

LETTER TO THE TOWN REGARDING CORONAVIRUS

DATE: March 21, 2020

FROM: Shane Fox, Town Manager, Blowing Rock, NC

RE: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update and Local Efforts

To our beloved Blowing Rock residents, businesses, and stakeholders,

I am writing to you today to provide an update regarding COVID-19, as well as to highlight the plans in place in our community to address any local implications of this virus.

Watauga County, App HealthCare, the Town of Blowing Rock, and neighboring jurisdictions, have been preparing for emerging infectious diseases for many years. While COVID-19 is a new virus, the coordination, communication efforts, and infrastructure around our public health preparedness is firmly in place.

To date, there have been two confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the county. App HealthCare is receiving regular updates from NC Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on this rapidly evolving situation. The department is in regular contact with key town officials and Appalachian Regional HealthCare to discuss status reports, directives, and messaging for the community. In addition, your Town Manager is participating in daily conference calls hosted by App HealthCare, which offer updates and guidance for County school officials, municipalities, and other stakeholders in the community.

Following direction from Governor Roy Cooper and State officials, the Town of Blowing Rock will be making several changes to Town programs, activities, and access to municipal buildings in an effort to keep residents and Town employees healthy and safe.

Blowing Rock Police Officers and the Blowing Rock Fire and Rescue Department will continue to respond to emergency calls for service. If you have an emergency, dial 911 and officers will respond as always. For non-emergency Police calls please dial 828-295-5210.

Blowing Rock Town Hall: Beginning on Monday, March 16, there will be no public access to Town Hall until further notice. All Town Hall staff will continue to work and will be available to respond to any questions and provide services by email and phone by calling 828-295-5200. We have our administrative staff answering calls and offering assistance during normal business hours.

A locked drop-box is also located in front of Town Hall where payments and other Town Hall correspondence may be dropped off. This box is checked regularly each business day.

Planning and Zoning will continue to work and provide service via phone calls, emails, and appointments as needed. Please call 828-295-5200.

Due to COVID-19 concerns, commercial trash pick-up will be on Wednesday only. Residential trash pick-up is on schedule as normal.

Blowing Rock Water Treatment Plant and the Blowing Rock Waste-Water Treatment Plant will continue operations as normal. All Staff are present as normal. Streets Department is working on rotating schedules and are present for issues and repairs that arise.

Effective on Saturday, March 14, the Blowing Rock Parks and Recreation Department will postpone all programs, classes, rentals and events until further notice.

Local Restaurant and Business Support: Dine-in service at all restaurants, cafes, and coffee shops is suspended; however, many restaurants are offering take-out or delivery options. Town Partners at the Chamber and TDA have developed resources to help support these restaurants through their websites.

<https://blowingrock.com/>
<https://www.blowingrockncchamber.com/home>

The community is also encouraged to Shop Local. Many stores are offering pick-up and delivery options and more plans will be shared in the coming days. Resources to support local businesses are also available on the town websites.

Churches:

Our Town Churches are here for support and assistance:

Rumple Memorial Presbyterian -Kathy Beach
828-295-7675
Pastorrumple@gmail.com

St. Mary's of the Hills Episcopal - Andrew Hege
828-295-7323
rector@stmaryofthehills.org

Blowing Rock Methodist - Michael Brown
828-372-7009
mbb4567@yahoo.com

First Baptist of Blowing Rock-Rusty Guenther
828-295-7715
rusty@firstbaptistblowingrock.com

Statewide Information:

Governor Roy Cooper and state officials issued new orders for all communities in North Carolina that include:

- Restricting all gatherings to 25 people or fewer (this includes civic, public, leisure, faith-based events, sporting events with spectators, concerts, and venues like fitness centers, private clubs, and theatres)
- Temporarily eliminating all on-premises dining at bars, restaurants, cafes and other eating establishments and allowing take-out options ONLY (grocery stores are exempt from this order to allow people to purchase food and supplies)

As of March 19, an Order of Abatement of Imminent Hazard issued by the Secretary of the NC Department of Health and Human Services, states that “seating areas of restaurants and bars constitute an imminent hazard for the spread of COVID-19.” Restaurants shall close all seating areas immediately and bars are directed to close immediately. Restaurants are restricted to carry-out, drive-through, and delivery to ensure food is available while maintaining social distancing. Restaurant staff are not permitted to serve patrons indoors or in the outdoor seating area, and all areas of North Carolina are subject to mass gathering restrictions and social distancing guidelines. If a restaurant has outdoor seating, onsite consumption in the outdoor seating area is not permitted pursuant to the Order of Abatement.

- Closing all public and private schools

Guidance on Social Distancing:

Public Health officials agree that social distancing – keeping people as physically separate as possible – can help slow the spread of COVID-19 and “flatten the curve” to limit the numbers of cases of infection on any given day. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has detailed resources for our community.

1. Refrain from interacting with vulnerable groups or individuals – grandparents, chronically ill; immune compromised.
2. In public, avoid touching things that have been touched by many others – doors knobs, push buttons, credit card machine buttons, etc. If you must use a high touch object, wash hands immediately.
3. Don’t go to necessary places like grocery stores during high peak hours; remain at least 6 feet away from others when shopping or in lines; use delivery services if possible.
4. Opt for activities that allow you and family members to keep distances from others. For parents, this means not allowing playdates; not allowing students who are out of school to congregate together in large groups, both inside homes and outside.

5. Stay at home as much as possible. Businesses and employers are encouraging people to work from home. Look for ways to stay in contact with others by phone, social media, online meeting platforms and other remote technology.

Please continue to be vigilant in following the restrictions in place; remind children, teens and young adults to adhere to these restrictions; and check on neighbors and those who may be frail, vulnerable, lonely or feel isolated.

https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20_coronavirus-guidance_8.5x11_315PM.pdf

Mental Health:

Visit the App HealthCare website for Mental Health resources and regular updates.

<https://www.apphealthcare.com/>

Help and information regarding Coronavirus is also available by calling North Carolina 2-1-1.

The Town of Blowing Rock is focused on the health, safety, and welfare of our citizens, staff, and families. Town staff and officials appreciate the many individual, grassroots, and outreach efforts offered to residents as we all work together to protect our community. Thank you for your understanding as we work through these difficult times.