

Press conference

Monday, May 25

Mayor Mike Savage remarks

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us as we update you on the municipal response to COVID-19.

I want to begin by acknowledging the hard work of many people, including those who continue to provide emergency services throughout the Halifax region, notably fire crews over the weekend in Porters Lake.

From Transportation and Public Works, Recreation, Planning, Libraries, our Municipal Clerks, our folks in Finance and Communications, Jacques and the senior staff team – you have all played a vital role in serving residents during these strange and challenging times.

Residents have also truly stepped up. They have helped each other, taught their kids at home, volunteered to help those in need, and taken on personal and collective responsibility to slow the spread of this virus.

Naturally, there is so much we still do not understand about COVID-19. And yet we have learned quite a bit since the first cases emerged in Wuhan to race around the globe.

We know that we can protect ourselves through basic measures: staying six feet apart, not gathering in large numbers, and being vigilant about handwashing.

During these first number of weeks we have learned a few things about ourselves too, like how much we value friends and family and how much we need community.

Many of us dream about gathering with friends in our favourite restaurant, taking in a show or a game.

Our first response to COVID was rightly, to go home and stay there as much as possible. These efforts have succeeded in driving down infection rates, but precautions will be in place for untold months to come.

Somehow, we must carry on, for our own social and financial wellbeing and for this city we love. We are quickly moving into recovery mode as we watch more services, businesses and public amenities open back up under new pandemic realities.

To that end, we must adapt civic spaces to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. With the permission of Dr. Strang, we have reopened parks, trails, and beaches, and now we are going further.

Today, we want to share with you how we continue to develop and adapt our municipal responses, including the *Halifax Mobility Response: Streets and Spaces Plan* to adjust streets, sidewalks and bike lanes.

In consultation with business improvement commissions, we will implement short, medium and long-term temporary adjustments to the transportation network, as part of the collective effort to keep the city moving while working to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Jacques will provide more of the details around the first phase, the widening of sidewalks on Spring Garden Road, to a lesser extent Quinpool Road, and other improvements for pedestrians.

I commend staff for their continued work on this and I look forward to more initiatives that make it easier to move throughout the city and provide additional space for patio expansions for bars and restaurants.

This is Halifax, where we are known for our welcoming nature. As we move into this new phase, let's be true to ourselves and kind to each other as we find new ways to enjoy our city.

I continue to work closely with the Halifax Partnership as they craft a broad economic recovery plan for the region.

Similarly, I am engaged with Discover Halifax as they further examine the tourism sector's longer-term recovery.

Common to these efforts is a need to support our local businesses as much as possible, whether that means a summer staycation, weekly takeout or a family "buy local" pledge.

As you know, Council continues to debate a radically recast budget – attempting to strike an appropriate balance between restraint, borrowing and turning to rainy day reserves.

We intend to keep money flowing into the economy through capital works and procurement.

We will participate to whatever degree possible in stimulus programs with the federal and provincial governments with our list of shovel-ready projects.

And we will continue to make critical investments in infrastructure that underpins the economy and are the hallmarks of a modern city, including transit, active transportation and the environment.

But, make no mistake, our ability to contribute to the strong economic recovery in the Halifax region and for the province would benefit greatly from provincial and federal support.

Discussions continue on both of those fronts, but it's time for movement.

Mayors across the country are united in the push for direct federal funding to municipalities for COVID recovery, including money to stem the bleed in public transit and a flexible gas tax allocation.

Municipalities are the governments closest to the places where Canadians live and do business, and we are in the best position to deliver stimulus to the front lines.

I will continue to work with our Council, with our colleagues at the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Big City Mayors Caucus, to press this matter on behalf of residents and businesses in the Halifax region.

Thank you.

CAO Jacques Dubé remarks

Porters Lake Wildfire

Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

I want to start today by commending Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency crews for their tremendous work this weekend during a very scary time for residents of the Porters Lake area.

Crews spent all weekend battling a wild fire in the area and I'm very pleased that residents have been able to return safely to their homes after Saturday's evacuation.

The Department of Lands and Forestry continue to maintain the perimeter and monitor the fire.

We want to thank the province for all their efforts this weekend and for being a strong partner throughout the event.

Residents will be notified if there are any changes to the status of the fire and we thank everyone for their cooperation this weekend.

This situation is difficult during the best of times, but there is certainly an increased level of stress due to COVID-19.

We encourage any resident in the municipality in need of support to contact one of the many services available to you through the province. Visit novascotia.ca/coronavirus for phone numbers of people standing by to help.

I also want to thank all healthcare workers who are not only helping us on the frontline, but are also there to help support our mental health. On behalf of all of us at the municipality, thank you.

COVID-19 Updates

As always, I want to thank everyone across the municipality for their dedicated efforts to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

As restrictions continue to be lifted, and our new 'normal' as a community appears, we must keep following the guidance of public health.

Now, I would like to update you on several initiatives and service adjustments as we move into the beginning of the COVID-19 recovery stage.

Budget

While we look towards next steps, municipal staff and Regional Council have continued discussions regarding a revised budget, taking the financial impacts of COVID-19 in to account.

This discussion began on May 12 and meetings will continue over the coming days.

I want to personally thank staff across all business units for their diligence throughout the revised budget process. Your ability to adapt and guide your teams through this unpredictable time has been exceptional.

The decisions that have been made to date have not been easy and have not been taken lightly. However, these decisions will put the municipality in a position of financial resiliency and stability as the effects of COVID-19 continue to impact our region, province and country.

There is one more virtual Special Budget Committee meeting scheduled for tomorrow before the final budget is presented to Regional Council on Tuesday, June 9. Once these discussions have finished, we will have a clear picture of the impacts to capital and operating budgets.

Halifax Mobility Response – Streets and Spaces

In the meantime, we have not waited for these meetings to conclude to plan for the first stage of recovery and have been planning safe ways to help reopen our economy.

As the need for social distancing will remain in place for the foreseeable future, and transportation patterns evolve throughout the recovery phase, it's important we identify the necessary changes to our streets, sidewalks and bike lanes as part of our collective effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

This morning we're announcing **phase one** of the **Halifax Mobility Response Plan**. This plan includes measures that can be deployed quickly, while also considering what will be needed over the coming months in response to Public Health directives.

Work on phase one will begin immediately and includes changes that allow all pedestrians including those requiring accessible considerations to maintain a safe physical distance while travelling on the streets that connect people to essential destinations and local businesses.

As part of phase one:

Sidewalks on both sides of Spring Garden Road, between South Park and Queen streets, will be widened by temporarily removing parking and loading spaces.

The northbound sidewalk on Quinpool Road, between Quingate Place and Monastery Lane, will also be widened by removing parking and loading spaces.

Traffic signal crossings in pedestrian-heavy areas are being modified to reduce wait times by encouraging people to keep moving.

And temporary loading spaces will be added across downtown Halifax and Dartmouth to allow businesses to safely load and unload goods.

These adjustments will be implemented by the end of the week and will remain in place until further notice.

We will continue to identify further adaptations to the transportation network and more information on **phase two** will be announced in the coming weeks.

Public Safety

During these times, our Public Safety Office continues to assess the needs of our most vulnerable residents.

As of last week, two portable toilets, including one accessible toilet, have been installed on the back plaza of the Halifax Central Library.

This temporary service, made possible through partnership with the Halifax Public Libraries, is available to those in need while many public facilities are unavailable during COVID-19.

Parking

As the province eases health restrictions and businesses resume operations, paid parking, hourly parking and enforcement will resume effective **June 1**.

All parking meters will be **“on”** and enforced effective June 1 in all areas across the municipality. Our mobile payment service, HotSpot, will be reactivated and all meters will require payment. Time-restricted parking and loading zones will also be enforced.

New, temporary 15-minute parking zones have been installed to facilitate pick up at restaurants and other businesses.

All parking permits expiring in March through to June will remain valid until customer service centres reopen. This includes monthly and residential parking permits.

Accessible parking, tow-away zones and transit priority lanes will continue to be fully enforced.

Parks and Recreation

Regarding Parks & Recreation, staff have been reopening parks in line with the relaxation of the health order, however some areas still remain closed such as artificial turf fields and basketball courts.

Social distancing and group gathering limits, as directed by public health, must be followed at all times.

The booking of sites for organized sports and gatherings are still not permitted at this time.

Sport organizations are finalizing new protocols to meet public health requirements. Once those are in place, staff will review and determine options for bookings.

Recreation facilities remain closed at this time.

In terms of summer recreation programming, the municipality will provide a variety of virtual offerings for families to enjoy.

We're awaiting further details from public health regarding safety recommendations around modified recreational programming. Once we have more information we will review the **potential** for additional options to our current adjusted summer programming.

Solid Waste

In following with social distancing measures, the Curbside Giveaway Weekend on June 6 & 7 and the Mobile Household Special Waste event at Mic Mac Mall on June 13 have both been cancelled.

The Household Special Waste Depot program is also suspended until further notice.

Halifax.ca has lots of information on the safe storage of household hazardous waste and alternate locations and programs for proper disposal for residents to learn more.

We ask all residents to continue to take the appropriate steps to keep our municipality clean.

Conclusion

The past few months have been challenging on us all, as it feels like nearly every aspect of daily life is impacted by COVID-19.

We've seen some positive steps over the last couple of weeks and I can feel an increase to our collective morale. It feels good to see more smiling faces walking down our streets.

Please continue to stay safe and follow public health directives during this time. We've made a lot of progress and don't want to take any steps back as we continue through the recovery phases.

To stay up to date with our ongoing efforts and municipal service updates regarding COVID-19, please visit [Halifax.ca/coronavirus](https://halifax.ca/coronavirus).

Thank you again.