

Ready, Resilient and Resourceful Committee Report

DATE: Tuesday, March 29, 2022

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE REPORT 2021

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To provide the Ready, Resilient and Resourceful Committee with an overview of the activities of the Emergency Management Team (EMT) to manage the pandemic from January to December 2021.

Report Highlights

- The EMT managed the ongoing pandemic response through four waves of new variants where each was more transmissible.
- The provincial reopening strategies changed from the Framework for Reopening colour code system to the Roadmap to Reopen based on key health indicators and vaccination rates.
- The City supported the vaccination strategy by providing facilities and staff to perform non-clinical duties at static and pop-up clinics.
- Phase 1 of the Business Reintegration Plan occurred on November 1, 2021, with up to 30% of staff working from home returning to the workplace.
- The COVID-19 Vaccination Policy was implemented with a compliance rate of 99%.
- The Emergency Planning Program has implemented five of the recommended enhancements to strengthen our emergency management capabilities.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee receive this report for information.

Background

It is standard practice that an evaluation is conducted of every emergency response to identify best practices, lessons learned and continuous improvements. However, the duration of a pandemic can be very long and waiting until the end of the event may result in loss of critical data. In consultation with the EMT, it was determined that conducting debriefings and reporting at quarterly intervals would provide the most relevant feedback to enhance our emergency management capabilities. This process allows for information to be gathered promptly while still fresh in the minds of the staff.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Response 2021 (Attachment 1) provides an overview of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency for 2021, data and analytics of departmental operations and the status of implementation of program enhancements endorsed by the Emergency Management Program Committee to strengthen our emergency management capabilities.

A surge in cases creating the second wave around the globe was caused by three new variants of concern (VOC) ushered in 2021. The World Health Organization changed the naming conventions of the variants from the country of origin to the Greek alphabet. The second wave variants were Alpha, Beta and Gamma, with Alpha as the dominant strain. The Alpha variant brought more severe illness and a higher rate of transmissibility than the original COVID-19 virus.

There was a brief plateau in February and March than the Alpha and Delta variants brought on the third wave. Late spring through to the middle of summer a second trough occurred. As summer drew to a close, a fourth wave started with Delta emerging as the predominant strain. As with Alpha, the Delta variant was more transmissible with more severe health outcomes. The year ended with the Omicron variant causing a 622% increase in cases in Vaughan, but with less severe health outcomes.

The response needs evolved with the pandemic. Providing facilities and staff support to the Public Health operated static and pop-up vaccine clinics was a significant task for the EMT. The Maple Community Centre served as static vaccination clinic seven days a week from March to the end of the year. In addition, Father Ermanno Bulfon operated as a static clinic for six weeks in the spring. Many Community Centres and the Pierre Berton Heritage Centre hosted pop-up clinics.

Vaccination on a local and global scale faced challenges. The availability of supply in the first half of the year resulted in changes to the dose regime in Canada that allowed for more citizens to receive their first dose. The blood clotting side effects of the Astra Zeneca and Johnson and Johnson vaccines resulted in restrictions placed on their use.

Canada became the global leader in vaccination in June with 67% of the population having received their first dose. Pfizer BioNTech developed a children's vaccine that was approved in November. The vaccine was now available to citizens five years and older. The Omicron variant created the need for a booster or third dose to be administered to citizens 18 years and older.

The EMT had to adjust the reopening of facilities and programs when the Province replaced the Framework for Reopening colour code system with the Roadmap to Reopen that was based on health indicators and vaccination levels. Libraries and community centres had to transition their operations through the provincial reopening strategies due to lockdowns and restrictions imposed during the three waves. By-Law and Compliance, Licensing and Permitting Services staff continued to enforce the provincial orders through education and where warranted, charges. The use of outdoor facilities continued to be high, keeping Public Works busy ensuring that litter was picked up in a timely manner and areas well maintained. Economic Development provided ongoing support to the business community to help them navigate through the various directives issued by the Province. The Data and Analytics and Research Teams provided critical information to the EMT to ensure that they had the best possible situational awareness to make evidence-based decisions. Corporate and Strategic Communications kept citizens up to date on changes to services and orders issued that affected our operations. While the pandemic progressed, all departments continued to serve our community and support city-building.

All departments reviewed their operational needs to help guide the Business Reintegration Plan (BRP) to ensure an efficient process for gradually returning staff working from home to the workplace. As a result, the BRP established a phased approach where up to 30% of employees working from home began returning to the workplace on November 1, 2021. The BRP paused in December with the onset of the Omicron wave and lockdown directives.

The City's emergency response and research efforts were recognized by our peers. Research conducted by our librarians was instrumental in affecting how library materials were handled and resulted in the elimination of a provincial restriction. In addition, the Association of Strategic Planning awarded Vaughan the Richard Goodman Special Edition Pandemic Award for our strategic response to the pandemic.

The global trend was to implement vaccine passports and policies. The Province mandated that the public service, health sector employers, municipalities, and education sector have vaccination policies. The COVID-19 Vaccination Policy was developed

along with the process for checking vaccination status of community centre users. City staff achieved 99% compliance with the policy by the end of the year.

There was a shift in response strategies to the COVID-19 pandemic from zero cases to learning to live with and adapt to the virus.

Previous Reports/Authority

[COVID-19 Update Emergency Operations Centre Response June 23, 2020.](#)

[Update on City's Response to COVID-19 September 29, 2020.](#)

[Update on City's Response to COVID-19 March 10, 2021.](#)

Analysis and Options

The year ended as it began, with a new variant causing a surge in cases. The Emergency Management Team continued to respond with a measured and cautious approach based on data, analytics and research. The quarterly evaluations of our response ensure that recommendations are identified and recorded in a timely manner.

The Emergency Planning Program worked on implementing the recommendations from past reports. The following is the status of implementation the recommendations endorsed by the Emergency Management Program Committee:

Annual Mandatory Requirements	3
Ongoing Processes	5
Scheduled for 2022 and In Progress	11
To be determined	7
Completed and removed from list	5
Total	31

Financial Impact

Most of the costs of implementing the recommendations will be covered by the existing approved operating budget. However, where additional funds are required, requests will be initiated through the budget process.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Emergency response is an integrated process and ongoing coordination occurs with York Region Emergency Management to address any lessons learned with regional impacts.

Conclusion

Throughout the year, the EMT managed the changing environment of the pandemic. The year began with emergence of the Alpha, Beta and Gamma variants causing a spike in cases January through April, then a trough. Summer and autumn saw the Delta variant causing cases to surge, and the year ended with the most transmissible variant Omicron causing new case counts to rise 622%. The EMT maintained a cautious and evidence-based approach to resuming operations in each trough, complying with orders in each wave, supporting vaccine clinic operations and implementing policies to support City building and the safety of the community.

For more information, please contact: Sharon Walker, Manager of Emergency Planning, extension 6322.

Attachments

1. COVID-19 Pandemic Response 2021.

Prepared by

Sharon Walker, Manager of Emergency Planning, extension 6322.

Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Zvanitajs'.

Andrew Zvanitajs, Fire Chief/Community
Emergency Management Coordinator

Reviewed by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Spensieri'.

Nick Spensieri, City Manager