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Customer Service Department 2020 Year End Results Information Report to Council

Report Number: INFO-2021-02

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In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Purpose

This report provides Members of Council with the highlights, overall results, and trends for 2020 as well as the key areas of focus in 2021, for the Customer Service Department

Background

The Customer Service Department provides Members of Council with the quarterly and yearly results that include volumes, trends, key project updates, and highlights related to service delivery.

Discussion

The attached graphics represent service requests as captured in our CRM system by either Customer Service staff or by staff in the Mayor and Councillors' offices.

Some of the highlights in the Customer Service department are as follows:

Overall Volumes and Trends

- The Customer Service Department fielded over 7700 inquiries related to the COVID-19 Pandemic between March and December 2020
 - The highest volume of inquiries were related to requests for Recreation assistance, inquiries related to Recreation amenity re-openings and requests for Marriage Licenses.

- Total contacts continue to trend downward while length and complexity of each contact continues to trend upward, as do the percentage of service requests.
- As a result of the pandemic, the length of each call and the overall volume of emails have increased substantially.
- Request for Parking Enforcement (1167) is the highest type of service request across the whole Town of Newmarket in 2020, followed by Bylaws – Property Standards (705) and requests related to the COVID-19 pandemic (682) respectively;
- Request for Parking Enforcement is the top service request in every ward, except Ward 1, where it is only narrowly behind Property Standards;

Customer Service Responds to the COVID-19 Pandemic

- On March 17, 2020, the Municipal Offices closed for all walk-in customers. Customer Service staff worked with IT Services to quickly move associates into remote work stations. CS Associates continue to answer calls, emails, and social media requests remotely.
- A limited number of staff continue to work in the office to provide few processes which require on-site resources.
- Processes are continuously being evaluated and streamlined to ensure that all services are available in the most safe and efficient manner for our residents. All payments are processed by credit card over the phone and paper-reliant processes have been modified and moved to electronic means where possible.
- A “walk up” window was installed in the fall of 2020 in the Customer Service Centre. This window allows essential services which were previously “in person” to be completed without contact and the Town of Newmarket is one few municipalities who continue to offer these important services, particularly during lockdown. Marriage licenses and commissioning of documents are currently offered by appointment at the window.
- Customer Service Kiosk staff have been trained and continue to back up CSC staff. Kiosk staff are the first line of contact for all payments; as well, they monitor and respond to emails and voicemails as appropriate. Over 10,500 payments have been taken by phone and drop box since the onset of the pandemic with the majority being processed by Kiosk staff, working out of the Magna Centre.
- Staff who are working in the office have been provided with appropriate materials and protocols to ensure safety. Protocols have been adjusted as necessary in accordance with Provincial restrictions.
- Once appropriate, the Customer Service Department is prepared to accommodate a soft re-opening plan for “in person” services.

Revenue and Cost Saving Opportunities

- Customer Service Supervisor, Jamie Boyle, is now leading the “Enhanced Customer Service training for the Public Sector” program virtually. This program

has been very well received and is available to all staff across the N6 municipalities. The course is considered 'mandatory' for Town of Newmarket staff and 9 individual sessions were offered throughout 2020. 120 TON staff representing all levels across the organization and 30 N6 staff completed the course in 2020.

- In 2019, two partnerships were created with Seneca College's Public Administration Program and Government Relations Program. Workshops were created and delivered for both programs focusing on best practices in municipal service delivery, our centralized customer service model and career development panels with Town of Newmarket municipal professionals from across the organization. These workshops were both very successful and lead to a 2-day course being developed and offered in January 2020 as part of Seneca's Public Administration Program. The course titled "Excellence in Municipal Government" was well received and the partnership has continued with this course being delivered again in early 2021. These workshops and courses were all developed internally and delivered by Jamie Boyle.
- Due to the increased demand for marriage licenses and commissioning, these procedures were reviewed, streamlined and non-resident fees are now being charged on both services.
- In October of 2019, the Town of Newmarket signed a contract with a new "after hours" answering service which allowed us to negotiate a lower rate per minute based on the calls answered. The new contract, in addition to the streamlining of our website and changing the process flow of the 'after hours greeting' has allowed for a cost savings of approximately \$7,000 in 2020 (compared to 2018 billing).

Continuous Improvement – 2021 and beyond

- Customer Services, IT Services and Communications are working together to launch a "live chat" application on the website. We are in the final stages of implementation and the application is scheduled for soft launch in Q2, 2021. This project aims to assist customers in navigating and accessing online services and information.
- Prepare the Customer Service department for the Town of Newmarket's implementation, installation and management of the new Smart Water Meter program, scheduled to commence in 2021.
- Continue the rollout of corporate-wide, and N6 municipalities' Enhanced Customer Service training.
- Continue building partnerships with post-secondary institutions to build and deliver municipal government based programming.
- Represent the customer through the ongoing pandemic by participating in discussions and decisions related to the re-opening and/or closing of facilities, amenities, and programs

Conclusion

The Customer Service Department remains committed to providing Council with the most recent trends and statistics by ward and the Town of Newmarket as a whole.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

Tracking and reporting on trends and customer feedback supports the Town's strategic directions of being Well-Equipped and Managed by demonstrating Service Excellence.

Consultation

Not applicable to this report.

Human Resource Considerations

Not applicable to this report.

Budget Impact

None

Attachments

Overall Volumes and Trends Graphics (3 Pages)

Contact

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Approval

Hayley Fryer, Supervisor, Customer Service Centre

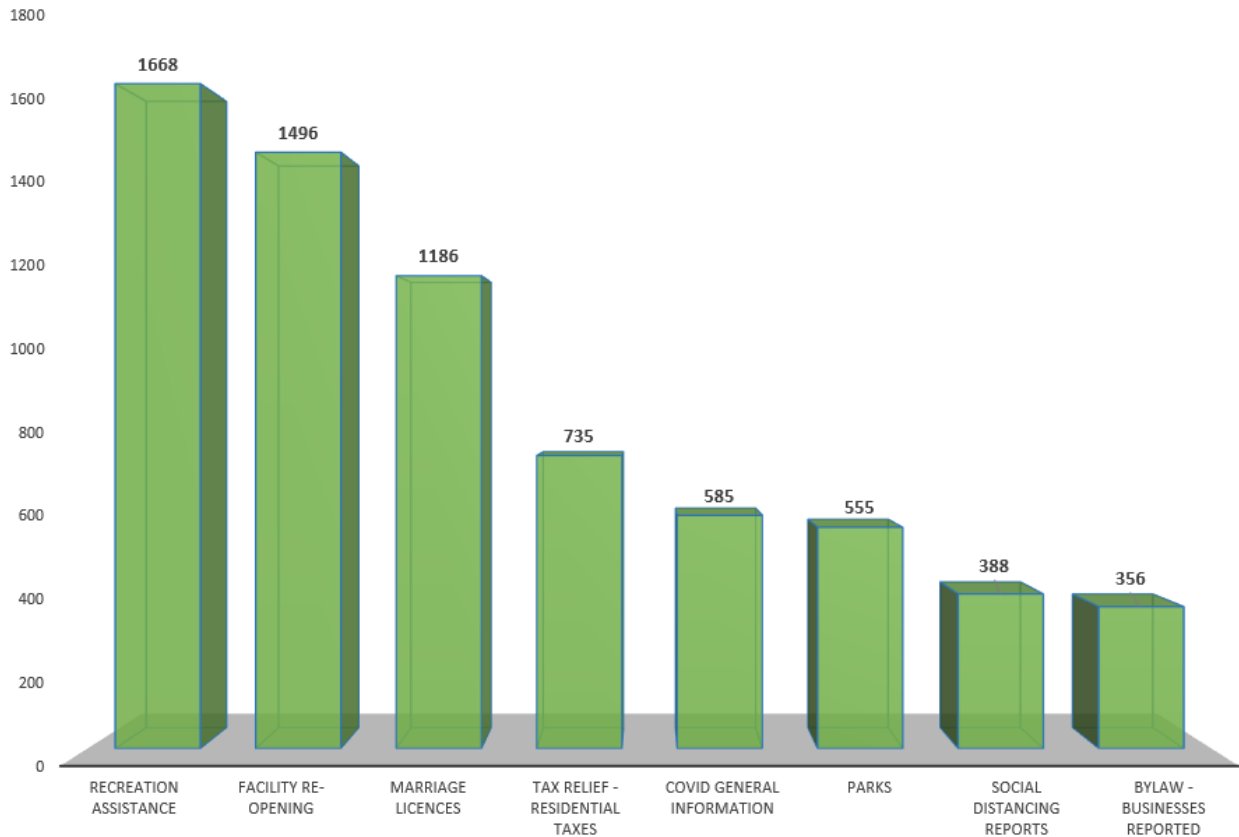
Jamie Boyle, Supervisor, Customer Service Kiosks

Bonnie Munslow, Manager, Corporate Customer Service

Ian McDougall, Commissioner, Community Services

Overall Volumes and Trends

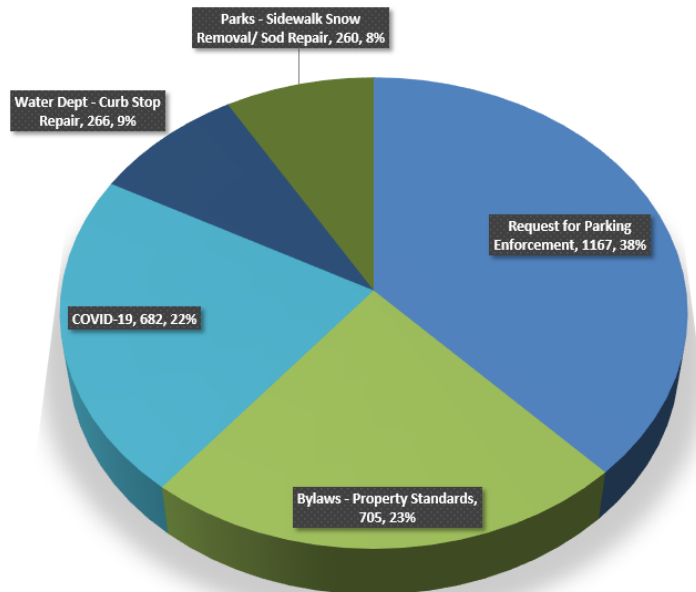
COVID-19 Inquiries, March - December 2020



Over 7700 calls, emails, and social media inquiries related to the COVID-19 Pandemic were fielded between March and December 2020. The most requested information was related to Recreation programming, facilities and assistance with new booking procedures. Marriage licensing was also a highly sought after service. At the start of the pandemic, marriage licenses were arranged only based on urgent circumstances. By the end of the summer, licenses and commissioning were provided by appointment to all qualifying couples. The installation of a “walk up” window at the Customer Service Centre has allowed us to continue to offer this contactless service, even during the lockdowns in the fall and winter. The Town of Newmarket is one of few municipalities that has offered continuous marriage licensing service throughout the pandemic.

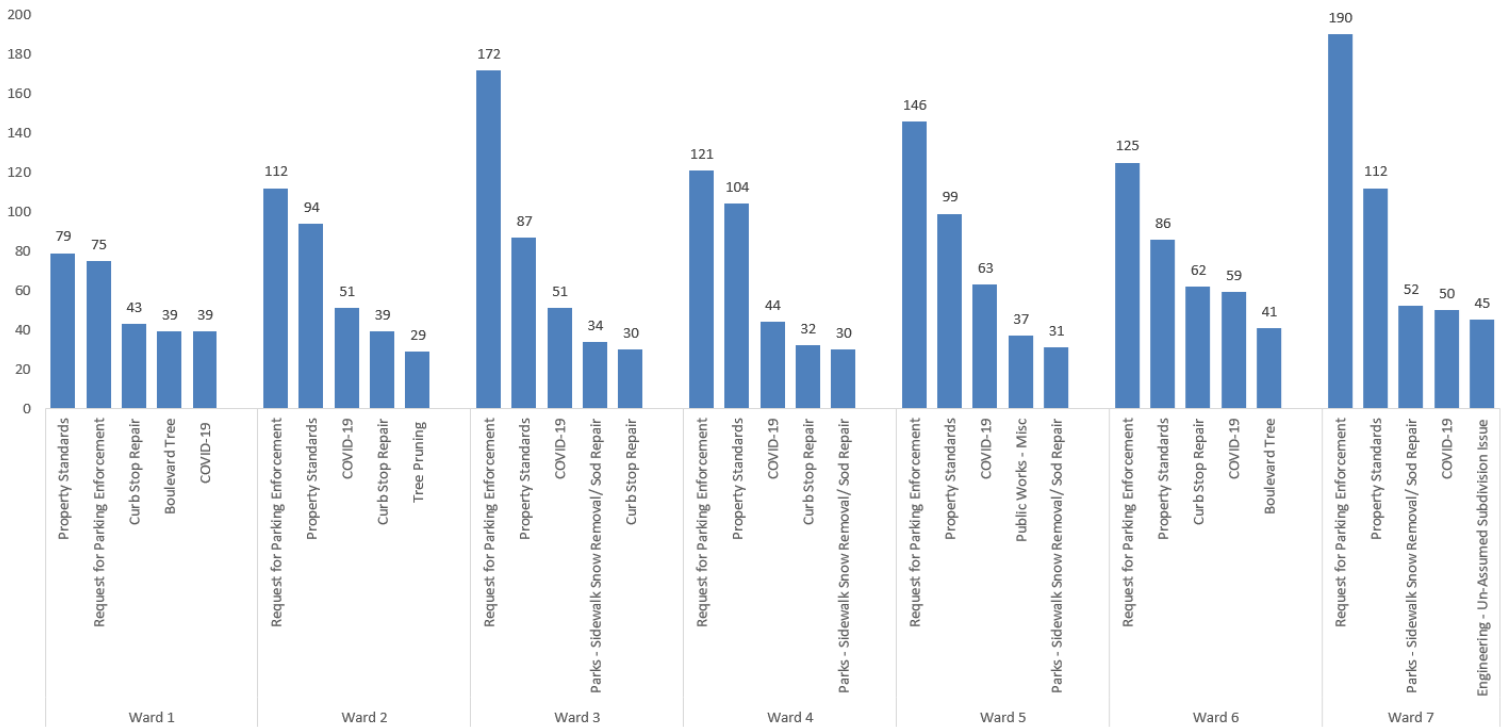
Town Wide Top 5 Service Requests for 2020

Town wide, the top service requests in 2020 were for parking enforcement followed by property standards investigations. This is consistent with previous years data. Of note, the third highest service requests were for COVID-19 related matters. A breakdown of these requests shows that the highest COVID-19 related service requests were for by-law related business complaints (236), social distancing (183) and park usage (85). Service requests related to routine curb stop repairs and sidewalk snow removal/ sod repair were all consistent with previous years data.



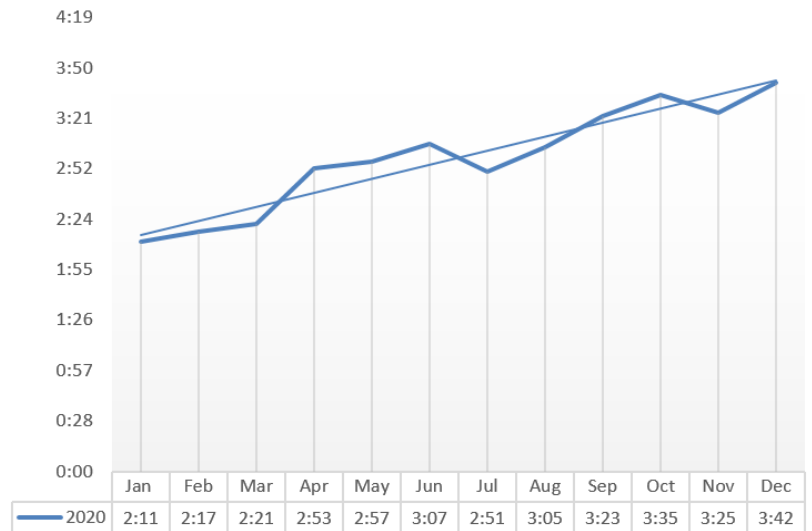
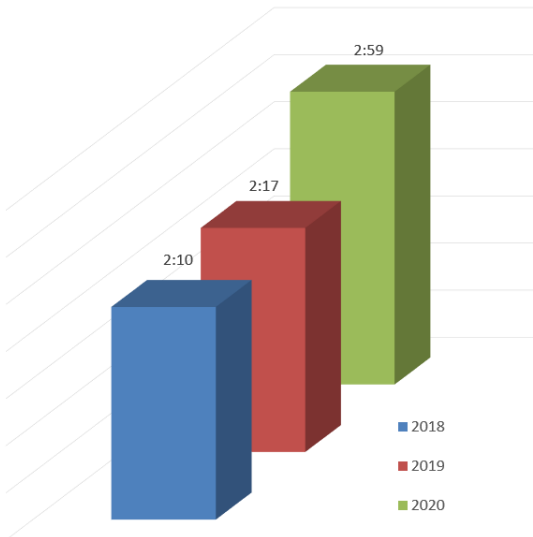
Overall Volumes and Trends

Top 5 Service Requests for 2020 by Ward



COVID-19 related enforcement requests are prevalent across all wards in 2020. The majority of these requests pertain to business related social distancing enforcement. The other service requests are consistent with previous years data. In Ward 7 the service requests in “un-assumed” areas refer to complaints and inquiries mostly related to construction, grading/ drainage and fencing and are lower than reported in 2019 (73 and 52 respectively).

Average Length of Call



The average time spent on each incoming phone call to the Customer Service Centre increased significantly in 2020. This is a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and also, the increasing complexity of the subject matter and service requests that associates deal with on a regular basis. The pandemic has increased the length of calls for a variety of reasons including the vast amount of ever changing information that associates are expected to provide. Verifying information from the Ontario Regulations and local sources has increased talk time. In addition, many processes which were once available in person have been moved to the phone. Examples include Recreation booking assistance and payments for a variety of services including waste bin and stickers. The average length of each call increased significantly in April 2020 and has continued to trend upward.

Overall Volumes and Trends

Telephone Service Levels vs. Abandonment Rates 2020



The Customer Service Department aims to answer 80% of incoming calls within 20 seconds (service level) and have no more than 8% of callers hang up before reaching an associate (abandonment rate). Generally the department is able to perform within these parameters. When the COVID-19 Pandemic began, the length of time spent with each call (on average) increased. Coupled with increased email volumes, this resulted in service levels dropping well below the established threshold. Abandonment rates were also affected. Callers were waiting longer to speak with an associate which resulted in more residents hanging up prior to be served. Once the Customer Service Kiosk team was trained to back up the Customer Service Centre associates were once again able to manage volumes and performance indicators

Email Volumes

As a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, email requests to the Customer Service Centre have increased substantially. Customer Service Kiosk staff have been trained to respond to general inquiries and have contributed greatly to the management of these volumes. This has allowed us to maintain our service goal of responding to most email inquiries and service requests within one business day.

