

Keeping Calm and Mostly Carrying On – COVID-19's Impact on Municipal Processes

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In the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, local governments have issued statements outlining COVID-19's impact on their respective municipal processes. The primary takeaway is that, while most municipal staff will remain accessible by e-mail and phone, municipal process delays should be expected. Other general takeaways include:

- a. nearly all city halls and city facilities are now closed to the public (including cancelling or postponing public hearings);
- b. city council meetings will mostly continue as scheduled, either by alternative methods (e.g. teleconference) or with social distancing measures strictly enforced;
- c. development and building permit application reviews are mostly continuing and municipalities are still accepting such applications through alternative delivery methods, including by e-mail, courier, appointment-only or drop-off outside city hall (see the applicable city website to see which delivery method applies); and
- d. building inspections are mostly continuing, often with additional requirements in place to ensure compliance with public health guidance.

Notable updates specific to certain municipalities include the following:

- a. City of Burnaby – until further notice, City Hall will serve the public on an appointment-only basis.
- b. City of New Westminster – essential City Hall services are now being provided on an appointment-only basis. All advisory committee meetings are cancelled until further notice. Inspections are being carried out, provided sites are complying with Provincial orders and advice. Stop work orders may be issued for sites which are not.
- c. City of Surrey – City Hall is serving the public on an appointment-only basis. All planning and development permits will now be digitally accepted at permitapplication@surrey.com.
- d. City of Vancouver – on March 20, 2020, Mayor Kennedy Stewart announced that City of Vancouver property taxes will be deferred 60 days (until September 1, 2020) for both businesses and individuals. Notwithstanding the announcement, City Council has yet to make the deferral official by amending the applicable bylaw. While City Council meetings will continue, Council-appointed advisory meetings and all boards and commissions are suspended until further notice.

Further up-to-date information on COVID-19's impact on municipal processes is available at: <https://udi.bc.ca/covid-19-municipal-updates/>