

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Remarks from Mayor Mike Savage

Good afternoon – thank you to everyone tuning in and to the media who have called in with their questions.

We appreciate everyone’s cooperation as we continue to follow public health directives and take questions remotely.

Given the provincial State of Emergency announced this past Sunday, it is important to provide citizens with an update on how this affects municipal services and operations.

Our CAO Jacques Dubé will provide an operational update shortly.

I do want to begin by extending my ongoing gratitude to Jacques, Erica Fleck, my Council colleagues, and our entire staff team at the municipality who are working tirelessly to help us manage these unprecedented times.

It’s important to note a provincial state of emergency does not impact public safety service levels, or core public services. Services deemed essential under the provincial order continue to operate, including 311, fire, and police.

I urge all citizens to continue to listen to the advice of provincial public health officials and practice social distancing. This is critically important and it cannot be stressed enough.

We are aware of concerns related to the recommended social distancing not being followed on some Halifax Transit buses.

Public transit is an absolutely critical service for essential workers during an emergency – and this includes health care professionals travelling to work at hospitals, or nursing homes. Without it, they can’t get where they need to go.

To date, most other large cities have NOT cancelled transit service – and at this time, we have no plans to cancel service in HRM.

Having said that, we have to take public health precautions seriously – both for the safety of our operators and transit users – and the Halifax Transit team continues to monitor the situation daily and are working hard to ensure that proper cleaning and social distancing are maintained on buses to keep them operational.

We know there has been some confusion related to the closure of municipal parks and trails.

Consistent with the decision by the province of Nova Scotia to close all provincial parks, all municipal parks, beaches, playgrounds, sports fields and courts remained closed until further notice.

This decision was made in an effort to protect public health and ensure proper social distancing.

I know we have received a number of calls from people concerned about the wellbeing of some of our more vulnerable residents – those who are homeless and housing insecure.

Our staff has been working diligently with the province to ensure that those vulnerable residents are housed appropriately and that the facilities required to isolate some individuals are open and operational.

I have to give credit to our amazing Libraries who continue to offer great resources and come up with creative ways to serve our community.

Residents are now able to sign up for a digital library card to immediately access online resources. Hundreds of residents have already signed up.

Online offerings have expanded to include things like:

- Over 200 digital magazines, including the New Yorker, Rolling Stone, GQ, Elle, Us Weekly, Bon Appetit, etc.
- An online learning platform, Lynda.com, offering workshops on everything from photography and photoshoot to resume writing
- Language tutorials
- Music and film streaming from Hoopla and Kanopy
- An incredible collection of digital children's materials

In addition, library staff are creating online content – like virtual storytelling - which is making staying home easier for kids and parents alike.

Recognizing that many people do not have digital access at home, public Wi-Fi has been left on at all library buildings, so those passing by any branch can connect to Wi-Fi, download items, connect with their families and search the internet.

Libraries are even making individual and community 'house calls' – dropping off gaming systems, movies and board games to Youth Homes – or dropping off audio books to seniors in self-isolation.

These are tough times for many people, but so many are stepping up to help in big ways.

I told you last week about The Atlantic Compassion Fund, which continues to grow.

Just yesterday, Emera and Nova Scotia power announced a combined \$1M donation to help address the immediate and emerging challenges of Atlantic Canada in the wake of COVID-19.

We are incredibly grateful to businesses like Emera and Nova Scotia Power, and others like Atlantic Business Interiors for their generosity that will support so many.

And while the fund continues to grow – so too does the need. I encourage anyone who is able to visit unitedwayhalifax.ca to make a contribution to this important fund.

I want to end by offering a heartfelt thanks to the people out there in our community who continue to provide essential services that keep us going:

- Grocery store workers
- Truck drivers
- Animal care workers – at places like the SPCA and others who are ensuring our furry friends remain cared for
- Farmers
- Sanitation workers
- Front line health care workers – from those working in nursing homes to hospitals
- Public health, including Dr. Strang and his team
- Those who we might not think of right away – those in the financial sector who are providing much -needed advice and help during a time of financial uncertainty for many

These are the people who are standing up in our time of great need.

We need to ensure that we are supporting the people who are supporting us – so please, continue to follow the advice of Public Health – stay home unless it's absolutely necessary to go out, maintain a physical distance of 6ft, and wash your hands frequently.

COVID-19 is bigger than any one person – we are all in this together.

Please continue to follow official social media updates for the most accurate information.

I'll now pass things over to our CAO Jacques Dubé for an operational update.

Remarks from CAO Jacques Dubé

Thank you Mayor Savage and good afternoon everyone.

Let me again start by thanking staff and residents for taking important steps in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

The Halifax Regional Municipality supports the provincial decision to declare a state of emergency.

Municipal staff will continue to work with the province to align with recommendations of health officials and orders issued under the Emergency Measures Act.

Municipal staff are currently determining service level adjustments related to a provincial state of emergency, including Halifax Transit, and will issue announcements as decisions are confirmed.

Services deemed essential under the provincial order will continue to operate.

A provincial state of emergency does not impact public safety service levels, or the need to maintain a level of core public services.

All standard, essential services of the municipality – including 311, fire and police – are operational and adhering to the most updated guidance and precautions from health officials.

On behalf of our emergency responders, we ask that residents DO NOT call 9-1-1 for non-emergency purposes.

Instead, please call 3-1-1 and police non-emergency lines.

We ask that you please strictly follow provincial instructions regarding social distancing.

This recommendation is for your own safety and for the safety of your loved ones.

We remind residents that under provincial authority, individuals who are found in breach of the order will be subject to fines issued by provincial and local police enforcement.

Let's try to avoid this step and cooperate by working together to get through this challenging time.

Yesterday, to align with the province's decision to close all provincial parks, all municipal parks, beaches, playgrounds, and sports fields/courts, as well as many trails have been closed until further notice.

I'd like to clarify some questions regarding trails:

- Residential pathways that connect streets can be used.
- Multi-use paths along streets that replace sidewalks can be used.
- Residents can walk/cycle to a trail in their neighborhood only, provided that trail is not connected to or in a park.
- Residents are not permitted to drive to trails outside of their neighbourhood.

Residents are not to gather and must continue to follow social distancing guidelines in accordance with provincial orders.

Today, I'd like to share a new update from Parks and Recreation regarding programming:

- All municipal spring recreation programming is cancelled.
- Summer recreation program registration - originally scheduled for April 1 - is cancelled.
- The status of summer recreation programming will be determined at a later date.

We will also begin removing ice surfaces in the coming days at many of our municipal arenas for maintenance purposes.

Should this affect a previous booking, staff will be contacting residents about refunds.

We will continue to update service adjustments as soon as new information becomes available.

For the most up-to-date municipal service adjustments, please visit [Halifax.ca/coronavirus](https://halifax.ca/coronavirus).

Thank you again for helping with the community effort to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Remarks from Assistant Chief Erica Fleck

I'd like to address a few frequently asked questions we've received at the Emergency Management Office.

It is very important for residents to understand that stores that are essential will not be closed under any state of emergency such as grocery stores, drug stores, gas stations, and others that we use on a daily basis.

Please refer to Halifax.ca/coronavirus for the latest information as well as the provincial website novascotia.ca/coronavirus.

Regarding masks, you should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should only be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting infected.

The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone with COVID-19 in close settings such as at home or a healthcare facility.

Another reminder to please check on your neighbours. A phone call, text message, or a knock on the door to talk (through the door) to help those in need.

Always adhere to social distancing rules when connecting with others. And please remember to be kind.