

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY DURING COVID-19

Managing Our City Services

Due to COVID-19 and related Provincial Orders and Public Health guidelines, the City of Hamilton quickly adopted a Human Resources strategy designed to protect the health and safety of our employees, ensure continued provision of essential services and critical supports to both the organization and the community and optimize options for remote service delivery, wherever possible.

With approximately 8,200 full and part time employees providing a wide range of City services, the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) have worked in collaboration to review staffing requirements on an ongoing basis. These efforts have resulted in a virtually seamless transition from pre-COVID to our current pandemic service delivery.

Under the direction of the EOC, staff was instructed to work from home, where feasible, as of March 13, 2020. Due to our IT infrastructure and applications, this was readily achieved almost immediately. Where operational requirements dictated staff needed to be onsite, a number of additional measures related to COVID-19 were implemented to ensure a safe and sustainable delivery model. This resulted in a significant number of staff being redeployed to provide COVID-19 supports such as onsite screening at Long Term Care facilities. Public Health was required to expand their focus and service offering and this also required support staff from other areas to supplement the core team to provide Public Health Hotline support, Mountain Test Assessment site and other increased operational demands.

Several new City services were created to fill the needs of the community. Working in conjunction with various community agency partners, services like the Isolation Centre and Shelter Hotels were created with a resulting requirement of City staff. Other projects like Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Donation program and the Reusable Gown program also saw a resulting redeployment of staff.

At the same time, immediate measures were implemented to restrict hiring to only essential and critical support roles across the organization. Initially, summer student and co-op hiring was deferred in order to maximize existing human resources with optimal cost mitigation impact.

Addressing Staffing Levels and Gapping Targets

There are approximately 306 permanent budgeted positions that are currently vacant. In an attempt to address the gapping targets, a corporate wide approach has been implemented to restrict the hiring process. Consideration is only being given to hiring essential services staff (i.e. front-line staff, Fire, EMS, Transit, Waste, Water, Public Health, etc.), as well as, staff providing critical support services (i.e. IT, Procurement, Legal, etc.).

Given the essential and critical nature of these positions, consideration is being given for posting and hiring of such positions, subject to a business case that is approved by the General Manager and the Executive Director of Human Resources.

Mitigation and Redeployment of Staff Resources

The COVID-19 pandemic affected a number of our City services resulting in a significant reduction in our staffing needs. As a result, the City stopped scheduling and guaranteeing minimum hours for approximately 1,338 part time employees, effective May 5, 2020. Of the 1,338 employees, 610 employees were unionized members of CUPE 5167. Due to the complexities of the layoff and bumping language within the collective agreement, Labour Relations reached out to the CUPE leadership and negotiated a *Letter of Understanding* (LOU) that placed the affected employees on Declared Emergency Leave (DEL) rather than layoff. This agreement was of significant mutual benefit in that it avoided the cumbersome layoff and bumping process. Of equal benefit from the Union and its members' perspective, it allowed for a job protected leave under the *Employment Standards Act* and at the same time, allowed employees to apply for the \$2,000 per month federal Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). In kind, the non-union part time employees were also placed on a DEL which allowed them to apply for the same \$2,000 per month benefit. These employees remain on leave.

Redeployment Status Update as of June 10, 2020

SLT has reviewed all staff who do not have sufficient work available due to the COVID-19 restrictions. At present, that represents a total of 42 full time staff. Due to a variety of factors, including skill set and physical conditioning requirements, these individuals have not been matched with a suitable redeployment opportunity. The EOC Personnel Unit continues to work with SLT to ensure appropriate placements as new resource requests are received. Many of these staff are expected to be fully utilized in the coming weeks as additional service offerings are provided.

As of June 10, 2020, a total of 267 full time employees have been redeployed to support the needs identified to maintain current levels of services. As we move forward with the Hamilton Reopens plan and in accordance with both Provincial Orders and Public Health recommendations, our service level offerings are expected to move through the phases as indicated below:

	Initial	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Proceeding - No Change	2	2	2	2
Proceeding - New Model	13	17	29	60
Modified	50	48	38	8
Cancelled	5	3	1	0
Total # Service	70	70	70	70

It should be noted that this schedule is subject to change, in accordance with the provincial orders and reopening announcements, as well as, EOC decisions. As the City services reopen and there is a greater need for the redeployment of employees, we will likely encounter situations wherein an employee refuses the redeployment for non-medical reasons. In such cases, employees will be required to take vacation time, lieu time or unpaid time off, or secure other acceptable forms of absence, including those provided for under the *Employment Standards Act*.

Currently, there are approximately 132 City employees who are over 70 years of age. The City continues to monitor the advice from the Province's Chief Medical Officer of Health regarding those employees in this category, particularly given the greater health risks identified in the Golden Horseshoe. Where possible, employees over 70 years of age have continued to perform their normal duties from home. Those employees wishing to return to work are able to do so, as required. Human Resources has recommended that such employees speak to their physician about their risks and the precautions in place to help mitigate their exposure, prior to their return to work.

New and Returning Summer Students

Currently, there are approximately 126 Summer / Co-op Students that have been hired for the 2020 season, excluding approximately 30 full time employees that have been redeployed to summer student work. This is in comparison to approximately 767 Summer / Co-op Students that were hired across the City in 2019. Human Resources is observing a level of increased resistance under COVID and specifically, there is a noticeable sentiment coming from both parents and students alike identifying a nervousness about the health and safety of any proposed return to work. The resistance is assisted to some degree by the federal government Canada Emergency Student Benefit of \$1,250 per month allowing both parents and students some added financial comfort in taking the position that the \$1,000 difference between the benefit and paid work is not worth the risk of exposure to the COVID infection.

Finally, those employees performing summer student work continue to follow the COVID standard operating procedures with respect to health and safety precautions, including provisions restricting employees to only two per vehicle, while wearing non-surgical masks, as well as, a number of cleaning requirements. Currently, there are more employees working than available vehicles and as such, some employees are utilizing their own personal vehicles, with reimbursement provided in accordance with the associated mileage reimbursement policy.

While there is a reduction in the number of summer students hired due to COVID, there is also a reduction in the amount of general labour and maintenance work being performed this summer season. For example, grass trimming is not being performed at all City parks and given that washrooms have not reopened, there is no maintenance of washrooms required at this time.

Consideration for Further Layoffs

The logistics of engaging in layoffs would require a reallocation of staff resources. Human Resources (HR) would need to hold face-to-face meetings with Union leaders, HR staff and those employees exercising their bumping rights. One of the more practical features of the layoff process is to make available a variety of vacancies to which those being laid off can be placed. Because of a significantly downsized workforce, the prospect of vacancies would be largely limited, resulting in a process that would be almost exclusively driven by bumping – not a desirable outcome from an operations perspective.

Managing HR During “Hamilton ReOpens”

As the City manages through the complexities of the next phases in response to the COVID-19 emergency, the Human Resources strategy is aimed at supporting City employees through the gradual, safe and measured reopening of our City services and programs. To this end, there are a number of HR policies, procedures and standard operating practices that must be addressed in order to successfully address the “hierarchy of controls” (i.e. physical distancing, adjusting the workplace, adjusting processes and required personal protective equipment).

For example, many employees will continue to be directed to work from home, wherever possible, in response to the COVID-19 Public Health measures. While the City currently has a Telecommuting Policy and Procedure, the Policy was intended to cover telecommuting that occurs when it is requested by employees and where it is considered to be a privilege. As telecommuting has become embedded into workplace practices for a large number of employees and as it has been identified as a significant feature of the strategy for phasing staff back into the workplace, Human Resources has developed guidelines and procedures to support the larger-scale telecommuting program moving forward. The Policy is intended to support employees and leaders in increasing work-life balance and flexibility while ensuring that telecommuting employees follow consistent work practices, address potential health and safety concerns and provide a level of service equal to or better than that provided at an onsite work location.