

Subject: COVID-19 Weekly Update – April 3rd

Dear Staff,

I hope you are all doing as well as can be, under the circumstances.

Another week has passed, and a lot has happened in the world and our region. I'm gratified to note that our work continues; you have all made incredible adjustments during this time. Let it never again be said that Metro Vancouver is not nimble or flexible or quick – when the world seemingly turned upside down, you all responded and adapted, almost overnight.

There are a few things I'd like to update you on this week, regarding our ongoing COVID-19 response.

Metro Vancouver Operations

We continue to take measures to ensure ongoing safety for our staff, and the public we serve. Across all of our departments, we have made adjustments to our work. As noted previously, my direction is clear: our work is critical and residents of the region are counting on us. Our staff will always be able to look back on this time and be immensely proud of their efforts. To that end, it's essential that our work is conducted safely. If it's not safe, we need to stop and adjust to make it so. We continue to follow all direction from the authorities, including our Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry. New safety protocols have been released, operations have adapted accordingly, and we are monitoring the situation continuously. Our senior executive team meets twice-daily to monitor and support continuing developments related to the current crisis. We will also be commencing support of a new COVID-19 Response Task Force, which will be led by Chair Dhaliwal, and all of the region's mayors. The Task Force will help to ensure we're responding accordingly, and supporting the rebuilding of our local economy once we're on the other side of this crisis; our staff, our work and our projects will be instrumental in this regard.

Field Supplies

I understand that in some areas of our field there are concerns about not having sufficient stockpiles of hand sanitizer and sanitizer products available. I have made it clear that securing this is our utmost priority for today and tomorrow, and I expect it to be on site as soon as possible and distributed immediately to all staff that require it. We will continue to work through all avenues to get the supplies we need.

Metro Vancouver Parks

I want to confirm that we intend to keep the majority of our regional Parks open and accessible. We continue to follow the direction of the Provincial Health Officer who reinforces that it is safe and positive to spend time outdoors. Spending time in nature is an effective way to reduce stress and support physical and mental wellbeing; our goal is to continue to provide the Regional Parks service that is such an important part of so many peoples' daily health routines. We are doubling our efforts to increase signage, add traffic control and support physical distancing. This will ensure safe practices. We are assessing daily, and will only close parks as required where safety is of greatest concern for our staff and the public. We have temporarily closed Brae Island Regional Park, and as of today, Barnston Island, which are both regional parks that aren't staffed on a regular basis. The vast majority of our 20+ parks remain open. Thank you to Parks staff that continue to support this important service, as well as LSCR staff that are also working through similar challenges.

Staff Health

I'm very pleased to report that we continue to have no confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported amongst Metro Vancouver staff, and staff absences remain only slightly higher than the same time period last year.

Our Member Jurisdictions

We've understandably had a few questions related to job security at Metro Vancouver with everything going on in both the private and public sector throughout our region, and country. I want to reiterate to all of you my commitment, that I will be making every effort to keep staff working at Metro Vancouver, to deliver the essential services we provide to the region. However, we will require increased flexibility on behalf of both Metro Vancouver and staff. I also wanted to explain both the similarities and differences between us and our member jurisdictions. As a regional government, we are a local government and we share many parallels with our local municipalities. Where we are different, however, is in the nature of some of our work, and accordingly, our revenues. The municipalities are heavily impacted at this time as significant revenue streams (20-30%) have ceased to exist for an indeterminate time period (recreation, rental and parking fees, for example). This time period is a permanent revenue loss, as residents will not owe them for services they haven't accessed, and these revenues won't be back until operations resume. The other 70-80% of their revenue comes from property taxes and utilities. So with a 20-30% shortfall currently, they are significantly impacted. Our regional government is different in that we are more heavily weighted to the utilities which is 96% of our revenue; while there may be delays in some of these payments, these fees should not disappear. Only 4% of our revenues are tied to recreation or fees related to things such as rentals, fees or events. Regardless of our difference, we are very mindful of the current challenges of our member jurisdictions.

Communications

I know there have been a flurry of emails over the last few weeks, from me and others on the senior leadership team; we're working on a centralized resource for all of these, so you can reference them as required. Please also remember to check our Intranet News; our internal communications team is featuring a series of stories related to our Pandemic response and a series of staff stories. An article on Metro Vancouver's EOC can be found [here](#), and our Department Operating Centres [here](#). The first of a series on how Employees are coming together and supporting their community can be found [here](#). Thank you to all staff who have participated in these articles; I read them all. Please keep them coming!

Supporting Staff

I'd also like to remind staff that our Employee and Family Assistance (EFAP) program is available to you and your dependents at any time, and is a confidential service. Our EFAP is also adjusting their model to offer telephone and virtual counselling. Resiliency webinars, Zoom training, mental health awareness, as well as many other offerings, are being provided by our HR training teams and there are a number of offerings being rolled out over the next few weeks. Please watch out for these and we encourage your attendance and participation where possible.

Nightly 7pm Thank You's

I want to say a continued, genuine **thank you** to our Water, Liquid Waste Services, Housing Operations, Solid Waste Services, LSCR, Parks, Air Quality and all staff that continue to be on the front lines of supporting our region through this trying time period. Many thanks as well to the departments and work groups supporting all this work – HR, IT, Safety, Fleet, Finance, Legal, Communications, and more.

I know many of you are joining in the nightly 7pm 'show of gratitude' outside your homes and on your balconies, to applaud and express some heartfelt noise for front line workers. Please note, that I, and the senior leadership team, are participating, and in addition to our incredible healthcare workers, it is all of you that we are cheering for – your work, your courage, and your indomitable spirit.

Stay well.
Jerry

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