



CITY OF PORTLAND
Executive Department
Kate Snyder, Mayor
Jon P. Jennings, City Manager

May 18, 2020

To the Citizens & Businesses of Portland,

We hope everyone is healthy and as well as can be expected during this stressful time. As we begin the 10th week of the Emergency Stay at Home Order, we realize many of you are wondering what the future looks like and you have many questions and concerns related to the many rules and recommendations from the City and the State. We are doing our best to respond as quickly as possible to the changing conditions in order to keep our community safe. At the same time, we realize the need for businesses and services to continue as much as possible. We want to thank you for how seriously you all have taken this situation by complying with previous and current guidance. We are cautiously optimistic based on current data that all of our actions have helped to flatten the curve and not overwhelm our healthcare system. In that vein, we are supportive of the Governor's staged plan for [Restarting Maine's Economy](#) and have begun to outline below what this means in Portland. We know many of you are looking forward to what summer brings to Maine.

Please know that we remain in close communication with appropriate federal, state, and local officials on developments related to this situation, and it is those conversations that have helped inform and guide our plan. There have been many confirmed cases and deaths in Maine, including Portland residents and City employees. Our thoughts and prayers are with those families who have been affected by a loved one who has had to battle this virus or those who have sadly lost a loved one. We want to thank everyone in our community who has stepped up during this time to offer support and positivity. Portland residents overwhelmingly answered the call when we sought volunteers to grocery shop for our elderly residents, people and businesses started making masks to share with friends or donate, you've continued to support the many small businesses that make our city so special, many donated to their favorite charities or non-profit organizations, and others of you left simple positive and uplifting messages in the windows of your home or along sidewalks and trails to remind people that we're all in this together.

Ensuring the safety of our employees and the general public, while also continuing to provide the critical services necessary to run the city, is of paramount importance to us. Our Police, Fire, General Assistance and Shelter, Public Works and Trash & Recycling pick up, Barron Center, and Jetport operations have continued during this time, and we thank them and the many other City workers who continue to serve us during this crisis. Many of our employees quickly adapted their work during this time in order to best serve citizens, whether it be taking on a new role or working virtually from home.

In order to minimize the rise of exposure to employees, volunteers and the general public, we have done the following:

- **Declared an Emergency Stay at Home Order that remains in effect until July 13.** Additionally, we introduced restrictions on off-leash dogs and the continuation of the Affordable Rental Housing Incentive Program. We also deferred business license renewals.
- **Followed Governor Mills' Executive Order as of April 29th mandating a series of continued and new restrictions** through May 31st, including a Stay Safer at Home directive, Economic & Community Development Restarting Plan, and a requirement for cloth face coverings in public settings where physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain. Visit <https://www.maine.gov/covid19/restartingmaine> for the State's detailed plan.
- **The Portland City Council voted to approve three business loan and grant programs** designed by the Portland Development Corporation and the City's Economic Development Department in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The three programs are all intended to assist Portland businesses needing help due to COVID-19. The programs include the Business Assistance Program for Job Creation (Rehiring), the Microenterprise Grant Program, and the Rapid Response Micro Loan Program.
- **Begun to redo the FY 2021 Budget, which will result in no increase in the tax rate to help residents and businesses** during this challenging time. Difficult decisions are being made that we do not take lightly and we appreciate everyone's understanding to achieve this goal. This budget will be presented to the City Council at some point this summer. The Finance Committee held a joint City/School budget meeting on May 14 to begin discussions.
- **Collaborating with area leaders to seek Congressional support to give states more flexibility for the use of CARES Act Funds** to meet the needs of communities and address the collateral damage and financial hardship caused by this crisis. We need to advocate for increased assistance and allow these additional funds to make up for decreases in state and city revenue resulting from this pandemic. Until then, we are committed to a fiscally responsible budget.
- **The hosts of the Memorial Day Parade have decided to cancel this year's parade,** but representatives from local veterans and friends groups continue to assist our cemetery staff with the placement of flags at veterans graves.
- **We are starting preparations for the upcoming State Primary & School Budget Validation Referendum Election** which has been moved to July 14th. The same period which voters can request absentee ballots has been extended. We are encouraging everyone to vote absentee to help protect the health and safety of all. This is not a mandate, but an urgent request. Many of the people who work at elections are in the high-risk category, and while we don't know what the virus will look like on Election Day, making this commitment now to vote absentee will help keep the community healthy. You can request an absentee ballot online, by mail or by phone and the City Clerk will mail your ballot to complete and mail back. We will be promoting this effort via our website, Friday News Round Up, and on our social media channels. You can visit our website or contact the City Clerk's Office at 207-874-8610 for more information.

- **Previously announced a non-essential spending & hiring freeze and furlough program.** These are very difficult times for everyone and we are blessed with an exceptional workforce. Decisions that can adversely impact our dedicated employees are not entered into lightly. However, the City has a legal obligation to maintain a balanced budget, even under these challenging conditions and we take this very seriously.
- **Creative Portland launched an [Artist Relief Fund](#).** As the City's official nonprofit arts agency, Creative Portland created an emergency relief fund for visual artists and performing artists in the gig economy, who are not eligible for unemployment. After raising \$77,000, Creative Portland began issuing \$500 stipends to artists to help make ends meet.
- **Supporting Portland's Small Businesses -- Pay It Forward Campaign.** The City joined the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce's *Pay It Forward* campaign, which encouraged residents to continue supporting the local businesses in our community that make Portland great. Whether it was to purchase food or items via curbside pickup or delivery or purchasing gift cards to use later, Portlanders found creative ways to support their favorite places.
- **Street Closures & Expanded Outdoor Dining/Sidewalk Use to Assist Restaurants & Retail Businesses with Reopening.** The City announced a pilot program that includes temporary street closures and permitting changes to assist our small business community as they look to safely and responsibly reopen restaurants and retail establishments. In line with the Governor's staged reopening, these changes would go in effect beginning June 1 and be valid until November 1.
- **Superintendent Botana announced that the [Portland School Department](#) would continue distance learning and remote operations for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.** Details are on their website regarding their response. The Superintendent is working on ways to honor the Class of 2020, and more information will be released soon.
- **Opened the Farmers' Market and Riverside Golf Course.** Our Parks, Recreation and Facilities Department worked with the Farmers' Market organization to reopen the market in Deering Oaks with proper social distancing guidelines and reopened the golf course to walkers only with additional restrictions in place.

Announcing the City of Portland Reopening Plan as follows:

Immediate (Following all CDC Guidelines)

- **Phased increase of workforce at City Hall with existing staff as appropriate to continue critical operations and prepare for our phased reopening.** City Hall and City buildings will remain closed to the public until June 22 (date subject to change), but we are working on a plan to open Room 24 of City Hall so the public can access City staff for certain transactions, like vehicle registration, that cannot be done remotely. We will continue to assist with transactions remotely as well.
- **Summer Camp** Our Recreation Department is currently planning the logistics and possibility of holding summer camps this year, albeit in a much different format. The current thought is that we would host camps in July and August utilizing up to five different sites. Each site would have a cap of 45 children in order to allow for greater

social distancing and adhere to State guidelines of gatherings of less than 50 people. The Rec Department is waiting for the State to issue their summer camp checklist, and then they will announce final details.

- **Property tax payments have been delayed until June 1.** Revaluation notices, scheduled for May, have also been delayed. We will announce a new date as soon as we have more information. The Portland Senior Tax Equity Program (P-STEP) is still available and accepting applications through June 15, 2020.
- **Thanks to American Roots and Sea Bags, we were able to outfit our employees with cloth masks in order to keep them and the public safe while they work.**
- **Tennis and Pickleball courts reopened on May 15 with proper precautions.**
- **The Portland Rowing Club** moved singles and doubles to East End Beach for club use on May 15.

June 1st (Tentative & Following all CDC Guidelines)

- **Open City Hall to staff only.** Staff will be required to wear masks while traveling through the building. Plexiglass barriers have been installed in our Treasury Office to protect staff and the public. Staff will also return to other City buildings. At this time, we expect to reopen to the public on June 22.
- **Basketball and volleyball courts will reopen.**
- **Street Closures & Expanded Outdoor Dining & Retail Begins. Visit www.portlandmaine.gov/COVID19 for more details.**

July & August (Tentative & Following all CDC Guidelines)

- **Athletic Fields will reopen on July 1.**
- **Playgrounds will reopen on July 1.**
- **Summer Day Camp starts July 6.**

July 14th (Tentative & Following all CDC Guidelines)

- **State Primary Election & School Budget Validation Referendum as explained above.**

This is a fluid and rapidly evolving situation that requires close monitoring and the need to adapt quickly. We will continue to modify all directives as appropriate and provide additional updates. Please remember we should continue to minimize our public contact and wear cloth face coverings in public in order to reduce the spread and not set us back. Remember we are taking these preventive actions out of an abundance of caution and concern for everyone. We apologize for any inconveniences you may experience as a result of these measures.

Please continue to check on your neighbors, especially seniors, and help each other out if and when possible. Let's remain strong to keep each other healthy and protect our first responders and healthcare providers. We will get through this together.

For more information on the City's response and the status of the pandemic, please visit www.portlandmaine.gov/COVID19. This dedicated page with a host of resources and information is updated frequently.

Thank you and stay safe.

Kate Snyder, Mayor

Jon Jennings, City Manager