

## Township of Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls



### *A Year in Review*

This Christmas season, we gather – near and apart. Maybe your together is found sitting side by side, or maybe it's celebrating by phone or Zoom, which has become ubiquitous in our lives in 2020. Whatever the case, this year gave us a lot to take in, but however and wherever you gather this year, in these moments, despite the pandemic, the best kind of memories and most meaningful connections, while different, are still possible.

Speaking of near and far, the Township of Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls was and is fundamentally different, as it is globally, due to Covid-19. Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls is a community built upon a vast and diverse demographic. Our community landscape was changed this year. Of 1,214 households in Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls, 865 of these, over 70%, are recreational properties. 60% of these, a reasonable approximation, over 500 households, were not permitted entry to Canada. This amounts to a loss to our seasonal population of over 40% in 2020.

This loss is further compounded when you consider that within our Municipality we have over 50 lodge/resort type operations. This number is unprecedented for a community of our size. As a result of Covid-19, and the US border closure, our community has suffered a devastating loss to our typical seasonal population from an accommodation-based perspective. The seasonal property-owning residents, as well as all of the seasonal visitors who stay in our more than 50 lodges/resorts, were not able to come to our community this summer to shop and support all of our other local businesses, and the impact of this was felt by the entire community.

We missed and miss our seasonal residents and visitors from the United States, and abroad, unequivocally. There is no question of the importance of our US and foreign residents, as well as the visitors from the US and abroad, all of whom contribute greatly to our community, not only from an economic standpoint, but in the weaving of the fabric of our very culture here.

The Township of Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls continues to lobby for and represent, to the very best of our ability, the interests of all of our business and property owners, on both sides of the border and across the globe. Our economic development team shifted focus to regional markets in an attempt to fill as much of the gaps as possible for our local businesses. We are consistently making requests to senior levels of government for financial aid programs for the tourism sector in the form of grants, not loans, and clearer communication about issues that impact our local businesses. Our administrative team and council deferred the tax deadlines in 2020 in an attempt to provide some relief to our local businesses and residents. We also reduced capacity and spending in 2020, as well as cancelled or postponed many planned capital projects. At the time of writing, overall, our local municipal operating expenses were reduced by 8.5% and our Policing costs were reduced by 9.2%. Our general municipal revenues are also down, by 2.6%. Finally, some of our external levies increased by 2.7% (social services), 4.3% (land ambulance) and a proposed increase to insurance in the 14-17% range.

It is important to note, that while we can reduce spending in some local departments and facilities, our levies to external agencies and mandated services remain. We have no choice but to collect Education taxes as well as collect and pay for expenses such as insurance, basic utilities, cemetery services, protection services and levies for Land Ambulance, Policing, District Social Services Boards, Public Health, District Homes for the Aged, etc. These levies comprise the majority of our budget and cannot be deferred. It is a balancing act.

We missed a number of our local significant Special Events in 2020, including the Sioux Narrows Arts Festival and the Moose n' Fiddle Music Festival. However, our local volunteers and municipal organizers, as the case may be, shifted their approach to provide innovative alternatives.

The Township hosted a live-streamed musical event in place of Moose n' Fiddle. The live music festival event which began in 2014, typically had an audience of 1,200 people over 2 days. Our online event, The Kitchen Party, had an impressive reach, of 6,200 viewers between Facebook and YouTube.

The Sioux Narrows Arts Council hosted an outdoor 'Artists in the Park' artists and crafters vendors event at Sioux Narrows Provincial Park. While it was no Arts Festival substitute, it was certainly a great success bringing in 15 artists and drawing 350 attendees from all over the region.

Many of our local fishing tournaments went ahead and were successful in filling their rosters. While we missed being able to attend and gather at tournament dinners and watching the weigh-ins in person, we were able to catch the results online.

And, we had Canada Day Fireworks displays at both Sioux Narrows and Nestor Falls. These were a huge success and the ability to celebrate was a definite boost in morale for our community.

We welcomed a new member to our permanent team this year. Mike Kakeeway joins Mike Salvador in our Maintenance Department. Mike and Mike bring extensive experience in carpentry, equipment operation and more, and they have already made great improvements to and realized efficiencies in our facilities and operations.

We do have some capital projects in the queue for 2021, such as construction of the Nestor Falls Ambulance Base, site development at the Falls grounds at the Nestor Falls MTO rest stop and site development at the Sportfishing Centre's outdoor grounds. All of these projects have significant external financing and cost recovery components, including through the Kenora District Services Board, the provincial and federal governments.

The Fire Rescue Service was able to formally decommission their old fire boat at Station 2 in Nestor Falls. They found and purchased a suitable water rescue vessel this summer, financed through the municipal fire department capital reserves and money raised through the team's fire boat fundraising initiative.

We are involved locally and regionally in a number of engagement and planning processes.

The Township of Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls and Nootkamegwanning First Nation senior administration and council members met in October to discuss working together and relationship building. We are looking forward to meeting again in the new year.

The Township of Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls is a partner of the All Nations Health Partners (ANHP) coalition. We were invited to participate at the outset of the initiative and have dedicated council participation in all committee activities, as well as continue to work with ANHP personnel to assist with community engagement activities and the sharing of information with our residents. We are looking forward to seeing the efforts and vision of the ANHP, community participants and residents come together toward our shared goal of creating an All Nations Health Care System in our region.

We are mandated by the Province to have Community Safety and Well-Being Plans. The Township of Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls' volunteer committee have arrived at their final draft of the plan. We hope to have it published in the early to mid-part of 2021.

We are beginning to receive applications from residents interested in volunteering to sit on our new Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Committee, which will begin meeting in 2021.

We are working with Kenora, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and Wawa, in partnership with ArtsBuild Ontario and the NORDIK Institute, on an Ontario Arts Mapping Project. The outcome will be a mapping of existing art facilities and spaces, as well as identifying gaps and needs in our region.

This is just a glimpse of some of our current and planned activities. Though this communication is unable to provide any assurances for conditions in 2021, as it isn't solely within our local power to do so, I do wish to impart that the Township of Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls is working hard to control costs, lobby government, seek external funding opportunities, market our region for business sustainability and maintain Sioux Narrows – Nestor Falls as one of the best places in Northwestern Ontario to live and visit.

Before signing off, and though last, not least, I want to thank our municipal council, staff and volunteers for their hard work, dedication and commitment, especially during this past year. We have had to pivot our way of doing business this year and your ability and willingness to adapt, while maintaining services with quality, excellence, professionalism and care, deserves recognition.

Wishing everyone a safe, healthy and happy Christmas & New Year.

*Wanda Kabel, Chief Administrative Officer*