

Select recreation facilities re-open, outbreak continues at Chartwell

As York Region passed 2,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the weekend, there are further signs of a gradual return to normalcy.

While the Aurora Farmers' Market is in the final stages, at press time, of confirming whether it can re-open to the public at Town Park with strict health and safety measures in place this Saturday, May 23, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Town of Aurora announced the re-opening of select recreational facilities on Tuesday afternoon.

The municipality is now permitting recreational use of tennis courts, basketball courts, sports fields, baseball diamonds, and skateboard parks, along with outdoor picnic sites, benches and shelters in parks and recreational spaces.

Amenities expected to remain closed to the public include water areas such as splash pads, playgrounds and play structures, washrooms and clubhouses. Organized sporting activities such as football and soccer will also remain prohibited as such activities do not allow for proper physical distancing.

Following the lead of the Province of Ontario, we are pleased to announce that Aurora's park amenities will begin to reopen effective immediately, being one of the first municipalities to do so, said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. We are focused on resuming operations on a gradual basis to ensure the health and safety of our community. This incremental approach protects our community and, at the same time, allows residents to spend time outdoors to benefit their wellbeing and overall health.

We must remain mindful that this pandemic is ongoing, and in order to keep enjoying these activities, we need to practice proper physical distancing, wash our hands frequently and follow provincial orders.

Although the rate of new COVID-19 cases has slowed over the past week, new cases are still being reported within Aurora and the virus outbreak at Chartwell Aurora (formerly Resthaven) is still classified as active by the Region of York.

As of Tuesday, the Region reported 2,080 cases of COVID-19, 833 of which remain active with a further 1,083 cases resolved. There have been 164 deaths related to the virus since the outbreak began, 13 of which are among Aurora residents.

Within Aurora, there are 44 active cases of COVID-19 within the community, with a total of 38 cases marked recovered or resolved and 13 deaths for a total of 95.

22 per cent of these cases are attributed to close

contact, 11 per cent to travel, 8 per cent to local transmission, 2 per cent to workplace outbreak, and 2 cases remains under investigation.

The largest number of cases, 55 per cent, is related to institutional outbreak.

42 residents of Chartwell Aurora have tested positive for COVID-19, with 14 cases reported amongst healthcare workers. 11 residents have died as a result of the outbreak.

Outbreaks at long-term care residences remain a primary source of new infections across the Province and, as a result, the Ontario Government announced Tuesday a new independent commission into the problem.

While opposition MPPs remain firm in their call for a full-scale public inquiry into the matter, Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care, says an independent commission will help the government get answers.

Over the next several months, our government will be finalizing details of the commission, including terms of reference, membership, leadership of the commission and reporting timelines, said Minister Fullerton. We have been clear the long-term care system in Ontario is broken. We must act quickly and decisively, and that is why an independent, non-partisan commission is the best way to conduct a thorough and expedited review.

As we all take steps to contain the pandemic, the Commission will get down to work and provide us with guidance on how to improve the long-term care system and better protect residents and staff from any future outbreaks. Our government offers our condolences to the families who lost a loved one due to COVID-19 while residing in a long-term care home. Ontarians need and deserve answers, and let me assure you, they will get them.

By Brock Weir