronger together.

~ George Cornell, County of Simcoe Warden

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