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GTA

'Human behaviour at its worst.' Wasaga Beach to close main beach area, limit parking after huge Canada Day crowds

By **Ian Adams** Wasaga Sun

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The public's "blatant disregard" for the rules of social distancing has resulted in Wasaga Beach laying out a plan to shut down the majority of the main beach area by July 9.

The only access permitted would be three walkways to reach the water, and so the public can access businesses along what was Beach Drive.

Anyone who chooses to flout the new rules by walking on the municipal portion of the beach will also face a hefty fine: \$750.

The rules do not apply to beach areas under the auspices of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park.

The decision during an emergency council meeting Thursday came after a busy Canada Day that saw the road — which, with high water levels, is currently the main beach area as it's under 60 centimetres of sand — packed with beachgoers.

The town's emergency management co-ordinator and deputy fire chief, Craig Williams, called the disregard for social distancing and gathering recommendations on Canada Day, and the previous two weekends, "human behaviour at its worst."

The beach area would be closed to the public by July 9 and "for the foreseeable future."

The municipal lots would be reduced in capacity by half.

Mayor Nina Bifulchi said while the previous two weekends on the beach had been busy, the crowds on Canada Day "took it to a whole new level."

Bifulchi told Simcoe.com that the town's pandemic command team had little choice but to make that recommendation "for the health and safety of our community and our residents."

"Over the last weekend and on Canada Day, the blatant disregard for social distancing and the rules (for the pandemic) were completely ignored by those visiting the beach area," she said.

Council also directed the mayor to send a letter to the OPP and Ontario Parks expressing the town's frustration with what has been seen as inaction on the part of both provincial agencies to enforce the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, which mandates that groups be limited to 10 people or fewer.

Bifulchi said the letter would be asking both agencies to work more in partnership with the municipality to enforce the rules.

The town is still determining how it will limit capacity in the parking lots. The beach area under the control of the town will be fenced off, with signs indicating the area is off limits and anyone disregarding the bylaw will be subject to a fine.

Bifulchi said the command team will continue to monitor the parking situation, “and if we feel we need to close it beyond that, we will do that.”

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