

1. WHAT ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUNICIPAL OPERATIONS AND STAFFING?

MNL and PMA recommend that all municipal offices and public facilities should now be closed to the public including appointments. Business continuity planning in the case of an emergency, if available, should now be in place. All municipalities should explore and encourage banking online or through the phone, or payments through cheque/money order if online banking is not a possibility.

Where and when possible, office staff should be working from home. If staff cannot work from home, advised social distancing guidelines and hygiene practices should be maintained in the office. Public works and outside staff should follow social distancing and hygiene practices and should work from home on an on-call basis, when possible.

2. WE ARE A SMALL COMMUNITY WITH A SMALL MAINTENANCE STAFF. IF OUR STAFF BECOME ILL, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Ensure anyone who is feeling ill calls 811 and self-isolates for their protection and the protection of others. Reach out to neighbouring communities now to discuss whether there is an opportunity to share staff across the region should the need arise – particularly for critical services like drinking water. Mutual aid agreements can be helpful in these situations. If all or a large portion of your staff fall ill, you will have to curtail services unless you are able to work out an arrangement with neighbouring municipalities. If you are unable to find another solution, contact the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

3. IS THERE A GRACE PERIOD FOR COUNCIL TO OPERATE WITHOUT QUORUM AND/OR ONLINE MEETING CAPACITY?

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment issued a circular to municipalities on March 23 recommending that council meetings be postponed for the time being. You can read the circular [here](#). MNL has developed a solution with TELUS Business to support councils operating remotely in the future. Email bpower@municipalnl.ca for more information.

4. MY TOWN OFFICE IS CO-LOCATED WITH OTHER BUSINESSES AND/OR ORGANIZATIONS, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

MNL and PMA recommend that all town offices be closed to the public. If you are co-located with a facility that remains open, such as the post office, and you are not able to facilitate office staff working from home, we recommend following the safety guidelines put forward by Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (click here for [COVID-19](#)

[webpage](#)) and Government of Canada for social distancing and environmental cleaning and ventilation of public spaces. (click here for [Public Health Canada](#)).

5. WHAT FINANCIAL AID, IF ANY, WILL BE IN PLACE FOR MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS?

We have not been given any information, to date, on financial aid for municipal governments under Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan or from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

6. THERE IS NO DISINFECTANT AVAILABLE IN MY COMMUNITY, WHAT DO WE DO AS A MUNICIPALITY?

Disinfectant shortages exist right across the country. We are working with our partners through MNL Advantage to source available supplies. Please watch your inbox and this website for updates.

7. WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT OUR MUNICIPAL OPERATING GRANT? WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH THOSE?

MNL has requested that the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment consider processing all MOGs immediately and following-up with Community Sustainability Partnership accountability once the COVID-19 crisis has passed. We are awaiting a response and will provide an update as soon as possible.

UPDATE March 26, 2020: Municipal Affairs and Environment will be processing Municipal Operating Grants as soon as the provincial budgetary process allows. Councils should expect to receive the first installment in mid-April.

In addition, the department is fast-tracking the payment of Provincial Gas Tax transfers. Councils should expect to receive those payments in mid-April as well.

In addition, the department has communicated to the major banks that they are providing a blanket extension to loan agreements. This means that getting a payment deferral from your bank will not cause your loan to extend beyond the deadline in your agreement with MAE.

8. WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE FLOW OF MONEY FOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS?

MNL has asked the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment for guidance on this issue.

9. SOMEONE IN MY COMMUNITY IS NOT SELF-ISOLATING BUT THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

There is a reporting process in place by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. If you wish to communicate a concern about an individual or business that may be acting in contradiction to the orders issued under the *Public Health and Promotion Act*, please complete the [Public Report Form](#).

10. IF THERE IS A PUB IN TOWN THAT DOESN'T CLOSE, WHAT IS OUR ROLE AS A COUNCIL AND AS A COMMUNITY?

As per the Chief Medical Officer and the public health state of emergency now in place, all restaurants and bars are to be closed. Take-out food is still allowed. If you wish to communicate a concern about an individual or business that may be acting in contradiction to the orders issued under the *Public Health and Promotion Act*, please complete the [Public Report Form](#).

11. MANY OF OUR FIRE DEPARTMENTS ARE VOLUNTEER. WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT NOT BEING PROPERLY EQUIPPED AND OUR FIREFIGHTERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT RESPONDING TO CALLS WITH POSSIBLE COVID –19. WHAT DO WE DO?

The Department of Municipal Affairs has issued the following guidance document ([click here](#)) for fire departments. If you need emergency PPE, contact the Fire Commissioner's office at 709-729-1608. If you would like to purchase PPE through MNL's procurement program, MNL Advantage, please email purchasing@municipalnl.ca

12. WHAT WOULD COUNCIL'S ROLE BE IF WE HAVE TO CONVERT BUILDINGS FOR PATIENT USE? SHOULD WE START NOW?

We recommend that you connect with your local and regional health authorities to discuss need and availability.

13. WHAT MIGHT BE AVAILABLE TO US IN TERMS OF RESOURCES SHOULD THE NEED ARISE TO CONVERT A BUILDING?

The best information we have says that the provincial government will provide all resources required should any public building be acquired for use by the provincial government.

14. WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE AVAILABILITY OF FOOD IN OUR PROVINCE, AND IN OUR COMMUNITIES. WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH RESPECT TO FOOD SECURITY?

The Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador are taking measures to ensure that food supply chains remain open and secure during this time. Grocers are also taking steps to put limits on food quantities that can be purchased at any one time. Municipal leaders should encourage their residents not to panic buy.

Some municipalities are working with local community groups to ensure that local vulnerable populations can access the food that they need.

15. WE HAVE A COME HOME YEAR PLANNED FOR THE SUMMER. HOW LONG CAN WE EXPECT THESE MEASURES TO CONTINUE AND HOW SHOULD WE THEREFORE APPROACH OUR COMMUNITY EVENTS AND PLANNING?

The best information we have says we should be prepared for the situation to last several months, perhaps to July.

16. SHOULD TAXES BE REDUCED FOR SEASONAL BUSINESSES WHO WILL NOW NOT BE OPENING AT THEIR REGULAR TIME, IF AT ALL?

Some municipalities are deferring taxes (allowing businesses and residents to pay later in the year) without interest. This is a question that depends deeply on your financial capacity and relationship with your business community. You need to consider how well your business community will be able to recover once the crisis is over and the impact on your ability to continue to provide essential public services.

17. WE HAVE A LOCAL RECYCLING DEPOT, CAN WE SHUT IT DOWN? SHOULD WE SHUT IT DOWN?

Municipal Green Depots should close. As per the direction from the Provincial Government under the *Public Health Protection and Promotion Act*, all businesses that are not considered essential services should immediately close. Further to that, the MMSB has announced that Green Depots are now closed to the public to help limit the spread of COVID-19. ([click here](#) to read the MMSB update on green depots).

18. WE HAVE A NUMBER OF SERVICE CLUBS WITH INFRASTRUCTURE AND BUILDINGS TO MAINTAIN IN OUR COMMUNITY? WHAT PROVISIONS ARE IN PLACE FOR THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR, FINANCIALLY?

We are aware that municipalities are concerned about their community sector. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced on March 24 that financial provisions would be in place for this sector. More details are not currently available.

19. WE RECOGNIZE THAT PRIVACY IS IMPORTANT AT THIS TIME. IF THERE IS A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19 IN A MUNICIPALITY OR AN AREA, WILL COUNCIL BE INFORMED? WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COUNCIL IN SUCH A SITUATION?

Municipal leaders are not informed when cases are present in their communities because of privacy, nor do they have any formal role in the process.

20. CAN YOU COME IN CONTACT WITH THE VIRUS BY HANDLING INCOMING MAIL AND DOING FAXES AND PHOTOCOPIES FOR RESIDENTS?

The chief medical officer indicates that the risk of transmission through the mail is low, or negligible. MNL and PMA recommend that municipal offices should now be closed to the public. Please read Canada Post's response to COVID-19 [here](#).

21. THE WASHROOMS IN OUR MUNICIPAL BUILDING ARE FOR PUBLIC AND STAFF. WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTING?

MNL and PMA recommend that municipal offices should now be closed to the public. If you are not able to facilitate office staff working from home, we recommend following the safety guidelines put forward by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Click [here](#).

22. WHAT SHOULD MUNICIPALITIES BE DOING FOR OUR RESIDENTS, ESPECIALLY OUR SENIORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE POPULATIONS?

Seniors should stay home. Municipalities and community groups should be working together to ensure that vulnerable populations have access to supplies and support through communication and a drop-off/pick up system.

- The province has partnered with the Canadian Red Cross to support those in self-isolation, the number is 1-800-863-6582. This service is available to all residents and visitors.
- For anyone finding it difficult to cope or feel anxious, Bridge the Gapp offers many mental health support services. Please visit www.bridgethegapp.ca for more information.
- For anyone feeling isolated and alone during COVID-19, they are encouraged to reach out and speak with a trained mental health peer supporter. Call the Provincial Warm Line at 1-855-753-2560 9:00 am to 12:00 am daily.
- If anyone is experiencing a mental health crisis, they should call the Mental Health Crisis Line at 1-888-737-4668, available 24 hours a day, or use the Crisis Text service by texting 686868.

23. SHOULD OUTDOOR MUNICIPAL FACILITIES, SUCH AS RINKS AND PLAYGROUNDS, REMAIN OPEN?

No. All facilities where people and children gather should now be closed. This includes playgrounds, parks, beaches, etc.

24. IF THE PROVINCE CALLS A STATE OF EMERGENCY UNDER THE EMERGENCY SERVICES ACT, WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR MUNICIPAL STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES LIKE WATER AND SEWER?

There is no direct mention of municipal services in the Emergency Services Act. However, the Emergency Services Act does supersede all other Acts. We have submitted this question to the provincial government for guidance.

UPDATE March 27, 2020: The province is currently in a State of Emergency under the Public Health Protection and Promotion Act. MNL is working closely with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment on getting clarification. We do know that individual municipalities cannot issue a state of emergency as a result of pandemic under the Municipalities Act. Should the province choose to use the Emergency Services Act instead to address the situation, MNL will get further direction on what this means for municipalities and their essential services and staff.

25. WE HAVE A PORTABLE WATER DISPENSING UNIT IN OUR COMMUNITY. HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT IT IS SAFE FOR CONTINUED PUBLIC USE?

This is a critical question and we are awaiting direction from the provincial government.

26. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THAT THOSE ESSENTIAL SERVICES/BUSINESSES CURRENTLY OPEN ARE FOLLOWING THE PROPER PROTOCOLS FOR THE SAFETY OF STAFF AND THE PUBLIC?

Public health officials working with the RCMP and the RNC are responsible. You can notify the authorities of those not adhering to the public health orders by completing the [Public Report Form](#).

27. WE CANNOT BRING AUDITORS INTO OUR OFFICE AT THIS TIME. WILL THERE BE AN EXTENSION FOR THE SUBMISSION OF FINANCIAL AUDITS TO MAE?

UPDATE March 26, 2020: The Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment is aware of these concerns and working on a solution.

28. I AM A MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEE AND I AM NOW WORKING FROM HOME. WHAT IF I HAVE TO HANDLE SENSITIVE DOCUMENTS?

UPDATE March 27, 2020: As per the Municipalities Act, the town clerk is the safe keeper of all documents. MNL is seeking further direction from the Department of Municipal Affairs and the Privacy Commissioners Office.

29. Does the Province or Federal Government have anything in place for Municipalities that are having to lay workers off.

MNL is seeking clarification on this question.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR MUNICIPALITIES?

Stay informed, keep following the MNL COVID-19 site (<https://municipalnl.ca/covid-19/>) and join us for the next round of regional calls – invitations to these are coming.

If you have questions, please email us at COVID19@municipalnl.ca