

Consumer confidence key to re-opening: MPP

With Ontario's re-opening efforts underway, more work needs to be done on rebuilding consumer confidence, according to Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott.

Speaking to The Auroran on Friday afternoon as York Region moved into Stage 2 of the Province's re-opening plan, she said local residents should be congratulated in their efforts to slow the number of new cases of COVID-19.

Newmarket-Aurora has done such a fantastic job of following all the public health rules to get us to this point," said Ms. Elliott, who also serves as Ontario's Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "This would not have happened without everyone in the community following those rules. We could have been in a state like Italy and Spain and some parts of the United States, but fortunately we are not. Our hospitals have not been overwhelmed and now that we're able to open up the economy, people are able to get back to not a normal way that we used to know, but a new normal way of living."

Before the community could get to this point, Ms. Elliott says she heard from several local businesses that have been "anxious" to re-open.

"They wanted to return to a new normal, and that means getting back into business and having their customers come back to them," she said. "The Ministry of Health has been working with the Ministry of Labour, who have done a huge amount of work here, and they have produced over 160 different guidelines for workplaces in terms of a return to work, depending on what it is their business is doing. That has been very helpful so that businesses feel confident that when they do re-open it is going to be safe for their employees as well as the general public."

"I think what we still need to work on is building consumer confidence. People have been self-isolating and remaining in their homes for the last number of months and are still a little bit apprehensive about going out in public again, going back into food stores and pharmacies."

People need to continue physical distancing, she says, and in situations where physical distancing can't be done, the Province is asking people to wear a mask "just to make sure we don't have further outbreaks of COVID-19."

"We want to keep everyone safe and healthy," she says.

An important step in

building up that consumer confidence once again ? as well as confidence of the public at large ? is the Province's new contact notification system. Announced last week, Ms. Elliott says this new contact tracing app will be launching ?in several weeks? and available to residents on a voluntary basis to let them know if they have been in contact with someone with COVID-19.

?If they are in contact with someone who has COVID-19, the app will notify them and then they can take the necessary steps to either have themselves tested, self-isolate, and also inform people they have been in close contact with,? she explains. ?It is completely anonymous, works on the Bluetooth system, and it has been approved by the Information & Privacy Commissioner of Ontario.

?Privacy is a very important consideration, making sure they are safe and healthy, and also balancing their civil liberties and their right to privacy. We have worked hand-in-hand with the [Commissioner] who is satisfied that the app that has been developed in Ontario and is now going to be used by the Federal government and right across the country.

?This is going to be very helpful, I think, in helping to boost consumer confidence. It is not the only step we're taking, of course, with contact management, but it is one of the points of assistance that we have in order to make sure that people are safe and that they feel safe.?

As Stage 2 arrived in York Region on Friday, Mayor Tom Mrakas said the Town will continue to work closely with the Province and York Region Public Health to monitor the pandemic and its impact on the community while he also urged residents to remain vigilant.

?Thank you to our residents and businesses for your cooperation over the past few months as we all work to flatten the curve,' he said. ?I know it has been difficult, but our collective sacrifices and efforts have resulted in a positive step forward.?

The Town, he added, will initiate a ?staged approach? to reopening community resources.

?As the Province begins to reduce restrictions, Town Staff are starting to assess and begin the necessary preparations for a gradual reopening of Town amenities over the coming months. Our top priority is to ensure all considerations are addressed to maintain the safety and wellbeing of patrons and staff. We know residents are anxious to get back to normal, but this will be a slow, gradual process in order to minimize the potential risk of future waves of COVID-19.

?As we enjoy these new freedoms, I ask you to continue to follow the advice of our public health

officials. We should all be diligently maintaining physical distance with others, washing hands with soap and water often, wearing a mask if necessary and staying home if you are feeling unwell.

?By following the guidelines set out by health officials, we have been able to move forward and if we stay vigilant we will continue to progress.?

By Brock Weir