

Remarks from Mayor Mike Savage – Wednesday, April 8, 2020

Good afternoon, thank you for joining us today.

We wanted to make sure we provided the media and the public an opportunity to hear from us in advance of the coming long weekend – a time when we would normally be enjoying the outdoors and spending time with friends and family.

This is a period of religious significance, whether you observe Passover or Easter. Like many of you, I would normally attend church and gather with family and friends to celebrate this weekend

This weekend will be different, it must be. I miss seeing members of my family (I miss my kids enormously) but we are all too responsible for continuing to make progress against COVID-19. We simply must stay the course and stay home.

We can find new ways to mark old traditions, to observe our faiths, until we can again celebrate together. The Province, through Public health, have set the course and we will follow the lead.

We support it. And we will enforce it. For everybody's benefit.

To that end, police, RCMP and bylaw officers will continue to patrol and ticket when they find people in parks, on beaches or sports fields, and in instances where people are failing to adhere to social distancing and gathering limitations.

Trails that are NOT part of a park can be used for exercise but only if you can walk there and observe social distancing of 2 metres. Anyone with questions about a trail near them can call 311.

We are also urging residents to visit Halifax.ca to access up-to-date municipal information and sign up for hfxALERT: the municipality's mass notification system. Subscribers receive urgent and non-urgent notifications by phone, email, and/or text message.

I know times are tough. Going into this COVID-19 crisis, Halifax had one of the most robust urban economies in the country.

We will have a significant recovery ahead of us, but I am confident that we have the natural and earned advantages that will position us to recapture momentum.

To that end, Council has engaged our economic development agency, the Halifax Partnership to focus on a recovery plan. That work is beginning in earnest and we look forward to their regular reporting to Council.

While we continue to hear heart-breaking stories of people losing employment and businesses struggling to hold on against indefinite closure, I am also heartened to witness the generosity of spirit and resiliency that has long characterized this community.

From the bookshop owner who is sending out books by bicycle, the restaurateur donating surplus food to the Dartmouth North Food Centre, the clothing designer who has turned dressmaking skills to

designing masks, to the 3D printer now making face shields, and local researchers joining the hunt for a vaccine.

We have each others' backs in this city, it's who we are and who we will need to be in the hard days ahead.

I want to stress that our Council will be taking a fresh look at every spending commitment before we pass our operational and capital budget. We will work to strike an appropriate balance between our need to keep vital municipal services moving, to award economy-boosting contracts and pursue capital works, with a recognition that many of the people we serve are hurting and need help.

Household budgets and business bottom lines are impacted throughout the region and will require a range of supports, some from us, from other orders of government and financial institutions.

Before I turn things over to Jacques, there is one other thing I'd like to stress on behalf of Halifax Water. Please, for the love of God, stop flushing things down the toilet that belong in the wastebbin.

You've probably seen the pictures – they are disgusting.

No matter what the package says, wipes DO NOT go in the toilet. Neither do disposable gloves. These things jam up sewage treatment equipment and they can do the same in the sewer line between your home and the street.

I think we can all agree that we do not want to invite a sewage back up into our homes at any time, least of all when we're stuck there.

So, in wrapping up, stay home, stay strong, stay apart, but stay together as a community. We will come out the other side, and sooner, if we all do our part.

Thank you.

Remarks from CAO Jacques Dubé

Thank you Mr. Mayor. Good afternoon everyone.

First of all, thank you Mayor and members of Regional Council for continuing to work tirelessly to share important messages to help keep residents safe.

Thank you as well to our staff for continuing to provide vital services to keep our municipality operating during this difficult time.

The municipality continues to take steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and we are constantly adapting to new solutions for resuming as many operational activities as possible, under the circumstance.

We appreciate residents' patience during this time and most importantly, for your cooperation in helping us reduce the spread of the virus. It really is a team effort.

Domestic violence

I want to start by addressing the difficult topic of domestic violence. I am responsible for the municipal Public Safety Office and as such, I want to address this topic.

Following the public health direction to stay home is crucial, but we know, that home is not always safe for everyone.

Available help for women and their children takes many forms, from supportive connections and outreach over the phone, information about safety planning and resources, to provision of emergency shelter and second-stage housing.

In Halifax, organizations serving women continue to offer a wide range of support, guidance, and shelter to women and their children during this time.

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, know that you are not alone. There's help available to you.

- If you're in immediate danger, call 911.
- If you need help or information, you can call Bryony House's distress line at **902.422.7650**.
- To connect with community resources in Halifax, call 211 or visit their website.

Service updates

At this time, there are no significant service adjustments since our last update.

We continue to focus on delivering the highest level of municipal service that can be reasonably provided – while continuing to take steps that help minimize the spread of COVID-19. Moving forward, service levels will continue to be adjusted as necessary, based on available operational resources.

Halifax Transit has been designated by the Province of Nova Scotia as an essential service under the current provincial state of emergency and continues to operate on a reduced schedule with significant adjustments to our service model.

Parks, playgrounds, sports fields, arenas and many municipal trails remain closed. As the Mayor has mentioned, some people are still not complying with these rules and have subsequently received hefty tickets. It is not the municipality's desire to hand out these tickets but know that we will continue to do so in an effort to protect our residents.

Please continue to stay home and only leave if absolutely necessary.

As with every long weekend, there will be some minor service adjustments this Easter weekend to accommodate the holiday. Please check our website to find out if any of these changes impact you.

All service level adjustments are posted to our COVID-19 webpage at Halifax.ca/coronavirus and we regularly share timely updates on our Twitter account, @hfxgov, as well other municipal social media channels.

Municipal Budget

I'd like to further update residents on the impact of COVID-19 on the municipality's finances.

As mentioned at our Special Regional Council meeting last week, a number of the measures we have taken to protect our staff and the public, as well as support businesses, has resulted in a decrease to our revenue.

Bus fares from Halifax Transit alone are around \$3 million per month. By adding forgone parking revenue and rent deferrals we are seeing material changes to the budget.

Finance staff are assessing the operating and capital budget to see what can be delivered this year, and what can be deferred. We are also continuing to have conversations with the province about infrastructure spending and the possibility of stimulus programs.

It is anticipated that finance staff will be back with a recast budget in late May, but as with all things COVID-19 related, that timeline is subject to change.

Tax Deferral

At last week's Council meeting we also discussed developing a plan regarding the deferral of property taxes to help businesses and individuals that have been impacted by COVID-19.

We continue to work the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities and the Association of Municipal Administrators on options for a tax deferral program.

Our finance team will present a report to Regional Council for consideration on April 14th

It is critical that those who can pay their taxes continue to do so in a timely fashion. Tax revenue makes up 82% of the municipality's revenue. We spend approximately \$100 million per month and, while we are financially sound, we do require a significant amount of cash flow in order to provide services, pay our vendors and suppliers and continue with capital projects that support the economy.

Staffing

As mentioned, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on our revenue streams.

When something like this happens, whether you lead a business or a government's administration, you have to face very difficult decisions regarding staffing. Like all administrations at this time, we are not immune to this painful reality.

At this time, however, I will not be elaborating further on this matter.

In closing, I urge all residents to stay safe and follow provincial public health orders this long weekend.

We will get through this and I thank each of you for being part of the collective effort that will get us there.