

Message from the Mayor, April 8, 2020

Easter, Passover carry a coronavirus message

Today's Coronavirus update seems especially timely coming during Passover and Holy Week, when the Jewish and Christian faiths mark the passage through death to new life. It is impossible not to be struck by the similarities with today, as our lives have been touched by the sickness and death of family and friends, and while we look forward to better days ahead.

As of today, April 8, 2020, there are 3 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Chatham Township, bringing our total to 34. Thankfully there have been no known deaths due to the coronavirus among Chatham Township residents.

The total for Morris County is 2,239 confirmed cases, with 87 deaths attributed to complications caused by the coronavirus. While we in Chatham Township have been spared so far, many around us have not.

There has been much speculation on when the peak of infections in New Jersey will arrive. The advice from healthcare experts that seems to make the most sense is that our so-called peak may be several weeks away; that it may look more like a downward sloping plateau than a peak; and that even when new infections start to decline we will still see increasing deaths due to the numbers of critically ill people already in intensive care.

The one thing we do know is that we each have the power to save lives and make those projections better by what we do. In that context, there have been a number of important new developments since my last Mayor's Message just three days ago on Monday:

Phil Murphy yesterday extended the State of Emergency by 30 days through early May. His executive order continues the guidelines to stay at home; avoid all non-essential trips, and to practice safe social distancing from everyone who is not a member of your immediate household. These are lifesaving measures, especially for the most vulnerable among us, and it is vital that everyone continues to follow these guidelines.

– The CDC has recommended that everyone wear a face mask when among other people, a change from previous guidance recommending face masks only for health care workers and those with symptoms of COVID-19.

Murphy yesterday closed all state and county parks, including the popular trails of the nearby Loantaka Preserve and Giralda Farms. This measure is especially painful for all of us who walked the trails for fresh air and exercise. However it will take tough measures and sacrifice in these crucial next few weeks to defeat the coronavirus. Township parks remain open for passive use such as walking or jogging. Playgrounds, tennis courts and basketball courts are closed, and athletic fields are closed to all group activities.

Morris County previously closed the trails of the Outdoor Education Center on Southern Boulevard in the Township, and the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is expected to close the boardwalks of its Wildlife Observation Area on New Vernon Road in Long Hill. The popularity of both facilities made safe distancing impossible.

The Compost Area on Tanglewood Lane which normally re-opens in early April remains closed during these peak weeks that will be crucial in defeating the coronavirus. This decision is taken in compliance with the Governor's stay-at-home order, and for staffing reasons because our DPW is working split shifts and has been down four members due to one vacancy, an injury, and two precautionary quarantines due to exposure to the coronavirus. We hope that conditions will allow us to open the Compost Area soon, and ask homeowners to stockpile their yard waste materials until then.

We are facing in the next few weeks what is expected to be the most serious and deadly period of the pandemic.

As Mayor, I want to again thank and congratulate everyone who has been careful to follow the social distancing and stay-at-home guidelines which are so important to protect our community. We are now being asked to do even more. It won't be easy, but it will save lives.

It will be a different Easter and Passover, with no large religious ceremonies or family gatherings. But we can celebrate together from a distance, and we can look forward to a time in the near future when we can celebrate together again.

Please continue to be careful and stay healthy.

Michael Kelly

Chatham Township Mayor