



April 20, 2020

**Statement from Mayor Ken Hewitt & Mayor Kristal Chopp, Chair of the Haldimand-Norfolk Board of Health**

Dear fellow residents of Haldimand and Norfolk,

These are frustrating times.

In addition to the ever-present fear of the spread of COVID-19, we're all faced with questions about what used to be the simple things in life: Can I go fishing? Can I get my car washed? Is the drug store open?

While we don't have all the answers (many of the most frequently-asked questions should really be directed to the provincial government), we did want to provide some clarity on a few key issues.

First, it's important to understand that every business currently shut down in Haldimand and Norfolk is closed because of provincial order.

If you're not sure if your business is considered essential by the provincial government or not, we encourage you to get in touch with our MPP, Toby Barrett, as this decision lies with the government that he is a part of. If you disagree with the definition of "essential," Mr. Barrett's office should have no problem providing a letter on your behalf addressed to the Haldimand and Norfolk Health Unit authorizing the operation of that business.

Second, all but two of our Medical Officer of Health's orders have been subsequently covered by similar provincial orders, issued by the province on the advice of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, and one federal order.

These are:

1. The process by which migrant farmers are allowed to integrate within the community.
2. The closure of trails and parks for walkthrough.

Here's a timeline of the orders issued by our Medical Officer of Health (MOH), as well as when the Province/Federal government issued a similar order:

- i. MARCH 16, 2020: MOH order closing food premises (takeout and delivery options only). The Provincial order was announced March 24, 2020



ii. MARCH 21, 2020: MOH Order closing all personal settings and esthetic services. The Provincial Order was announced March 24, 2020

iii. MARCH 22, 2020: MOH order prohibiting congregating in groups larger than 10 in public spaces and closing playground equipment. The Provincial Order of March 28, 2020 bans groups larger than 5. The Provincial Order of March 30, 2020 closed all recreational outdoor amenities.

iv. MARCH 22, 2020: MOH Mandatory Self-Isolation upon returning to Canada. Federal Order: March 25, 2020

v. MARCH 24, 2020: Our MOH orders a migrant worker mandatory quarantine program

vi. APRIL 3, 2020: Our MOH issues two orders

Not permitted to use or access any open space, including parks, trails, piers, beaches, community gardens, or other open spaces usually accessible to the public, whether publicly or privately owned.

Provincial Order: March 30, 2020 - All recreational outdoor amenities closed (exception for “walk-through access”) No person is permitted enter into a short-term stay agreement for a facility, including a room, house, cottage, recreational trailer, recreational vehicle, hotel, or motel, for stays that are less than 8 days.

Provincial Order: April 4, 2020 – short term rentals are only permitted for “individuals who are in need of housing during the emergency period”. Short-term is undefined.

To be clear, this means that Haldimand and Norfolk Mayor’s themselves have issued just a single order related to the public: the declaration of a State of Emergency.

Second, we’ve both been contacted many times about fishing and the province’s closure of boat ramps. The Provincial Order states that marinas are considered essential, but ONLY to the extent that the marina is necessary to access their primary place of residence.

In the event that the province meant for there to be further exemptions to the above, we have requested Toby Barrett’s office provide us with instructions from the province in writing. We continue to await a response and will direct our by-law accordingly.

We also understand that the Ford government has announced that fishing is acceptable, but please understand that per the Provincial Order marinas, piers, etc. have been closed and even at a provincial level, public areas were only open for walkthrough access. Clearly fishing on private property is acceptable, however, based on the superseding provincial orders closing marinas, piers, parks, beaches



etc. much ambiguity remains. Again, we would look to our MPP to provide written clarification from the province to the Health Unit so that we may direct our local by-law officers accordingly.

Lastly, we are frequently asked about the closure of our trail system. It is critically important for the public to realize that each of Ontario's 34 health units are independent entities and their Boards and local Medical Officer of Health make decisions based on an area's unique needs, circumstances and available resources. Both the Provincial and local Medical Officer of Health are governed by the Health Protection and Promotion Act which ensures that Medical Officers of Health have some independence from the political sphere – since decisions affecting public health shouldn't be at the whim of politicians.

This separation of the medical expertise from the political sphere allows the medical professions to speak truth to power. We might not always like their decisions, but they are made with medical knowledge keeping the community's best interests at heart, and they are designed to protect us all, as tough as that may be to accept. There will always be arguments for and against a decision, but it is to the Medical Officer of Health to weigh the risks and make a decision based on what they believe is best for our community as a whole. In light of the provincial announcement by the Premier today that the latest modelling has indicated progress, Dr. Nesathurai will continuously evaluate his order related to the trails, in the same manner that the province has indicated they will also begin evaluating when their restrictions can be eased.

One very public critic of our Medical Officer of Health's decisions has been our MPP Toby Barrett. Though given an open invitation to contact us directly on any questions or concerns he may have about our Emergency Operations Center's (EOC) actions, before being publicly critical of the decisions of our medical officer of health, Mr. Barrett did not reach out to our staff or Dr. Nesathurai to obtain an understanding of the medical rationale behind our decisions. Nor has he assisted us in our difficulty in interpreting and enforcing some of the Province's orders instead he has replied to his constituents with misleading information.

There has been no offer to help, no offer to assist in procuring supplies, no interest to learn more about our ventilators or weak points in our local health care system – instead there are number of posts that undermine our medical officer of health in eluding a tweets to go to a neighbouring county for a walk on a trail. This is in direct contradiction to the Province's overall advice which is, "All Ontarians need to stay home unless absolutely necessary for essential trips, such as accessing health care services, groceries, picking up prescriptions or supporting vulnerable community members with meeting essential needs. If you must leave your home, go alone and stay at least two metres apart from others."

This isn't picking a fight, this is two Mayor's who have been working tirelessly to support our teams in ensuring that our local plan and the Province's plan is successful. We understand that people will second guess our decisions no matter what we decide, but it is important that people understand that we are



making decisions based on the best medical evidence and being aligned with the Province's strategy taking into account the unique aspects of our two Counties.

The residents of Haldimand and Norfolk, should know that we are ahead of the curve, and when you see the accomplishments of our staff and the capacity in our local health care system that we have created, we believe you will be as proud as we are and have comfort knowing that should we ever be faced with that worst cases scenario, we are ready in Haldimand and Norfolk. Both Mayors would have hoped for greater support and cooperation from our MPP but that has not existed, that being said the two Counties have worked extremely well together and also with various Provincial ministries and staff who are also in a difficult and trying time.

To that end, we would both like to formally thank our Premier and Provincial Government for all their efforts during this pandemic and for the emergency assistance that was advanced to our health unit. Three months ago, all we knew was that there was an undiagnosed cluster of viral pneumonia in a place called Wuhan, China. Since that time international borders have been closed, supply chains interrupted on levels never seen, they had to make a test for the virus and then mass produce it. Things don't just happen overnight – they take time, even when you don't have the luxury of time. No one is ever going to agree with every decision ever made, but during these unprecedented times, this headline reminds us that there is no place for petty local politics and partisanship during this crisis:

“Doug Ford's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic draws praise from friends and foes.”

“Nothing is our friend, nothing is our enemy. Everything, including our mistakes, is our teacher.”  
- Humble the Poet

Stay Safe and Healthy,

Mayor Kristal Chopp, Chair H-N Board of Health  
Mayor Ken Hewitt