



CITY OF NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS

Office of the Mayor
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CORONAVIRUS UPDATE FROM NORTH ADAMS MAYOR TOM BERNARD

NORTH ADAMS, MA (March 13, 2020)

Friends,

This has been a challenging week for our entire community, and I know the days and weeks ahead will continue to bring new challenges as we continue to respond to the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic. We are all sharing the experience of doing our best to respond to a situation that is changing quickly, and taking action on the facts as we understand them in order to protect public health and safety.

My team and I don't always have all the answers but rest assured I, and they, will continue to provide regular updates with the most complete and accurate information available. To that end – and with apologies for the length of this communication but there is a great deal to cover – this message outlines a number of items and updates on our evolving response to the Coronavirus.

As always, please consider the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as reliable and timely sources for information and recommendations:

<https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

In addition, with news about coronavirus changing rapidly, we encourage everyone to follow steps to prevent the spread of infection. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, avoid touching your eyes and face, and cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow.

In addition, please follow the recommendation to stay at home if you are feeling sick, and contact your primary healthcare provider if your symptoms worsen.

Here are a few key city updates for today:

Today, Friday, March 13, we announced that the North Adams Public Schools will be closed for two weeks, with the expectation that we will resume the regular school schedule on Monday, March 30. In announcing this decision we are working in collaboration and alignment with superintendents and districts across Berkshire County. We are making this unprecedented decision based on the latest information we received from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). See the information and announcement from the Superintendent of Schools here: <https://www.napsk12.org/apps/news/article/1183582>.

In addition, following the example of other communities I have declared a state of emergency effective today, Friday, March 13, and in effect until further notice. This is in line with our overall planning and preparedness, and it ensures that we are able to protect public health and safety as well as to expedite the procurement of the goods and services we will need to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic.

We have established an operations center in City Hall, and city staff are finalizing action plans to adjust our operations in order to protect employees and the public from risk of Coronavirus exposure and transmission. As we have seen in other communities, this may include closing city hall and other public buildings to the public and providing services in different ways. Like the updated protocols being followed by Northern Berkshire EMS, how people interact with city staff and city services may look different but we will do our best to ensure the service residents receive remains respectful and responsive.

In addition to the event restrictions I announced earlier this week, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has announced that all public skating rinks statewide are closed immediately and until further notice. This includes our local Peter W. Foote Vietnam Veterans Memorial Skating Rink. In recognition of this directive, and the decision to limit access to public spaces, additional public buildings, including the North Adams Public Library and the Mary Spitzer Senior Center will be closed to the public. Both facilities have plans in place to serve the community while access to the building is restricted, and these will be announced shortly.

Finally, City Hall will be closed to the public beginning on Monday, March 16. During this time any payments, forms, or documents that need to be submitted to the city and that cannot be transmitted electronically can be deposited in the secure drop boxes that will be set up at both entrances to City Hall.

Despite these changes in our standard operating procedures, the regular business of the city continues to go on. Our team in IT continues to pay close attention to cybersecurity and preparedness against online threats. This is especially important during times of increased stress – scammers prey on people’s vulnerability, and they only succeed when people respond with

emotion (usually fear) or out of a sense of urgency rather than with thoughtfulness and (healthy) skepticism. To our staff, I urge you to remember – when in doubt, **ASK**.

Sadly, it's not just city staff who are susceptible to scammers during times of stress. While most people are pulling together, and making sure we are doing all we can to protect and sustain the most vulnerable members of our community, there are those who use times like these to prey on people's fear and concern. Attorney General Maura Healey and her team put out a great set of consumer protection recommendations, which you can find online at <https://www.mass.gov/news/ags-office-issues-guidance-on-coronavirus-resources-warns-of-consumer-scams>.

Yesterday (March 12) Governor Baker issued an executive order temporarily relaxing certain requirements of the Open Meeting Law “in order to allow state, quasi and local governments to continue to carry out essential functions and operations during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.” These include a provision to allow remote participation in public meetings even when a quorum of members is not physically present. We are reviewing the order with our legal counsel, and will be providing guidance to chairs, members, and the public on how the city will support remote participation, as well as to determine what meetings should be postponed if there are no pressing agenda items.

Other business continues as well. Many of you also may have received your census notification in the mail this week. I encourage you to follow the steps to complete it online or by phone. We will work with the Berkshire complete count committee to determine how to deliver support to those who need it in the face of our Coronavirus response.

While we are instituting our response plans, adjusting our work practices and social habits, and , I want to highlight a few things that are worthy of celebration, including:

- The incredible performance of the Drury boys basketball team throughout the season, capped by an outstanding and hard-fought Western Mass championship (their second consecutive title).
- The Western Mass honors earned by the Drury cheerleading team.
- The great performance by the Drury jazz band and the academy and high school bands this week, including the Elks Citizen of the Year award presented to band director Chris Caproni.
- The announcement of the 2020 class of 40 Under Forty honorees, including North Adams police lieutenant Anthony Beverly.

There has been a lot of talk lately about social distancing, and abundance of caution – a phrase I've used a number of times – but I also am seeing people suggest that we reconsider these ideas, and instead of thinking about caution to reflect on the duty of care and concern we each have to our families, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and fellow residents.

I have said many times that I am encouraged and inspired by the strength of our North Adams and northern Berkshire community. I know this strength will continue to sustain us over the coming days and weeks. **HOW** we connect with one another will change – and I expect it will

change in surprising, unexpected, and in some cases inspiring ways – but I am confident that we will continue to look out for each other, for our friends and neighbors, and for the most vulnerable members of our community. There’s a lot we need to figure out, together, and I know we have a strong network of thoughtful, caring, supportive, collaborative people here in our community to help us figure it out.

We will continue to share information and updates, and please reach out with your questions and suggestions.

Finally, I want to share my thanks and admiration with the staff who work for the City of North Adams and the North Adams Public Schools. Their adaptability, candor, thoughtfulness and professionalism amid a rapidly-changing situation has been exemplary.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible work of the Regional Emergency Planning Committee and the team and Northern Berkshire EMS for their emergency response expertise and professionalism. I’m grateful to Representative Barrett, Senator Hinds, and our entire Berkshire delegation for their leadership, advocacy, and support.

I also am thankful to my fellow elected and appointed officials here in the Berkshires and across the state who have shared information, ideas, communications, and friendship as we all navigate what, in the words of President Lyndon Johnson that I referenced in my inaugural address earlier this year, certainly qualifies as “a challenge constantly renewed.”

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