

Combined statement on COVID-19 from Mayor Savage and CAO Jacques Dubé – March 16, 2020

Statement from Mayor Mike Savage

Thank you for being here today.

The Halifax Regional Municipality continues to monitor and respond to the rapidly evolving effects of COVID-19.

This is an extraordinary time and we are taking extraordinary measures to get through this. And we will get through this.

The health, safety and wellness of residents and employees is our priority and our focus.

We are actively taking steps to mitigate impacts on municipal services while also helping to reduce the spread of the disease.

We are working closely with government partners and following the guidance and recommendations from provincial and federal health agencies on COVID-19.

CAO Jacques Dubé will go through operational details.

First off, essential services such as police and fire are unaffected at this point. As always, we are very appreciative of their efforts.

Halifax Transit, as well as 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.

We're also asking anyone who is feeling ill to please stay home and follow the advice of health professionals.

I realized these times can cause much stress and anxiety. We're all feeling the effects and you're not alone.

If you need to speak with someone, we encourage you reach out to friends, loved ones and colleagues. If you need additional support, you can call 2-1-1 to speak with someone who can help.

I want to thank my council colleagues for all their work during this challenging time. I have been in contact with all of them, mostly by phone and they stand ready to continue to serve our citizens.

Many Councillors are working to support vulnerable citizens and I know many other community leaders are doing the same.

This is a time to take care of each other.

I'm asking residents to reach out to your neighbours and help look after them in this time of need.

In consultation with Deputy Mayor Lisa Blackburn and the CAO, we've cancelled next week's Council meeting. There are some things we can manage in the short term and we'll be making alternate plans as appropriate to handle the rest.

Work on the budget is largely done, and other agenda items can be moved.

Updates will continue to be provided regularly by myself and my colleagues at the municipality.

Stay diligent and take care of one another. That is our way.

We will get through this together.

Lastly, I'd like to personally thank everyone for their well wishes over the past few days while my office was dealing with a potential COVID-19 case.

We closed our office out of an abundance of caution.

I'm pleased to confirm that me and my team have been cleared after several days of self-isolation.

The EOC is set up here now, as needed our team of professionals is attending and working together as they always do.

I have great confidence in them and thank them.

I want to thank everyone in Nova Scotia – the provincial government here, Dr. Strang, Dr. Watson Creed, and Erica Fleck here at the EOC.

Also want to thank partners like Ross Jefferson with Discover Halifax, and Patrick Sullivan at the Chamber of Commerce – there will significant financial hardship in the days and weeks to come.

We must deal with health first – but we will support other orders of government in their work to support our citizens.

I'm going to now hand it over to CAO Jacques Dubé to speak more specifically about municipal operational updates.

Statement from CAO Jacques Dubé

Thank you Mayor Savage.

As the Mayor mentioned, we are committed to keeping our residents and employees safe.

This means pulling together as a community to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

I want to thank all employees and our front-line staff in particular for your dedication to maintaining public services during this difficult time.

The situation continues to change daily.

As new information becomes available – from our provincial and federal health partners, as well as our 10 business units and partners including Halifax Water and Halifax Public Libraries – we will continue to make adjustments to municipal services and brief the public on changes.

At this time, the municipality is taking specific actions:

- I have directed all municipal employees who can work from home to do so.
- While Halifax Transit remains operating on a regular schedule, there are some service adjustments:
 - We have increased cleaning on all buses and ferries
 - Ferry capacity will now be limited to 150 passengers
 - All buses will be limited to seating passengers only
- We have also increased cleaning frequency in all municipal facilities.
- Municipally owned recreation facilities, centers and arenas will all close as of this evening until further notice.
- All in-person public engagement and events hosted by the municipality are postponed.
- All Halifax Public Library branches are closed until further notice.
- Halifax Water will maintain critical services.
- Waste collection will continue on a regular schedule.

For those who are feeling unwell, we encourage you to stay home and avoid using Halifax Transit, as well as avoid all public facilities, when possible.

For all the latest updates regarding the status of municipal services, please visit halifax.ca/coronavirus

Our team will continue to update our website as more information becomes available and will continue to share these messages via our social media channels.

Thank you.

Statement from Assistant Chief Erica Fleck

Thank you CAO and Mr. Mayor.

Our planning continues to evolve.

Every day we expect our plan will have to change to some degree based on the information we receive from our provincial health partners.

Announcements such as the one from the Prime Minister today will have an effect on municipal planning and require regular adjustments.

Emergency Management will continue to meet every morning and I want to stress that not only will we be meeting with our provincial and federal partners, we also receive information from across Canada on the Emergency Management network, as does the CAO and the Mayor on their respective networks as well.

The message we are hearing from these partners is about what they could have done earlier.

I know many Nova Scotians and residents of the municipality feel that we are doing too much now.

What I can tell you is that everyone across Canada and around the world has said they wished they had started sooner and shut down services earlier.

We're learning from their experiences and we're doing everything we can to keep residents safe.

It's not too much too soon