August 10, 2020: Statement by Councillor Bill Evans on returning to council chambers.

First of all, I want to have meetings in public. I want to see people face-to-face. I want to shake hands and hug people. I want to hold my grandchildren. I want things to be like they were BC, before COVID.

But, sadly, they are not and, besides, "what I want" is not something I get to consider when I do my job as a councillor. As I have said many times before, my job is to consider the welfare and interests of the entire municipality when making decisions.

I don't think that those who seem to disagree with me are wrong. I'm not even convinced that we disagree. I think that, in a fundamental way, we just have a different understanding of this confusing situation we find ourselves in. I think that there are a lot of people who have been inconvenienced by having to behave differently for months now. They're tired of it and many think that it wasn't necessary. It might surprise you to know that I agree with them. I'm just as tired of it as they are and, it turned out, many of our precautions weren't necessary. Not necessary, in the same way that my having paid for fire insurance for 40 years without ever having collected a dime, turned out to be unnecessary. In the same way that my having worn a seat belt every time I've driven a car and never needed one, turned out to be unnecessary. Not necessary… yet. But… was that a mistake? Do I regret those decisions? No! I behaved that way… in case something bad happened. So that it wouldn't be as bad, if it did happen.

We have been avoiding contact with other people, keeping our distances, limiting our exposure times and wearing masks, not because the virus is here, but in case it showed up. The issue before us today is whether to have face-to-face council meetings again. But we are considering this matter in the context of a global pandemic which, fortunately, we have, so far, avoided here in Sackville. But that doesn't mean that the pandemic is over or that the risks are less than they were months ago. Being careful is not something that you do for a while and then stop. Just like fire insurance and seat belts, you have to keep doing it as long as the risks are there.

We are in a pandemic which means that the virus and the disease are everywhere around the world. Millions have been affected and hundreds of thousands have died and more every day. The virus can spread rapidly and we are not immune. We know these things are true. It is also, almost certainly true that the coronavirus is not in Sackville right now and that no one here has COVID-19. Mostly thanks to early government restrictions on travel and gatherings… and good luck. But our good fortune could easily change. It would only take one infected person coming to town.

Because of the time delay between the cause and the effect and the possibility of pre- and a-symptomatic transmission, by the time we see evidence that there are infected people in our community, it will be too late to start being careful (just like it's too late to put on your seat belt when your car hits the guardrail). The only way to ensure that we are taking precautions in time to limit the spread of infection, is to start now, before the virus is present… before it is actually necessary. That's why they are called pre-cautions. And we have to keep doing this until we are all immune, which could be a long time. The alternative is to drive without a seat belt or to not have fire insurance. It will fine… until it's not. Or, as my dad used to say: if you run across a street with your eyes closed and don't get hit by a car, it doesn't make it a good idea.

But, we can't all keep self-isolating indefinitely, because, if we did, life would grind to a halt. So we need to focus on doing essential things carefully and restrict doing optional things. Or, as some of my colleagues like to say, we need to focus on the difference between needs and wants. BTW, following guidelines doesn't keep us safe. Guidelines are the product of compromises and safety is only one of the considerations. They keep us safer but the risks are still present.

Those who can, should avoid contact with others. Those who must have such contact, need to behave as if they were infected (because we can't know that we're not). This can be inconvenient, but it's not complicated. It's actually quite simple: wear a mask and keep apart from people as much as possible. That means limiting your indoor interactions to things you must do and then, ensuring that you do them considerately e.g. only go to the grocery store once a week (not daily) and go alone (don't tag along for company).

When you go anywhere where people are required to work, wear a mask — for them and for you. Just because you can physically distance most of the times, it doesn't mean that they can. I think that governments should mandate wearing masks. But if they don't, be a good neighbor and wear one anyway.

No one ever told us we could have everything we wanted. We're in a pandemic! A pandemic is a bad thing. So it means we can't always have what we want, when we want it. That's an inconvenience. Many people are having to make huge sacrifices they didn't ask for. People who lived on tips or commissions have lost their jobs. Owners of bars and coffee shops have gone out-of-business. Proud people are going to food banks. Doctors and nurses are risking their lives. People working in grocery stores are on the front lines, as are daycare workers, and teachers will be too. So don't view the inconveniences you face as a deprivation. Think of it as a sacrifice you are willing to make for those who don't have a choice.

We all should be doing "our bit" and, if we do, we will make this pandemic less bad that it might otherwise be. But if we are thoughtless or selfish, then people can die… needlessly. The governor of Florida probably regrets that, in May, he mocked those who predicted that Florida could become like New York, claiming: "Well, it hasn't happened". He should have added "yet".

It's like we are in a dry forest and there are fires raging all around us. We should be preparing appropriately, not saying: "oh good, it's not happening here". There is no good reason to believe that the pandemic is almost over. By looking south of the border, we can see what our future could easily look like if we carelessly let down our guard and get unlucky. Surges in cases are the direct result of the relaxation of precautions.

Try this experiment… ask yourself this: How many examples you can come up with of government leaders who made decisions that turned out to be too soon or too restrictive and what were the negative consequences? Now ask yourself the easier question. Think of how many leaders made decisions that were too late or not restrictive enough and think of the needless suffering and death that resulted.

I don't think that enough of us have been behaving carefully enough yet. I've seen many examples of people violating our current lax restrictions. I think that we should mandate mask-wearing in all

building accessible by the public. I think that we should be leading by example and behaving in a way that reflects the reality that we're are still in the midst of a pandemic. We should be doing all that we can to limit its spread should the virus show up here. I think that we should be doing simple and easy things like: wearing masks in buildings and avoiding meeting face-to-face where there are easy alternatives. This is about risk management in uncertain times. We could make mistakes which will have serious consequences. But I believe we will feel much better about decisions if we find ourselves looking back having been too careful, rather than not careful enough. I am going to continue paying for fire insurance, continue wearing my seat belt and I think that we should continue with virtual meetings.