



## **Township of McNab/Braeside**

### *Report to Council*

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|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject:</b> Burnstown Beach and COVID-19 Impacts | <b>Author:</b> Oliver Jacob<br><b>Title:</b> Councillor |
| <b>Report Number:</b> 2020-08-04-01                  | <b>Date:</b> August 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2020              |

### **Recommendations:**

**That** Council receive Report No. 2020-08-04-01m (Burnstown Beach and COVID-19 Impacts) as information.

**Further That** Council provide direction on next steps at the Burnstown Beach site.

### **Background**

COVID-19 (now commonly known as the coronavirus) is an airborne coronavirus that is spread through the respiratory system. While there are still many unknowns surrounding its transmission, it is clear that close person-to-person contact in a community can contribute to a higher probability for contracting the virus.

The Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) and federal/provincial health authorities have strongly recommended that Canadians practice physical distancing of at least two metres (six feet) between themselves and persons outside of their immediate household and/or social circle. This acts to complement mandatory mask guidance in enclosed indoor spaces, frequent handwashing guidance and restrictions on the size of public gatherings.

Over the last few months, the local unemployment rate has climbed over 5% which has resulted from temporary business closures in accordance with provincial emergency orders which are only now being withdrawn as we enter Phase 3 of Ontario's "[Framework for Re-Opening Our Province](#)". Although upper levels of government have been calling on residents to stay home where possible and to limit non-essential excursions, communities have seen a marked increase in traffic. With the public opening of beaches in June 2020, hundreds of residents and visitors have frequented our various public beach and boat launch facilities in search of the tranquility that our Township sites offer. In addition, the volume of resident concerns has increased significantly as residents are concerned about overcrowding, littering and the contravention of public health guidance (and Provincial Emergency Orders).

## **Discussion:**

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with various options that it may wish to consider regarding the concerns raised by residents about the Burnstown Beach site. No discussion on preferred options has been provided as it is desired that Council provide their direction as to next steps at the Burnstown Beach site.

Two municipalities are referred in this report (Wasaga Beach and South Bruce Peninsula). These municipalities were selected as they have both reported considerable issues relating to the operation of the local beaches due to overcrowding and the failure of users to abide by physical distancing requirements.

## **Options**

There are a number of options that Council may wish to review with regard to this Report to Council. They are detailed below for Council's information. These options are provided for information purposes only.

### **1. Parking Along Calabogie Road**

Calabogie Road is extremely busy during regular times and it is dangerous to have vehicles parked on its sides. Vehicles have parked in such a manner at least two (2) times since the re-opening of the site when internal parking is not available. The County of Renfrew has enacted By-Law No. 63-20 which prohibits parking on both sides of Calabogie Road from a point 487m southwest of Dickson Road to a point 444m southwest of the first point (roughly the area around the entrance/exit of the Burnstown Beach site. Furthermore, the County's by-law appoints the municipality's By-Law Enforcement Officers to be able to lay fines. However, the absence of "No Parking" signs along this stretch does not allow Township by-law enforcement officers from laying charges that could have a reasonable chance of being upheld by the Court, if challenged. Additionally, By-Law Enforcement Officers would have to be directed by the Township to patrol this area and issue fines to offending vehicles once signs are erected.

### **2. Ensuring That Boat Launch Parking Is Available**

Several residents have been concerned about beach users parking in the trailer parking assigned for Boat Launch users. They have noted that there have been occasions where individuals who have purchased a boat launch pass have been unable to find parking at the site as a result. One potential solution would be to look at amending the Township's Parking By-Law to legislate that the northerly parking lot is only for boat launch users who pay for their launching passes. Any parked vehicles who do not possess a boat launch pass in this particular parking area could be fined. The Burnstown Beach site contains abundant parking for beach users without the use of this area. Appropriate signage would have to be installed at the entrance to the northerly parking lot to educate users.

3. Blocking Off Parking Spaces to Limit Traffic

It is possible to block off unsafe parking areas to limit the number of vehicles that can park on the site (i.e. the westerly side of the roadway). This can be done using pylons, logs, large rocks and other items within the Township's inventory. The benefits of eliminating these potential parking spaces would include increasing the safety of motorists and pedestrians at the site. Additionally, by limiting the number of available parking spaces, it is possible to limit the number of users on the beach itself.

4. Create Pods to Ensure Physical Distancing

The Township could rope off pods on the beach to identify where people can sit while maintaining physical distancing between groups. These pods could measure 10'x10' along the beach itself and in the shaded areas. Users from one social circle would be able to utilize the beach while maintaining physical distancing. This model has been adopted at the popular Wasaga Beach as a collaboration between the municipality and Ontario Parks as the latter owns the beach itself while the municipality owns the parking areas. This project was commenced in early July 2020 and the evaluation is ongoing.

5. Hire Summer Student to Control Access

The Township could hire a summer student to control how many people are allowed into the beach at one time. This would help to ensure that there is sufficient space to allow for adequate physical distancing while also permitting an increased level of authority at the site. However, it should be noted that this front-line position would potentially be subjected to aggressive users who do not understand or appreciate the implemented regulations. Appropriate signage and procedures would have to be implemented to prevent or mitigate such incidents.

6. Add Signage

The creation of additional signage sharing public health messaging around the importance of physical distancing, handwashing and face mask use when physical distancing is not possible would help to ensure that the Township is taking all steps necessary to educate its users. Funding for this project could be drawn from the Economic Development – Advertising budget line.

7. Engage By-Law Enforcement Officers for Increased Patrols

When warranted, the Township could use by-law enforcement officers to patrol and educate on public health guidance (fines, if necessary, due to uncooperative conduct, etc.). Provincial Emergency Orders may be enforced by local by-law enforcement personnel in accordance with the Attorney General's delegation earlier in the pandemic. In addition, the township could consider enacting its own by-laws/regulations related to permitted uses of our municipal sites.

To my knowledge, by-law enforcement officers have continued to provide enforcement for boat launch users who do not purchase the required boat launch pass. However, the Township has not requested that By-Law Enforcement engage residents through education on public health guidance and Provincial Emergency Orders at present. This would involve an additional expenditure above and beyond the existing By-Law Enforcement budget (unless service levels are altered).

8. Hire Paid Duty Officers or Private Security Contractors

As an alternative to Option No. 7, it would be possible to contract the services of paid duty OPP officers (or private security contractors) who could provide a similar education function.

At present, Provincial Emergency Orders are enforced by the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) in line with resident complaints. The Renfrew detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police have advised that they are conducting patrols of the local beaches and educating residents when calls-for-service permit. Several residents have noted their presence. Unfortunately, the most crowded periods occur on the weekends when calls-for-service are also high, meaning that the OPP are not always able to patrol the local beaches as a result.

9. Implement Parking Fees at the Site

Before 2017, the Township had adopted a parking fee system where all parked vehicles at municipal boat launch and beach facilities would be required to purchase and display a parking permit. This included both boat launch users and beach/park users. At that time, it was felt that it was unfair to charge residents to attend a public park so the fee was amended to solely apply to boat launch users as the boat launch is provided as an amenity.

Many residents have suggested the implementation of a parking fee system that could detract from the large numbers of users. This form of fee could potentially be implemented similarly to the boat launch passes through the Honk Mobile app. It would be important to determine if cash payments would be accepted, whether a Township staff member would have to be present and if Township residents would also be subject to the fee (resident vs. non-resident fee structure). Additional by-law enforcement presence would be required to ensure that users are familiar with the new regulation and that the new parking fees are being paid.

Mayor Janice Jackson of South Bruce Peninsula recommended that this option be considered as an opportunity to ensure that the park is a user-pay facility, similar to an arena. Any revenue from parking fees at their beaches is allocated for site maintenance (garbage removal, washroom cleaning) and new features.

10. Restrict the Site to Township Residents Only

Many residents have suggested that the Township beaches should be restricted to only ratepayers of our community. Such a policy would ensure that local residents would have the ability to enjoy the site that their tax dollars funds and it would also exclude visitors from areas where COVID-19 cases are more prevalent. There are numerous considerations that would need to be investigated before such a policy could be implemented.

- a) Firstly, it would be important to review the legal, privacy and discrimination-related implications of implementing a resident-only policy. This would involve obtaining legal advice from the township's solicitor.
- b) Secondly, if implemented, the manner in which it would be administered would be very important. It would be difficult to place someone at the entrance checking identification (ID) as this would cause traffic management concerns on the busy Calabogie Road. If users were permitted to park and disembark from their vehicles, it would be difficult to track where those users went.
- c) Thirdly, the identification of residents would need to be carefully discussed by staff. A windshield sticker, or similar device, could be issued to all taxpayers and mailed to their registered addresses. However, this would mean that tenants would not necessarily receive stickers and landlords who reside outside the municipality would potentially receive them. Additionally, residents may move or change vehicles so it would be difficult to administer such a program over multiple calendar years.

The Town of Wasaga Beach has sectioned off an area of their local beach for local residents and posted signage to that effect; however, it is difficult to enforce such a distinction. This may also be an option to satisfy local taxpayers.

#### 11. Maintain the Status-Quo

Given the status of the summer season, Council may deem it prudent to maintain the status-quo for the remainder of the 2020 season and investigate potential options for implementation during the 2021 season.

#### **Policy Considerations:**

The Township's draft Strategic Plan identifies that the Council's vision of the municipality is "a welcoming, healthy and safe community with a strong municipal government that provides cost effective services and infrastructure". The options outlined in this Report would support this vision and act as the implementation of Council's stated desires during one of the most challenging events in collective memory (the COVID-19 pandemic).

#### **Financial Considerations:**

It is important to note that various options above would incur expenditures for the municipality

that are not currently budgeted for in the 2020 Operating Budget. As a result, Council would have to decide where required funding could be drawn from (i.e. unexpended budget lines, reserves, etc.). Recommendations from the Township's Treasurer would be helpful should Council wish to proceed with one of the above options.

**Meeting Dates:**

None

**Consultation:**

Lindsey Lee, CAO/Clerk

Dawn Ferguson, OPP Detachment Commander

Mayor Janice Jackson, Town of South Bruce Peninsula

**Documents:**

None