



City of Richmond Hill Resumption Framework

May 2020

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Introduction

On March 13, 2020 Richmond Hill took the unprecedented measure of closing facilities and began to cancel programs and events in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Within a week, the City declared a State of Emergency and fully activated the COVID-19 Task Force. By the end of March, recreation programs were cancelled and park amenities were closed. To support residents, the May 1 property tax installment due date was moved to June 1 and penalties and interest on late property tax payments were waived through January 1, 2021.

The City continued to provide Fire and Emergency services, parks, roads, water and wastewater operations, waste collection, planning, bylaw, corporate services. However, changes to service levels, particularly in recreation and culture, resulted in decisions to temporarily lay off more than 1000 staff and redeploy 60 staff into positions that are typically filled by seasonal employees.

More than 2 months since facilities closed, efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 are taking effect and all organizations, including municipal governments must begin a phased approach to reopening.

The City of Richmond Hill Resumption Framework is a guide to resuming operations. It describes how city staff are mobilizing to recover from this crisis, outlines the pillars and principles to guide actions and describes the phased approach into corporate, community and economic components.

This Resumption Framework does not include the broader community economic recovery, which is a separate initiative through the Recover Richmond Hill Task Force.

More than a plan for the coming weeks or months – the Framework describes how the city will embrace the technology and best practices that were discovered through the COVID-19 period and use this information to build a more resilient, citizen-centred organization.

Mission

The Mission of the Richmond Hill Resumption Framework is to restore City Services in a safe and responsive manner while embracing innovation and change.

Pillars

The following pillars guide the business resumption actions and are foundational for the actions that have been taken because of COVID-19 and the actions Richmond Hill will take in the future.

Care: We will resume business operations while balancing the physical and psychological health and safety of staff and visitors to Richmond Hill facilities.

Coordination: We will align activities with Provincial and Public Health regulations and guidelines and with York Region plans.

Citizen Focused: We will adapt service delivery in a way that provides for citizen and employee safety and fosters innovation.

Communication: We will continue to communicate with staff, the community and Council – through multiple formats.

Principles

The following principles focus on operations and provide specific guidance for resumption efforts.

Staff Safety: Facility maintenance and sanitation, security, ability to access areas within city buildings etc. will be prioritized to ensure a safe and healthy environment for those who need to return to work at City Facilities.

Public-Facing Counters: In keeping with the Citizen Focused pillar, there is an opportunity to change current operations so that residents and business owners who interact with City staff no longer have to do so on multiple floors. Staff will reconfigure the ground floor at the main Municipal Offices and the Operations Centre to facilitate a common counter experience.

Remote Workforce: Physical distancing continues to be key in stopping the spread of COVID-19. With the support of technology, more than 700 employees are working remotely and will continue to do so unless they are required from an operational perspective identified as required in the “new normal” of how the City will operate in the future.

Financial Challenges: Like all municipalities, the financial impact of COVID-19 is significant. Fiscal responsibility is a principle that applies in all circumstances - now, it is even more important. We will continue to look for ways to reduce costs while maintaining service levels to the community.

Innovation: We will embrace the efficiencies gained from changes in our service delivery models on a permanent basis. The remote workforce arrangements that were put into place, also provided an opportunity to test technology and develop processes which ensure service excellence, while realizing efficiencies. Staff will embrace new ways to deliver service safely and effectively for the long-term. For example, we will:

- Go digital where possible to encourage online transactions and reduce the need for public access to City facilities. This includes launching a new digital permitting portal that enables citizens and building industry professionals to apply for, track and pay permits online. It also includes digitization of the community recreation Guide and Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts season brochure.
- Use IT resources to facilitate remote work where possible.
- Enhance our digital capability for records storage and move to a truly paperless operation
- Continue to develop online programming, and
- Seek out opportunities and partnerships that provide non-traditional revenue sources

While the COVID-19 pandemic posed considerable challenges – there are also opportunities to adopt practices and technology that will help us to not just return to normal – but to “Build Back Better”. This is a term often used in recovery practices to reflect how an organization can emerge from a crisis and be more resilient and citizen centric.

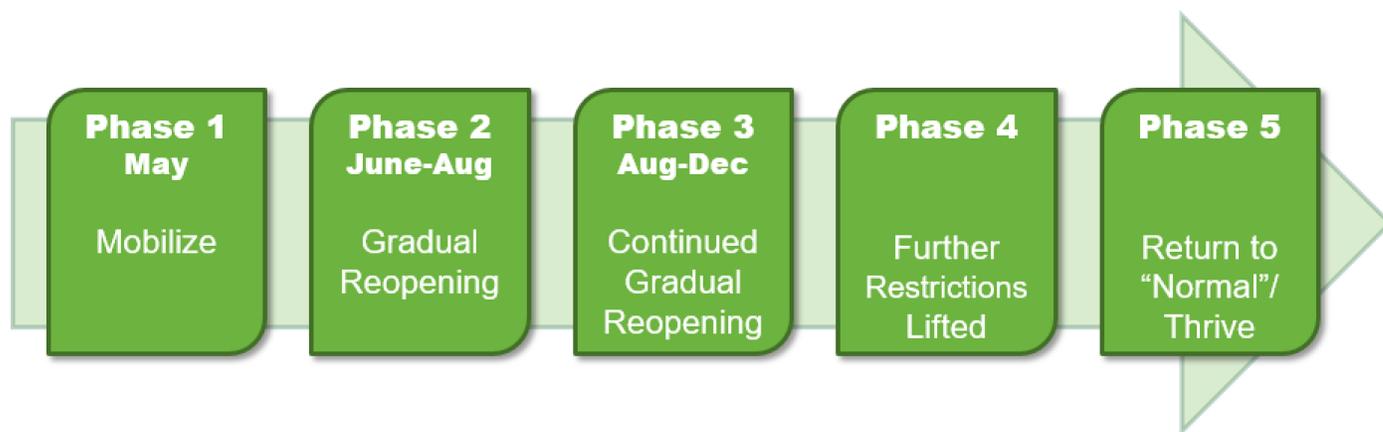
Phased approach

Resumption will be implemented using a five-stage approach while we build back better. We will do so using the pillars and principles and highlighting the corporate, community and financial considerations.

The phased approach allows for an extremely cautious reopening that aligns the actions of the City of Richmond Hill with the recommendations and guidelines from the Province of Ontario (including the Chief Medical Officer of Health), York Region Public Health and other authorities. Further, we will only move from one phase to the next when the City is prepared to do so safely and with all necessary precautions in place.

Flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances are essential to the City's continued success. The phases are not a linear progression, at any time in any phase as with the provincial framework we may maintain the status quo or reapply or tighten certain measures in response to any surge in cases or outbreaks.

It should be noted that the descriptions provided under each phase provides a summary of anticipated activities. The City Resumption Plan Committee will operate based on a detailed work plan with detailed roles, responsibilities and activities identified for each phase.



Phase 1: Mobilize (May 2020)

For the first phase of the resumption plan, our focus is on mobilization and developing a reopening framework that is intended to inform the phased business resumption plans for each Service. Like all phases, Phase 1 is grounded in the outlined pillars and principles and will follow the recommendations and guidelines from the Province of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, York Region Public Health and other authorities having jurisdiction. However, we will only proceed to the next phase if we are prepared to do so as a City.

Corporate

In this mobilization phase – we established a Business Resumption Committee and developed the City Resumption Framework.

Throughout this phase a Business Impact Analysis was conducted to determine the consequences of the COVID-19 business interruption to the City and to allow for the development of priority recovery strategies and comprehensive, innovative and resilient plans created for each service.

Further, the Business Impact Analysis determined the future office and space needs, the number of staff who are needed to work safely on premise to deliver services and those who can work from home. Moreover, in this phase there will be a strengthening of our IT and Telework Policies to better support staff and will identify any physical changes and process modifications that are needed.

Those staff who are working remotely will continue to do so unless they are otherwise required and our City facilities will remain closed to the public.

Community

In Phase 1, the community resumption planning efforts will help to ensure that residents continue to choose to live in the City of Richmond Hill based on community amenities, support networks, activities and other facets that make Richmond Hill a great place to live.

Maintaining constant communication and collaboration with key stakeholders like sports organizations will help to facilitate a safe return to play.

Further, by establishing clear, concise and Public Health informed rules of engagement for all kinds of community activities now and moving forward we will establish a safe and healthy return to 'normal'.

With the changes to provincial guidelines, the phased approach of opening park amenities including sports fields, tennis courts and off-leash dog parks began the week of May 19, 2020.

Financial

In addition to the corporate and community considerations, financial recovery is critical to continued City operations. In the mobilization phase, financial analysis and forecasts will be done for 2020 and 2021 budgets in consideration of the already approved property tax date moved to June 1, waived penalties and interest until January 1, 2021, the waived NSF fee of \$45 for the remainder of 2020, the payments required to higher levels of government and the ongoing review of potential cost savings in each department and division of the City. Staff will provide updates to Council through the Budget Committee and COVID-19 updates as scheduled.

Furthermore, staff are maintaining detailed records of all COVID-19 related financial loss and expenditures so that the city is prepared to request financial assistance from other levels of government if support becomes available.

Phase 2: Continue gradual reopening (June – August 2020)

The City will proceed to Phase 2, the continued gradual reopening, once it is prepared to do so safely with all the necessary precautions in place.

In this Phase, the Business Resumption Committee will continue to incorporate the pillars and principles and highlight the corporate, community and financial considerations throughout the gradual implementation of the business resumption plans created in Phase 1.

Corporate

In this phase, the City will begin the gradual implementation of the recovery strategies and comprehensive, innovative and resilient plans created in the Business Impact Analysis. This includes the modified continuation of services through “by appointment” arrangements discovered to be an effective method in the initial response of the pandemic. This will continue for services such as Development Applications and Building Permits.

In Phase 2, work from home arrangements will continue where possible and staff who are redeployed will continue in their redeployed positions.

Community

As was highlighted in Phase 1, the Phase 2 gradual implementation of the business resumption plans efforts will help to ensure our residents continue to choose to live in the City of Richmond Hill based on community amenities, support networks, activities and other facets that make Richmond Hill a great place to live.

Phase 2 will include the finalization of the business resumption plans for Recreation and Culture facilities including community centres, ice rinks, pools and the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts. A key component of this will be a determination of whether drop-in programs will run throughout the summer. The gradual reopening of park amenities will also take place through this phase as changes to provincial guidelines are announced.

Considering all pillars and principles and Phase 1 community considerations, the feasibility of delivery of fall festivals and events will be determined at this phase.

Financial

Analysis, forecasts and budgets will continue to be updated as we move forward in the cycle of the pandemic. Following the June 1, 2020 tax deadline, financial analyses and forecasts will be updated and staff will report to Council through the Budget Committee process.

Detailed record keeping of financial loss and expenditures will continue throughout Phase 2. This is particularly critical in Phase 2 as the gradual implementation of the business resumption plans begin and potential cost-saving initiatives are implemented.

Phase 3: Continue gradual re-opening and lifting restrictions (August to December 2020)

Continuing to be flexible and adaptable to the recommendations and guidelines from the Province of Ontario, York Region Public Health and other authorities having jurisdiction and with the continued goal to build back better, the City will proceed to Phase 3 when it is prepared to do so safely and with all necessary precautions in place.

In this Phase, the Business Resumption Committee will continue to incorporate the pillars and principles noted above and highlight the corporate, community and financial considerations throughout the gradual implementation of the business resumption plans created in phase 1 and lifting restrictions.

Corporate

During this Phase, the comprehensive, innovative and resilient plans created for each service through the Business Impact Analysis, will be realized as restrictions are lifted.

In phase 3 it is anticipated that the main Municipal Offices and Operations Centre will gradually reopen to the public on the ground floor.

This common counter approach is an example of building back better whereby ARH Advisors will continue to respond to phone and email inquiries remotely, thereby allowing for physical office space to be repurposed for expanded counter service.

Community

As was highlighted in Phases 1 and 2, Phase 3 will see continued gradual implementation of the business resumption plans efforts will help to ensure our residents continue to choose to live in the City of Richmond Hill based on community amenities, support networks, activities and other facets that make Richmond Hill a great place to live.

Phase 3 will include continued implementation of the business resumption plans for Recreation and Culture facilities that may reopen to the public with extensive restrictions on gatherings/interactions as potential changes to the provincial guidelines are announced.

Phase 3 will anticipate that provincial guidelines may continue to relax the restrictions on public gatherings. A final decision regarding fall festivals will stem from the provincial guideline changes in this Phase.

Finance

Analysis, forecasts and budgets will continue to be updated as we move forward through the Phases. Following the August and October 2020 tax deadline there will be a review of the existing analyses and forecasts. This analysis and forecasts will be presented to the Executive Leadership Team and Council on a regular basis, as necessary.

Continued detailed record keeping of all financial loss, expenditures etc. will continue throughout Phase 3. This is particularly critical in Phase 3 as the gradual implementation of the business resumption plans continues, additional restrictions are lifted and Recreation and Culture revenue returns to the City.

Phase 4: Further Restrictions Lifted

The City will proceed to Phase 4 as it is prepared to do so safely and with all necessary precautions in place.

In this Phase, the Business Resumption Committee will continue to incorporate the pillars and principles noted above and highlight the corporate, community and financial considerations throughout this phase as the City begins to further lift restrictions and return to a semblance of new normal.

Corporate

In this phase, recovery strategies and comprehensive, innovative and resilient plans created for each service out of the Business Impact Analysis, the City will continue to lift restrictions.

Throughout this Phase the Business Resumption Committee will begin to develop the long term plans that relax behavioural requirements as it is anticipated that by Phase 4 there will be the realistic potential for existing widely available vaccines or treatments for COVID-19.

In Phase 4 the City will be able to fully operationalize a common counter approach for the ground floor at the main Municipal Offices and Operations Centre and staff who can continue to work remotely will do so where possible.

Community

In Phase 4 it is anticipated that all City Recreation and Culture facilities will be open with less stringent restrictions. It is also anticipated that the Province will further relax the restrictions on public gatherings and the City will do the same, where possible.

Finance

Analysis, forecasts and budgets will continue to be updated as we move forward through the phases. Following the January 2021 deadline for waived penalties and interest on property taxes, there will be a review of the existing analyses, forecasts and budgets.

Continued detailed record keeping of all financial loss, expenditures etc. will continue throughout Phase 4. This is particularly critical in Phase 4 as further restrictions are lifted and the City looks to 2021.

Phase 5: Return to 'Normal'/Thrive

Phase 5 is the return to normal – or “new normal”. For our city – we are looking to build back better - to “Thrive” while the health and safety of the public and staff remain a priority.

Corporate

In Phase 5—return to ‘normal’/Thrive, all City offices and facilities will open fully with enhanced public health measures. Throughout this phase, the long-term plans that relax behavioural requirements will be implemented.

As highlighted in Phase 1-4, priority for Phase 5 is the health and safety of the community and staff.

Community

In Phase 5 all Recreation and Culture facilities will be open with enhanced public health measures. This will help to ensure our residents continue to choose to live in the City of Richmond Hill based on community amenities, support networks, activities and other facets that make Richmond Hill a great place to live.

Finance

Analysis, forecasts and budgets will continue to be updated as we move forward into the new ‘normal’/thrive Phase. The City will also develop new partnerships that provide non-traditional revenue sources and other innovative ways for the City to move forward financially.

The financial record keeping will continue into Phase 5, as it is anticipated that higher levels of government may provide some kind of assistance for municipalities affected by COVID-19 at this stage.

Conclusion

While COVID-19 forced the City to face unprecedented challenges, it is also an opportunity to identify opportunities and fully harness the capabilities that already exist within the organization.

At the heart of it – innovation is about problem-solving. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant operational challenges, it also presents an opportunity to identify solutions to how we create a more resilient, citizen-centric organization, reduce building operations costs, realize revenue opportunities and protect the health and safety of our staff and community; ultimately - to build back better.