

City of Keene
New Hampshire

March 25, 2020

TO: Keene City Council

FROM: Mayor George Hansel

RE: FOR PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION – Potential “shelter in place” or “stay at home” orders

There has been a lot of interest in Governor Sununu issuing a “shelter in place” or “stay at home” order for the State of New Hampshire. Considering this public interest, I thought it would be helpful to explain what such an order could look like, how we are preparing for such an order locally, and what similar actions have been taken in surrounding states.

I have discussed the possibility of such an order with Governor Sununu’s office. I am not against it. COVID-19 poses a serious threat to New Hampshire citizens and our best way to combat this virus is through extreme social distancing. Such an order is one tool in the toolbox. It would not absolve us of our responsibility to consistently remind our citizens to practice appropriate social distancing. If you see something that may be increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in our community, reach out to my office at mayor@ci.keene.nh.us or call (603) 357-9805. The City is being proactive to keep this community safe.

Massachusetts “Stay at Home” order – On Monday, March 23rd, Governor Charlie Baker of Massachusetts issued a “Stay at Home” advisory which requires the closure of nonessential businesses and further encourages residents to stay home whenever possible. The order went into effect on Tuesday, March 24th at noon. Residents are not being ordered to stay in their homes for days on end. Part of Governor Baker’s order also restricts public gatherings to 10 people or less. This order is currently scheduled to be in place until Tuesday, April 7th at noon.

Vermont “Stay Home, Stay Safe” order – On Tuesday, March 24th, Governor Phil Scott issued a “Stay Home, Stay Safe” order for the State of Vermont. This is scheduled to go into effect on Wednesday, March 25th at 5PM. Like the Massachusetts order, all businesses and not-for-profit entities not expressly exempted are being instructed to suspend all in-person business operations. Operations that can be conducted online or by phone and sales that can be facilitated with curbside pickup or delivery only can continue. Currently, Governor Scott’s order is set to be in place until Wednesday, April 15th, though it may be extended or shortened as needed.

Key points of “Shelter in Place” or “Stay at Home” orders:

- Only the Governor, or potentially the Federal Government, has the authority to issue such an order in the State of New Hampshire.
- While this could be different in New Hampshire, orders in other states have called for non-essential businesses to cease in-person operations. It’s important to understand that many businesses are considered “essential” and would be exempt from such an order. Ultimately, the State of New Hampshire would provide guidance as to which businesses are considered essential. Massachusetts posted a special [web page](#) to help businesses determine what is defined as essential status. Additionally, the Federal Department of Homeland Security has issued [guidance](#) on what industries and workers are critical to supporting our nation’s vital infrastructure.

- Orders focus on policies to promote extreme social distancing. Citizens should already be practicing these, even without an official order.
 - Businesses should take proactive measures to ensure social distancing (designate with signage, tape, etc.), hygiene (make hand sanitizer readily available), and implement operating hours for vulnerable populations.
 - Comply with the latest [CDC guidelines](#)
 - Stay at home except for essential reasons, such as: personal safety, to shop for groceries or medicine, curbside pickup for meals or goods, medical care, exercise, care of others, and work for individuals who are unable to work remotely.
 - Stay at least 6' away from others in public situations and avoid gatherings of more than 10 people.

City activity to prepare for a potential “Shelter in Place” or “Stay at Home” order:

- Public messaging is being established to communicate how such an order may impact local businesses and citizens.
- Community Development Director, Rhett Lamb, is drafting an “essential services” plan. In addition, all departments have ramped up cross training for essential services.
- We have started utilizing technology to conduct public meetings without participants being physically present at City Hall. Citizens are being encouraged to perform transactions with the City using electronic means. The City Manager has also been working to allow more City employees to work remotely.

Any additional questions or concerns on a potential “stay at home” order for the State of New Hampshire can be directed to the Mayor’s office.