

Mayor Savage's Remarks – Friday, March 20, 2020

As noted yesterday, we have moved to no in-person media briefings – I want to thank media for their cooperation as we continue to take questions remotely.

Also, I want to once again extend my ongoing gratitude to Jacques, Erica, my Council colleagues, and our entire staff team at the municipality who are going above and beyond to ensure essential services remain operational and to help us manage these unprecedented times.

The municipality remains committed to taking important steps in reducing spread of COVID-19.

We continue to urge people to practice social distancing. The more compliant and disciplined we are in following the direction of health officials, the faster we will get through this.

With the weekend coming up, it's important to remember that COVID-19 isn't taking a break and neither can we. It's important to relax and stay healthy, but we have to continue to keep our distance and comply with the important advice from health officials.

Some important things to avoid:

- Larger group gatherings
- Having visitors in your home
- Crowded stores – consider online grocery shopping or shopping off-peak hours

It's also important to remember that there are many things we CAN continue to do:

- Get outside and stay active – but keep your social distance
- Take a bike ride, or walk, along one of our municipality's many great parks and trails that remain open for the public to enjoy.
- Visit [Halifax.ca/recreation](https://halifax.ca/recreation) for a full listing

Our public library branches are closed – but our E-Library has some fantastic offerings to ward off boredom.

- Learn to play guitar
- Try a new recipe with online cookbooks
- Watch an animated story with the kids
- Practice a new language

Visit halifaxpubliclibraries.ca to explore these excellent resources and more.

I also want to reiterate to the public the importance of getting your information from a trusted source.

There's a lot of chatter out there, so stay focused on the facts. For health updates visit novascotia.ca/coronavirus. To hear about municipal service updates, visit Halifax.ca/coronavirus.

I want to be very clear that there are no reductions in public safety service levels.

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

Municipal online services are continuing through our website, Halifax.ca.

We continue to make adjustments to transit as required. We've seen a significant dip in usage which indicates people are staying home - and that's a good thing.

This is something that we continue to monitor and adjust to daily with the safety of operators and riders top of mind. All updates will be posted to the website.

As noted yesterday, parking fees at meters are waived and HotSpot fees will be set to zero, while enforcement of hourly spaces and monthly permit parking is suspended until further notice.

Again – this is not meant to encourage people to be out and about, rather it is meant to ease the burden of health care workers who are working around the clock, people who are self-isolating, and those who may be extending support to vulnerable residents.

I continue to be heartened by what I'm seeing online, from people and groups offering services to help the vulnerable and those in need.

There are lot of people in crisis right now – from housing to food access - and at the same time there are many people stepping up.

Take for example the Atlantic Compassion Fund – a partnership between United Way and Atlantic Business Interiors, a company who is donating up to \$100,00 in office furniture, and matching dollar-for-dollar the first \$100,000 donated by individual and businesses to help agencies meet the immediate needs of our communities.

I know many businesses have already joined and are donating funds, goods and services.

If you can, considering supporting this initiative. You can donate at unitedwayhalifax.ca

I have to say - in these tough times, I'm proud to be the Mayor of such a caring and compassionate community.

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 Denise Schofield, Director Parks and Recreation

A continued thank you to staff and residents for their support, diligence and cooperation during this challenging time.

Today, we'd like to give an important safety reminder to residents:

As recommended by public health officials, we're asking everyone to please avoid contact with all high-touch surfaces, such as playgrounds, doorknobs, public stair railings, etc.

We know this can be a difficult ask and we really appreciate your cooperation.

As the Mayor said, with the weekend coming, we know everyone is searching for a break.

Exercise has been challenging with the temporary closing of recreation centres and gyms.

This presents a great opportunity to get outside and have some much-needed fun, but we want to be mindful of the need to social distance and don't want to overcrowd popular parks and public spaces.

We want to encourage residents to visit our website to discover some of our more than 900 parks and trails.

Many of these are located outside of the city centre and remain undiscovered gems that are very much worth exploring.

The Parks and Rec team will also work to share our suggestions for other fun things to do while we practice social distancing and self-isolation.

The municipality is committed to taking important steps in reducing spread of COVID-19.

Please continue to follow our social media channels and regularly visit our website at Halifax.ca/coronavirus to stay up to date with the latest information related to municipal service adjustments.

Here's Director of Halifax Transit, Dave Reage with an important update from his team.

Remarks from Dave Reage, Director Halifax Transit

Thanks Denise.

I want to start by thanking everyone who is helping to keep our transit service running during this difficult time.

I know your dedication to serving the residents is greatly appreciated across the municipality.

However, due to a declining availability of staff resources, as of Monday, March 23, Halifax Transit is targeting a 30 per cent reduction in bus service on weekdays.

We are continuing regular weekday schedules on some routes, while other routes will operate on their Saturday schedules during weekdays.

Three routes will have no service.

The intent of this approach is to reduce the overall service level while minimizing gaps in the network.

Weekend service will not be impacted.

Details regarding all route changes can be found on [Halifax.ca/transit](https://halifax.ca/transit)

We are continuing to monitor and adapt to this rapidly evolving situation.

For the most up-to-date information, follow @hfxtransit on Twitter for any service disruptions.

Visit halifax.ca/coronavirus for all other municipal service adjustments to date.

Thank you again to operators, staff, and residents for your continued support.

I'll now pass it over to Assistant Chief Erica Fleck.

Remarks from Erica Fleck, Assistant Chief

Our Emergency Operations Centre continues to operate with our Senior Leadership team and, as stated, we assess risks throughout every day – balancing the needs of our citizens with those of our employees. We do this while always taking the recommendations from the lead Provincial department of Health and Wellness.

We understand that citizens continue to be concerned about the safety of themselves and others, and we want to remind everyone that, as per the recommendations of the province's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Strang ... washing your hands, not touching your face and avoiding touching common public surfaces.

The Halifax Regional Municipality, with recommendations from the Province, are doing everything that we can in order to flatten the curve.

What does flattening the curve mean? In contrast to a steep rise of coronavirus infections, a more gradual uptick of cases will see the same number of people get infected, but without overburdening the health-care system at any one time.

The idea of flattening the curve is to stagger the number of new cases over a longer period, so that people have better access to care.

As you've heard from all levels of government, please avoid crowds. We need people to practice safe social distancing.

We're encouraged to hear about grocery stores and drug stores that are offering dedicated hours to seniors and those who need assistance.

We need to continue to work as a community to get through these times.

As mentioned yesterday, we are working on coordinating volunteer efforts in order to help with support like delivery of necessities - particularly for those who are self-isolating and those in need.

Please continue to be safe, check on your family, friends and neighbours, and be kind to others.