

LESSONS LEARNED – OUR EXPERIENCE TO DATE

**Ready, Resilient, Resourceful Committee
June 23, 2020**

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BACKGROUND

In conjunction with the Emergency Operations Centre and the Emergency Management Team, the Office of Transformation and Strategy established a Lessons Learned /After-Action Report (**LLAAR**) Team to assist in the collection and analysis of information required for reporting purposes. It also serves as valuable input into the development of an Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency Strategy for the City post-COVID-19. The LLAAR Team has also been facilitating meetings and discussions across the organization regarding impacts to business operations, how COVID-19 has presented opportunities for changes in the way we do business and in documenting over 100 (and counting) innovations and process improvements since the onset of the pandemic.

The work of the COVID-19 LLAAR Team is divided into several phases targeting various stages of emergency management, particularly: response, mitigation, and recovery.

The Response Phase of Emergency Management entails activating and carrying out the emergency management plans. Mitigation involves using measures and risk analysis to make logical decisions and reduce the effects of an emergency to save lives, preserve the environment, protect property and recuperate economic deficits. Recovery refers to actions taken to recover from an emergency and include those which are initiated during the incident as well as when the recovery phase is announced. These measures and plans aim to assist staff, residents, businesses and the Vaughan community at large, to return to a new state of normalcy.

Lessons Learned interviews were scheduled with leaders (Deputy City Managers, Directors, Managers, supervisors) and various staff across all portfolios and departments to better understand the impact COVID-19 has had on the City's staff and the services which we deliver to our community. Virtual interviews were conducted via Skype / Microsoft Teams and hosted either in a personal 1:1 format or group settings.

For Phase 1 (mid-March to mid-April) participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about the events which took place for the first 30 days. The interviews were hosted in late April. The participants were asked to consider the City's initial emergency management response and the decisions that have been made about our programming, activities, and operations. A total number of 64 interviews were conducted with 107 interviewees participating in these sessions. In addition, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the Mayor and all members of Council to obtain their input.

For Phase 2 (mid-April to mid-May) Lessons Learned interviews were held during the last week of May / first week of June and focused on the mitigation period of emergency. The participants were asked the same set of questions. During the second

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round 67 interviews were conducted with 108 interviewees participating in these sessions.

To maintain consistency, the following questions were asked during each interview in Phase 1 and Phase 2:

- *What did we do well?*
- *What could we do better? What could have been done better?*
- *What changes do we need to make, or recommendations do you have? (to the emergency plans and procedures, policies, operations, resourcing, training etc.)*
- *What process changes and innovative ways of doing work did you experience in your operations and what did you learn from it?*
- *What did you learn from this emergency?*
- *Do you have anything to add?*

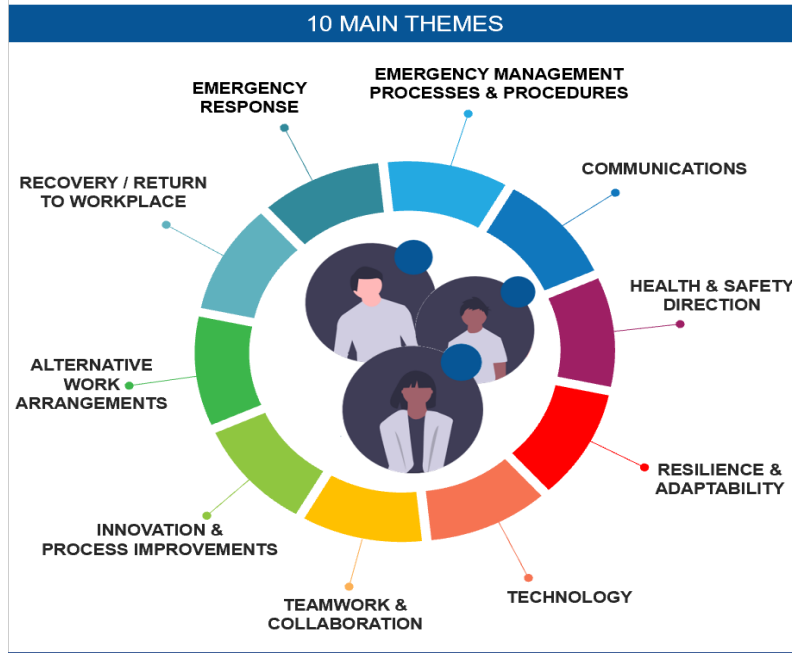
The participants were asked to consider the City's initial emergency response and the decisions that have been made about our programming, activities, and operations. The goal was to capture as much information as possible while it was still fresh in people's minds. An anonymous survey was also made available to all participants upon completion of their interviews to allow for any additional input, considerations or recommendations.

Although a detailed Lessons Learned and After-Action Report will be provided to the Ready, Resilient, Resourceful Committee and Council at a future date by the VFRS Chief and the EMT, the following provides a summary of the key themes that are being considered as part of the lessons learned.

EMERGING THEMES

The information gathered through Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the interviews as well as future interviews and surveys will help the City enhance its Emergency Management program and make recommendations vital to continuous improvement opportunities for any future events. Continual lessons learned gathering provides an opportunity for the City to think longer-term about how to create a more resilient and healthier workforce.

From Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Lessons Learned Series, 10 common themes emerged from the various interviews across all departments and portfolios.



1. Emergency Response

- The City responded quickly, and departments were able to effectively relocate staff to work remotely or allow for alternative work arrangements to continue work assignments and business services.
- Staff who had to remain in the field were provided with information and appropriate PPE.
- Introduced the City's Emergency Measures By-law and provided responsive services to public health and safety needs.
- The City's responsiveness in declaring a state of emergency and its quick and decisive actions around operational closures and temporary layoffs were critical in mitigating potential financial losses and threats to staff and the public.
- Proactive monitoring and readiness planning
- EOC mobilization and ability to quickly and effectively respond
- Created the operational taskforce to respond at tactical level
- The City's responsiveness in declaring a state of emergency
- Risk-based decision making

2. Emergency Management Processes and Preparedness

- Documentation of Business Continuity Plans
- EOC/EMT regular meetings and briefings
- Action logs and decision-tracking
- Unified approach in meetings, communications and decision making
- Alignment of efforts; consistency in decision making

3. Communications

- Proactive, relevant, timely communications internally and externally
- Message of Ready, Resilient, Resourceful
- Responsive to citizens and Business sector concerns
- Utilization of multiple communications channels
- Better and more expedient communications between staff and management

4. Health and Safety Direction

- Immediate response in the provision of PPE and enhanced cleaning and safety measures for those still in the workplace/field
- Clear messaging on safety
- Initiatives focused on health and wellness
- Employee assistance supports
- Q&As to inform and provide guidance
- Virtual ergonomic assessments and advice for those working from home
- Additional training and education where needed
- OCHRO developed the COVID-19 health and safety directive for Worksite Visits to provide safety measures for employees working in the community, at home or in the workplace during COVID-19.
- The department worked collaboratively with various lines of business identifying department-specific operational needs during COVID-19, and subsequently updating and communicating amended health and safety protocols.
- The OCHRO developed a wellness kit with various online resources and learning opportunities to help manage mindfulness, stress, time and remote communication.
- To help to alleviate stress and further promote emotional and physical wellness, encouraging staff to take vacations and days off.

5. Staff Resilience and Adaptability

- Quickly embraced new ways of doing business.
- Opened new channels for communication.
- Communications have actually increased among team members.
- Staff sharing uplifting messages, positive changes to their business and providing open door communications and transparency.
- Most meetings are taking place virtually (over Skype, Teams, Zoom) and these meetings are positively received.
- Staff are more readily available vs. scheduling meetings in the office and can participate in more meetings as they save on travel / walking distance.
- Staff are being invited to meetings appropriately and time is being used more productively.

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- Meeting duration is generally shorter than pre-scheduled face to face office meetings and still allows staff to create and complete action items and takeaways effectively and efficiently.
- Guardians of government – many staff who have gone above and beyond to provide service and protect our citizens.

6. Technology

- Quickly ramped up and adapted technology for work from home, Skype and Microsoft Teams virtual meetings.
- Electronic Committee and Council meetings.
- Virtual service delivery by enhanced online services including building permits, applications/submissions, PAC meetings, urban design meetings, parking enforcement services, training and development, recreation programs
- The OCIO has been responsive and quick in finding solutions for access to equipment, software and other requests. OCIO's responsiveness (supporting with hardware, installing / updating various software) to allow departments to work and function
- Extensive IT support to ensure different roles were equipped with the technology needed to maintain operations in a remote environment (i.e. Access Vaughan agents – soft phones, agent laptops, training and provided troubleshooting support as needed).

7. Teamwork and Collaboration

- A business unit was created within the financial system to track changes, monitor COVID related expenses.
- Quick and decisive actions around operational closures and temporary layoffs were critical in mitigating potential financial losses. Even though COVID-19's financial impacts are very significant, the situation would have been much worse had the organization delayed or never made those decisions.

8. Innovation and Process Improvements

- Over 100 business process improvements / innovations to the way we do business; implemented very quickly and effectively.
- Curbside pickup for library materials, curbside pickup up fitness equipment, curbside marriage licenses, virtual/digital library services.
- Electronic building permits; electronic applications/submissions.
- Meetings conducted virtually – Committee, Council, Taskforces, PAC, Urban design, etc.
- Email / electronic submission for Vaughan Business Licenses.
- Integrated Service Counter for the future.
- Payment processing innovations and finance modernization process improvements implemented.
- Enhanced efficiencies and effectiveness in safety, service delivery.

- Building capacity by sustaining these process changes.

9. Alternative Work Arrangements

- The City responded quickly and, for the most part, were able to effectively relocate staff to work remotely or allow for alternative work arrangements to continue work assignments and business services.
- The City followed the recommendations from the province and quickly implemented physical distancing guidelines for our workplace; working from home options and the ability to self-isolate is very much appreciated by staff.
- Considering the existing availability of meeting technologies, file sharing and mobile equipment, working from home has proven to be successful for most departments in sustaining business operations and transitioning seamlessly to a virtual environment.
- Staff can multi-task work requirements efficiently while juggling family and home priorities during this emergency. Many staff had already been equipped with laptops.
- Transitioning to working from home was comfortable for the most part. COVID-19 has acted as a catalyst for accelerating work from home arrangements and developing a better understanding of remote access capabilities while maintaining operations.
- Working from home does create some challenges with respect to ergonomic set-up, the need for better physical barriers between the work and home environment, the lack of face-to-face interactions; child care balancing issues.

10. Recovery / Return to Workplace

- Return to the workplace needs to be phased in; needs a disciplined approach.
- Staff have high expectations for distancing protocols, cleaning and disinfecting standards.
- Many understand that we will not return to the “old normal” or previous way of doing business.
- Some areas will need much more detailed protocols given their exposure to the public.
- Space planning and seating arrangements will change significantly and our need for office space will change.