

# Mayor Jon Mitchell updates the public on New Bedford's response to COVID-19

Mayor Jon Mitchell joined City officials on Friday to update the public on the City's response to COVID-19. In accordance with his legal authority, Mayor Mitchell has declared that a state of emergency now exists in New Bedford. This allows for the suspension of certain rules to expedite the procurement of goods and services, as well as allowing the Mayor to take reasonable steps to ensure public safety.

The Mayor and City officials offered the following guidelines on Friday, March 13:

## Events

**Public events:** All non-essential public community events greater than 100 people will be postponed or cancelled.

In particular, the Mayor's state of the city address, which is the second-largest of its kind in the state, will be postponed.

**Special event permits:** All special permits will be reviewed. Effective this Monday, the City will revoke all permits for indoor activities greater than 100 people, and all other special events will be subject to review of the Health Department to assess the risk of transmission.

**School events:** Superintendent Thomas Anderson has announced a similar curtailment of school events.

**Other events:** With respect to events that do not require some form of public approval or permit, Mayor Mitchell strongly discouraged the holding of non-essential indoor events of

greater than 100 people.



## **City Facilities and Board/Commission Meetings**

### **City facilities:**

In addition to curtailing events at public places, certain facilities will be closed.

Effective Monday morning: All senior centers in the city will be closed until further notice. Likewise, the City is closing the adult day facility in Brooklawn Park, but will provide the families of the facility's patrons a reasonable opportunity to find alternate care during the day.

Buttonwood Park Zoo: All indoor events at the Buttonwood Park Zoo will be postponed or cancelled.

### **Board and Commission meetings:**

Last night, the Governor issued an executive order that liberalizes the requirements of the state's opening meeting

law. The City's attorneys are reviewing the order now, but in any case, the City will take every step consistent with the law to minimize the attendance at board and commission meetings, including the deferring of items for which board action is not urgent.

### **City employees**

The City is working hard to ensure the safety our employees. For starters, the City's custodial staff is strenuously cleaning buildings, and is emphasizing of course proper hygiene.

All out-of-state employee travel through the end of April will be postponed or cancelled, as well as any non-essential employee travel of greater than twenty miles. The Superintendent has announced a similar curtailment of school field trips.

The City is advising department heads that employees whose duties and responsibilities allow them to work at home, should make arrangements to do so.

The City strongly encourages all employers to employ similar protections and accommodations for their employees.

### **Paying bills online or by mail**

To decrease person-to-person contact in public buildings, and help protect the health of employees and residents, the City is encouraging residents to pay bills remotely, either online or by mail. Payments can be made online at the City's website, [www.newbedford-ma.gov](http://www.newbedford-ma.gov), and selecting 'Pay Bills' directly on the home page. To mail payments, residents can use the mailing address printed on their bills or mail their bills directly to the City Treasurer at the following address:

City Hall – Treasurer's Office  
133 William Street, Room 103

New Bedford, MA 02740

Mayor Mitchell made the following statement at Friday's update:

"Good morning. There's a great deal of anxiety in our city, across our country and indeed around the world about the effects of the coronavirus outbreak. Nothing quite like this has happened in our lifetimes, so it is understandable that people are on edge. I am here today to provide an update on the city's latest efforts and to help you stay informed, prepare yourself and your family, and take actions to stem the spread of the virus.

"I want to begin by saying that the virus is coming, if it's not already here. While there has yet to be a confirmed case in Greater New Bedford, we should not be fooled. As has been well chronicled, the limited number of test kits in the United States has inhibited the ability of the medical community to determine with confidence who has been infected. And we know, based on the recent outbreaks in China, Italy and other places, the virus has the potential to spread faster than our healthcare system can address.

"Our work has been focused on three goals: to slow the transmission of the virus in our city and region, make preparations to continue essential city services, and ensure the health and safety of city employees and our residents. The strategy is to "flatten the curve" of viral spread, that is, to slow the transmission of the disease so that our health care system can keep up with the flow of patients until the virus eventually peters out. Getting out ahead of the virus through appropriate social distancing and encouraging proper hygiene is essential. That is why, even though residents in our region may not be infected yet, we have been taking proactive steps, including the cancelling of this weekend's half marathon.

"Our decisions are informed by the advice of health care experts, and are consistent with guidance from federal and state agencies. Every morning I am briefed by our health director and our public safety agencies on the latest developments, so that as the situation evolves, we can make informed decisions in the public interest. Under the authority vested in me under law, I have declared that a state of emergency now exists in New Bedford. The authority allows the mayor to suspend certain rules concerning procurement of good and services, and generally affords the mayor the ability to take reasonable steps to ensure public safety.

"This is one of the challenges our city and our country faces in which the actions of private individuals is indispensable to success. More than anything else, proper hygiene is a must. Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently, with soap and hot water. Make sure your loves ones do the same.

"Be especially conscience of what you touch. Avoid as much as possible highly touched surfaces, such as railings, door knobs, and elevator buttons. Don't touch your face. Stop shaking hands.

"And again, if you feel sick, go home and call your doctor.

"All of these measures and more, along with links to relevant state and federal guidance, can be found on the City's website. We'll continue to push out more updates so that you and your family remained informed, and I ask you to share with others.

"Our work here is about serious preparation, not panic. Each of us has a role to play to ensure the health and safety of our fellow New Bedfordites. I thank you in advance for your understanding, but more importantly, for the role you play in this collective effort."