

81-year-old man is Aurora's first COVID-19 death

An 81-year-old man is Aurora's first death related to COVID-19, the Region of York announced Monday.

The man, whose case was travel-related, was the 13th reported instance. He died Friday, April 3.

"On behalf of all residents, I extend our deepest condolences to the family and loved ones," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement following the man's death.

Despite another fatal case of COVID-19 in York Region, Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, began the week on a positive note, stating he was "cautiously optimistic that we may actually be reaching our peak or the plateau in York Region."

"However, there are still some pockets in York Region where the trajectory is high, particularly in Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Newmarket to a lesser extent. It is very important for folks who think they might have COVID-19-like symptoms self-isolate themselves, take the self-assessment tool. We can now have three assessment centres in York Region that are loosening their criteria for testing, so find out how to get there and what the processes are from our website ([York.ca](#)), get yourselves assessed and possibly tested, and we will be able to make sure that we put rings around all the cases and contacts so that every case that we prevent basically prevents another 60 to 100 cases down the road. Together, with your efforts at physical distancing, as well as hand hygiene and our efforts at case and contact containment, and with the hospitals' efforts at testing, we should be able to come out of this soon.

But the start of the week also brought difficult news on the job front as the Town announced the layoff of 280 part-time municipal workers under the terms of a Declared Emergency Leave.

"As everyone is aware, the current pandemic continues to impact our country and community in unprecedented ways," said Mayor Mrakas in a statement. "Millions of people are out of work and struggling to cope with the incredible fallout of this emergency. So far, the Town has been able to keep our staff intact as we provide the essential services our community relies on. However, with the Federal Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) starting this week, we are making a necessary adjustment to our workforce.

"We did not make this decision lightly. These employees primarily provide services in our facilities and recreational programming and our facilities are closed for the foreseeable future. We expect each of these people will be eligible to access funds through the CERB and we will be supporting them through the application process to minimize the impact on their situation.

?We look forward to healthier times in the future when these valuable team members are able to resume their important work in our community as we reopen facilities and offer programs.?

When Council convened remotely on March 31 for its first Council meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of all Town facilities and the temporary suspension of regular meetings, the future of employees was top of mind as local lawmakers received an update from Town CAO Doug Nadorozny.

Mr. Nadorozny told Councillors at this remote meeting that only ?minimal staff? are at municipal facilities to keep ?core services functioning? ? essential services like water testing and road maintenance ? with most of the rest of staff working from home. But there were many part-time workers whose jobs could not be transitioned to ?a home scenario.?

In response, Council members said they need to find a balance between protecting jobs and making sure taxpayers are getting value for money.

?We want to protect our staff, but, at the same time, we have a responsibility to our residents and the taxpayers because there are a lot of residents who have been hit hard by this,? said Mayor Mrakas at the meeting regarding the wide-ranging impacts being felt across the board due to COVID-19. ?We have to respect that and respect that money. We have to make a fiscally responsible decision but we also have to do what is best for the corporation as a whole.

?It is going to be a tough decision for us, but I am confident our CAO and staff are going to provide us with some options?and I think we will have something in front of us to allow us to make a solid decision that will allow us to respect our employees yet, at the same time, be fiscally responsible to our residents and taxpayers.?

By Brock Weir