

## LETTER TO THE TOWN REGARDING CORONAVIRUS

- **DATE:** March 23, 2020
- **FROM:** John A. Ward III, Town Manager & Rennie Brantz, Mayor
- **RE:** Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update and Local Efforts

### **To our citizens, businesses, and visitors:**

The following information will provide an update regarding COVID-19 and Town of Boone operations.

#### ***Preparations:***

Watauga County, App HealthCare, the Town of Boone, 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 in place. All partners are supporting and coordinating with App HealthCare as they take the lead for our community on our response efforts.

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. App HealthCare is in regular contact with key town officials and Appalachian Regional HealthCare to discuss status reports, directives, and messaging for the community. In addition, Town Manager John Ward 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.

Response efforts are evaluating changes to date, available resources, and adjustments that may be needed moving forward are underway. Preparation, implementation, and continued modifications will be necessary as we adjust to changing conditions. While we should all hope for the best, Town of Boone staff are hard at work preparing for the unknown future.

#### ***Town Operations:***

In accordance with direction from Governor Roy Cooper and State officials, the Town of Boone has made several changes to Town programs, activities, and access to municipal buildings in an effort to keep residents and employees healthy and safe.

The Police Department and the Fire 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 828-268-6900.

Town Hall will be closed to public access until further notice. 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 828-268-6200. Our administrative staff is answering calls and offering assistance during normal business hours, 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. Community links to updated information and contacts can be obtained on the Town of Boone Web Site at [www.townofboone.net](http://www.townofboone.net). A locked drop-box is also located on the side of Town Hall where utility payments and other Town Hall correspondence may be dropped off. This box is checked regularly each business day.

Planning and Inspections staff will continue to work and provide service via phone calls, emails, and appointments as needed. To contact them, please call 828-268-6960.

Our Water Treatment Plant and Waste-Water Treatment Plant will continue operations as normal. Staffing has been adjusted to ensure proper safety measures. Our Public Works - Streets Division is working on rotating schedules and are present for issues and repairs that arise.

The Cultural Resources Department and the Jones House are closed until further notice. Staff in this department continues to work and can be reached at 828-268-6280.

All events scheduled at the Daniel Boone Park and Botanical Gardens are cancelled, but the grounds are open to the public, as long as visitors follow all appropriate social distancing recommendations.

The Boone Greenway remains open to the public, as long as visitors follow all appropriate social distancing recommendations.

Finance and Human Resources staff will continue to work and will be available to respond to questions and provide service by email and phone by calling 828-268-6200.

Residential trash pick-up is on a normal schedule. In an effort to protect collection workers so they can continue this service, please make sure to place all garbage in a garbage bag, which reduces their exposure potential!

**Statewide Information:**

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

- Restricting all gatherings to 50 people or fewer
- 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)
- Closing all public K-12 schools until May 15, 2020, unless extended
- Closing all bowling alleys, indoor exercise facilities, indoor/outdoor pools, live performance venues, and movie theaters
- Closing all barber shops, beauty salons, nail salons, massage facilities and tattoo parlors.

***PRECAUTIONS:***

People are encouraged to take common sense precautions to prevent the spread of all infectious diseases, including COVID-19:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds at a time.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- If you are sick, stay home.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Do not reuse tissue after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched.

***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 recommendations to follow.

- Refrain from interacting with vulnerable groups or individuals – grandparents, chronically ill; immune compromised.

- 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.
- When in public spaces, stay at least 6 feet away from other people.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

### ***MORE INFORMATION***

- Centers for Disease Control: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)
- NCDHHS: [ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus](http://ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus)
- AppHealthCare: [www.apphealthcare.com](http://www.apphealthcare.com)
- Appalachian Regional Health Care System: [apprhs.org/COVID19](http://apprhs.org/COVID19)
- Appalachian State University: [www.appstate.edu/go/coronavirus](http://www.appstate.edu/go/coronavirus)
- Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute: [www.cccti.edu/COVID-19/](http://www.cccti.edu/COVID-19/)
- Boone Chamber: <https://www.boonechamber.com/>
- Watauga Democrat: <https://www.wataugademocrat.com/>

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

### ***Moving Forward:***

Each day we are faced with new challenges when dealing with the response to COVID-19 in our community. Uncertainty, fear, and frustration are all normal feelings that come into play when our lives, work, and schools have been disrupted. Now is the time to follow precautions and social distancing guidance more than ever to help those on the front lines providing vital community services so that their efforts are supported by all those who they are working to protect.

The Town of Boone will continue to focus on the health, safety, and welfare of our citizens, employees and visitors. We are working hard to make sure that all Town of Boone services continue without disruption. Our staff are dedicated to their jobs, they care about what you are going through, and they are working every day to help everyone they can during this challenging time.

We greatly appreciate all of the individuals, community groups, and organizations who have provided much needed assistance throughout the community. Now and in the future, it will be more important than ever to focus our support on those businesses that have been closed in an effort to stop the spread of this virus. Down the road when the current restrictions are lifted, we must help our local business owners rebuild and reopen so that Boone can come back stronger than ever. Buy Local – Buy Boone!

In the meantime, you can play a vital role in the greater community effort. Please stay home as much as possible to protect the most vulnerable in our community. Please call, email, or text a friend, co-worker, or neighbor to check to see if they are okay. COVID-19 is impacting us individually, as a community, as a state, and as a nation. Our collective strength and community spirit will be key to defeating this virus, protecting our community, and supporting each other.