

## Frequently Asked Questions During the State of Emergency

**Note: Decisions are subject to change as the situation evolves. This version was updated as of May 28, 2020.**

### ENFORCEMENT

#### **What is the City enforcing with respect to the Emergency Order?**

The City is taking an educational approach to enforcement to begin with. At this point, the following will be investigated:

- Continued operation of businesses that are directed to remain closed under Provincial Emergency Orders
- Public gatherings of more than five people
- Anyone ignoring the closure of outdoor recreational amenities such as playground equipment.

The City is **not** enforcing social distancing.

#### **Where can I direct my complaints?**

The City cannot accept complaints on social media. To file a complaint during the business day (Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.), please complete the COVID-19 Orders Noncompliance Complaint Form at [www.stcatharines.ca/COVID19](http://www.stcatharines.ca/COVID19); contact Citizens First via [CitizensFirst@stcatharines.ca](mailto:CitizensFirst@stcatharines.ca); or by phone at 905-688-5600. On weekends and after 5 p.m. on week days, enforcement concerns or complaints should be directed to Niagara Region's dispatch line at 905-984-3690 or 1-877-552-5579.

### CITY OPERATIONS AND EMPLOYEES

#### **What are essential services with respect to City services?**

Provincial orders have resulted in the closure of facilities and outdoor amenities to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Under the current provincial orders, it is the responsibility of each municipality to determine what is essential. If you see City crews working, those activities have been deemed essential by the municipality.

#### **How does the City determine what is deemed essential?**

During the State of Emergency, the City's objectives are to ensure the delivery of essential services; maintain facilities and assets; protect the safety and security of the public and staff; ensure the Corporation remains financially and fiscally responsible; and continue to work with our partners including Niagara Region, Niagara Region Public Health, among others. The City is taking a balanced approach in its decision making on what services need to be delivered based on those objectives.

## **What type of services will be delivered?**

Water, sewer, road and core infrastructure maintenance as well as construction that is deemed critical will continue. As well, the City will continue to maintain our buildings, cutting grass in parks and sports field to control weeds, overgrowth and ticks. This will also allow the City to open these facilities more quickly once the emergency is past and ensures no additional costs are incurred to bring parks and fields up to appropriate standards.

Services, programs and service levels are subject to change based on the evolving circumstances of COVID-19. For the latest information check the City website at [www.stcatharines.ca/COVID19](http://www.stcatharines.ca/COVID19)

## **What is the City doing to reduce the risk to City workers?**

The City takes the safety of our employees seriously and regularly consults with the Ministry of Labour and the regional, provincial, and federal public health agencies. The City is safeguarding municipal staff by taking a series of measures to limit contact between employees and the public, and minimize exposure to COVID-19.

All employees are required to stay home if sick and to use the self assessment tool provided by the province. Employees are required to self isolate in accordance with the assessment tool if deemed necessary. This is our first line of defense in protecting our employees.

For those employees that are at work, we have taken many steps to minimize the risk, including but not limited to:

- Staggering shift starting times to minimize the number of staff at dispatch;
- Increasing the frequency of cleaning our vehicles and facilities;
- Deploying staff to satellite locations to minimize the number in any one area;
- Providing hand cleaning stations to all crews;
- Changing our punch clock operating procedures to a touchless operation;
- Changing how we do our business to minimize staff interactions.
- Where possible, separating workplaces using physical distancing guidelines.

## **Shouldn't municipal workers be physically distancing or following public health guidelines?**

While public health guidelines are considered in our day-to-day work, they are for the public. Employees are regulated under the Ontario Health and Safety Act. All City Staff are working in accordance with this act.

Many of the essential services that the City provides require the employees to work in crews to perform the work safely. Guidelines around COVID – 19 do not replace existing health and safety regulations. Work that required crews before this emergency, still requires crews during the emergency.

## **Why is there more than one employee in a truck or City vehicle?**

The Ministry of Labour has recently reviewed our practices and procedures and have been satisfied and have not issued any direction to change them.

The provincial order limits groups of people to 5 or less. The City has further reduced that number to a maximum of 2 in any City vehicle (excluding Fire Services) to limit staff interactions. All appropriate regulations and guidelines under the Ontario Health and Safety Act and Ministry of Labour are being followed.

## **Why are employees not wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) when doing their work or together in City vehicles?**

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, has identified that for people without COVID-19 symptoms, wearing non-medical masks when in public is an additional measure to protect others, and reduce the risk of transmission when physical distancing is not possible.

In light of this, City employees will be permitted to wear face masks they bring from home, including those that are homemade, provided they do not interfere with any personal protective equipment required for their job.

Regardless of whether they are wearing a mask, employees are required to continue practicing physical distancing, washing or sanitizing their hands frequently, and to cover coughs and sneezes. This has been shown to be the most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The City of St. Catharines remains committed to the health and safety of its employees and adheres to the recommendations of Public Health and the Ministry of Labour.

## **Why is the City cutting grass and maintaining sports fields?**

Cutting grass in parks and sports fields allows the City to control weeds, overgrowth and ticks. It also ensures that the City doesn't incur additional costs to try and bring fields or parks back to appropriate standards. In the long run it ensures our fields will be financially viable, now that fields have opened for some limited use.

## **Why are contractors continuing to work on City Construction Projects?**

Construction and all supporting services which ensures the safe and reliable use of core infrastructure, such as water, sewer, roads, bridges, etc., are considered essential services.

The City is reviewing projects on a "project by projects basis" and are only proceeding with construction on projects that are considered critical in the short-term or an emergency. This includes, but is not limited to, the replacement of infrastructure that has failed or has the potential of failure, results in the mitigation of environmental concerns or could result in damage to private or public property.

With provincial restrictions lifting on construction the City will begin moving forward on some projects approved in the 2020 Capital Budget.

## **What else can be done to protect City employees?**

The City continues to monitor the situation daily and we will make modifications to the way we do our business as necessary to mitigate risks and comply with provincial regulations.

## **CEMETERIES**

### **Can I visit Victoria Lawn Cemetery?**

While indoor facilities, such as mausoleums, at the cemetery remain closed to the public, visitors are allowed to access the cemetery to visit grave sites. Anyone visiting the cemetery must maintain physical separation of two metres with others, and avoid gathering in groups of over five people.

### **What is happening to protect people at funerals?**

The province has directed no more than 10 attendees can participate in a funeral service. There is no contact permitted between funeral staff, mourners and cemetery staff, including pallbearers. Caskets/containers are to be placed on lowering devices by funeral staff, not family or mourners. We have enacted several other protocols to ensure safety during funeral services, visit <http://www.stcatharines.ca/VLC> for more information.

## **COUNCIL**

### **Is it legal for Council to meet electronically?**

New Provincial legislation allows municipalities to hold electronic meetings in place of regular council meetings as all levels of government move to slow the spread of the virus. It is critical for the City to move forward with important services that affect our residents and businesses.

Protecting public health must be our top priority at this time, so holding virtual meetings eliminates the need for councillors and residents to leave their homes to participate.

### **How can I make a delegation if it's an electronic meeting?**

If there is an item on the agendas of interest to you, email [clerks@stcatharines.ca](mailto:clerks@stcatharines.ca) outlining your thoughts regarding the item. Submissions are due by 3 p.m. the day before the Council meeting to ensure it is shared with council members well in advance of the meeting.

While written submissions are the preferred method of public input during this time, procedures have been put in place to allow for electronic delegations during City Council meetings. Those wishing to appear as a delegation electronically must apply via an online form at least three days prior to council, and participate in a Zoom training session prior to appearing. Visit <http://www.stcatharines.ca/CouncilMeetings> for more information.

### **Where can I find meeting dates and agendas?**

Visit [www.stcatharines.ca/council](http://www.stcatharines.ca/council) and you will find all of the information you need.

## RESIDENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORTS

### What is the City doing to help ease the financial burden of residents and businesses?

City Council recently approved a series of measures to help residents and businesses with the costs of municipal taxes and services in response to COVID-19 including:

- Deferring April 30 interim tax instalment to June 30
- Deferring the 2020 water and wastewater increase from April 1 to July 1
- Waiving tax penalty and interest charges until June 30
- Waiving payment for on-street parking, municipal parking lots and garages
- Waiving late fees for 2020 general business licences
- Waiving of fees associated with seasonal patio operation

See a list at [stcatharines.ca/COVID19](https://stcatharines.ca/COVID19) under the Payments tab.

The City's Economic Development Team is also assisting businesses who have questions and are looking for additional information on government programs and supports. They can be contacted at [edceconomic@stcatharines.ca](mailto:edceconomic@stcatharines.ca).

## WHAT'S OPEN AND CLOSED

### Are City parks and trails open?

With the lifting of some restrictions on outdoor amenities by the Province of Ontario the City has opened parks, trails and other outdoor areas for certain types of passive use. Specifically, residents are able to use parks for more than walk-through uses, with some limitations. Residents must still abide by restrictions limiting groups to no more than five people and maintaining a two-metre physical separation.

Passive activities are now permitted in these areas including:

- Bringing a chair or blanket to relax in parks
- Kicking a ball, playing catch, flying a kite, and other such activities with members of their own households
- Individual activities such as yoga or exercising, provided they are not in a group or class

In addition to easing certain restrictions the City is opening some previously closed amenities for use, effective Tuesday, May 19. These amenities are:

- Leash-free dog parks
- Tennis courts
- Skate parks

Organized sports are still restricted, given their necessity for gathering of groups and close physical contact. At this time park and outdoor amenities such as playground equipment, benches, the Lakeside Park Carousel, and washrooms remain closed to limit the spread of COVID-19 on shared surfaces.

### **Why are City facilities and some amenities closed?**

Closure is one of several steps we are taking to protect the health of our staff and community. Closing our facilities further limits the public spaces individuals can gather, interact in close proximity and possibly spread COVID-19. Watch [www.stcatharines.ca/COVID19](http://www.stcatharines.ca/COVID19) for more information and updates.

### **What does the state of emergency mean?**

The declaration means we are continuing to take COVID-19 seriously, and continuing to focus on best practices to slow the spread. It is a way for us to remind our residents that this is serious, and we all need to continue to do our part as physical distancing and isolation become increasingly important. For more details visit [stcatharines.ca/COVID19](http://stcatharines.ca/COVID19)

## **COVID HEALTH RELATED QUESTIONS**

### **Where can I get Public Health advice?**

Health-related questions or advice can to be directed to Niagara Region's Public Health hotline at 905.688.8248 or visit [niagararegion.ca/covid19](http://niagararegion.ca/covid19). The City does not have public health officials on staff, but the Region is Niagara's health authority, with a dedicated team of health professionals who can offer relevant, up-to-date advice.

### **How many cases are in St. Catharines?**

Niagara Region is responsible for this data and provides daily updates related to COVID-19 cases in various Niagara municipalities. Their public health nurses are actively tracing confirmed positive COVID-19 cases to provide the most up-to-date information to the public: <http://niagararegion.ca/covid19>.

## FIRES

### **Is the City part of the Ontario burn ban? Can I have a fire? Can I burn brush?**

No, the City's open air burning bylaw is still in effect, meaning no outdoor fires are permitted except for cooking. Any fire (whether it's in a chimenea, fire pit, bowl, fireplace, etc.) which does not use propane or natural gas is deemed open-air burning and is prohibited and will be extinguished. See [www.stcatharines.ca/backyardfires](http://www.stcatharines.ca/backyardfires) for more details.

### **What qualifies as a cooking fire?**

There are a variety of regulations, including time, location, size of the fire, material being burned and more. All of the rules can be found at [www.stcatharines.ca/backyardfires](http://www.stcatharines.ca/backyardfires). The fire must be completely extinguished immediately upon the completion of cooking.

### **Complaints about open-air burns as they are happening**

If you have a complaint about an open-air burn and it is still occurring, please call dispatch at 905-684-4311. If it is an emergency and there are urgent safety concerns, please call 911.

### **Complaints about open-air burns afterwards**

Please report all of the details you have (time, address, and any other helpful information) to Citizens First, by emailing [citizensfirst@stcatharines.ca](mailto:citizensfirst@stcatharines.ca) or calling 905.688.5600. They will ensure it gets to the appropriate staff for follow up.

### **What are the penalties?**

The owner of a property where an open air fire has occurred is subject to a minimum fee of \$250 for the extinguishment of the non-compliant fire and may be prosecuted for contravention of the [by-law](#).

## PARKING

### **Is there free parking downtown?**

Payment is not required, on a temporary basis, for on-street or in municipal parking lots and garages. This is to take away numerous people touching the same parking machines throughout the day. Parking enforcement for lack of payment will also be suspended until further notice.

## **What about parking enforcement for non-payment issues?**

Parking enforcement is currently limited to safety-related issues such as fire-routes, accessible parking, no-parking areas and fire hydrants. Concerns can be reported to Citizens First at 905.688.5600.

## **My parking permit has expired. What do I do?**

All residential permits that expire while we are closed to the public will still be honoured. Any new permits or renewals can be purchased once City Hall reopens. Currently non-payment enforcement has been suspended in municipal parking lots and garages.

## **TRANSIT**

### **Where can I find information on the routes and schedules?**

The St. Catharines Transit Commission has modified its schedule for essential travel to ensure service reliability and safety of employees and passengers. You can learn more at [www.yourbus.com](http://www.yourbus.com) where you can find a real-time map and link to a mobile app as well to help.

### **Who do I contact if I have a Transit complaint(s)?**

St. Catharines Transit is managed by the St. Catharines Transit Commission. Any complaints must be sent directly to the commission and its management team. Visit [yourbus.com/contact](http://yourbus.com/contact) for details, or call 905-687-5555.

## **WASTE**

### **Who do I contact about my recycling, yard waste, organics and waste pickup or concerns?**

Waste management (waste, recycling and organics) is a service provided by [Niagara Region](http://Niagara Region). You are best to seek support from them on this one. They have a Facebook page, or you can find more info and reach out to them via their website <https://niagararegion.ca/waste/>.