

TO: Mayor Caul & Members of Council

FROM: Dawn Galusha, Treasurer

DATE: April 3, 2020

SUBJECT: Financial Assistance in Response to COVID-19

BACKGROUND

On March 16, 2020, the Town of Fort Frances issued a press release in response to COVID-19, in which all Town Facilities would be closed to the General Public until further notice. As the Water & Sewer and Tax bills were already mailed out with a due date of March 31, we received some phone calls asking how payments can be made. The Treasury staff advised that payments can be made on-line, at the bank or via the drop-box at the front doors of the Civic Centre. Anyone who inquired whether or not the Town was going to change the due dates or to waive interest on overdue accounts was told that the due dates have not changed and the By-Law currently states 1.25% interest will be charged on the first day of the month. As well we advised, if you can pay, we are suggesting that you do pay.

In reviewing the Taxes Receivable and Water & Sewer Receivable amounts as of April 1, 2020, we are seeing a similar trend to the prior year. It appears that based on the timing of this bill cycle, COVID-19 did not have a significant effect on our customers' ability to pay. That being said, the next cycle of Water & Sewer Bills will be due May 29 and our typical tax due dates are July 31 and August 31.

Some options to assist residents moving forward may be to change due dates, alleviate interest in future months by changing the by-laws to read a different interest rate, or to change the By-Law to allow the Treasurer to review the accounts on a case by case basis. In addition, with overdue accounts comes the actuality of turning off water to customers who are 2 bills or 4 months in arrears. We should also consider how to handle these and if we will extend this to a longer period during this time.

RECOMMENDATION

The Administration & Finance Executive Committee recommends changing the final tax billing due dates to August 31 and September 30. In addition, there was a recommendation to continue to bill Water & Sewer on schedule, but to amend By-law 16/06 to state that during the emergency declaration, Section 3.16- Notice of Disconnection will not be in force.

Council Approval of this Report will agree to the Administration & Finance Executive Committee to change the final tax billing due dates to August 31 and September 30. In addition, there was a recommendation to continue to bill Water & Sewer on schedule, but to amend By-law 16/06 to state that during the emergency declaration, Section 3.16- Notice of Disconnection will not be in force.