



Borough of Chatham

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Fellow Residents,

On March 16, Governor Murphy issued sweeping restrictions designed to discourage group clustering in public settings as part of an extraordinary effort to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Among other things, Executive Order 104 implemented aggressive social distancing measures to mitigate further spread of the virus.

As the Governor put it in announcing his order, “we cannot allow the business-as-usual culture” to continue during this perilous time.

On March 21, Governor Murphy upped the ante with his issuance of Executive Order 107, directing all New Jersey residents to “stay at home” until further notice.

This order provides for certain exceptions, such as obtaining essential goods or services, seeking medical attention, reporting to work, or engaging in healthy outdoor activities (such as walking or jogging).

But it is important to emphasize that Executive Order 107 is intended *strengthen* the social distancing measures put in place under Executive Order 104.

Collectively, the Governor’s two Executive Orders prohibit all gatherings of individuals, such as parties, celebrations, or other social events. When in public, individuals *must* practice social distancing and stay at least six feet apart whenever possible, excluding immediate family members, caretakers, or household members.

Tonight, I come before you to issue a plea that each and every one of you *step up* your observance of these vitally important directives.

We *must* all work harder to maintain proper social distancing. And we *must* make a greater effort to stay at home during this public health crisis.

I continue to receive reports of group clustering on Main St, in our residential neighborhoods, and in public school parking lots. This *must* stop immediately.

A gathering storm will soon be upon us. What we are now seeing in terms of coronavirus infections around Chatham is only the beginning. Things are going to get a whole lot worse before they get better.

April will be a very tough month. And from the epidemiological models I'm seeing, so too will May.

If any of you are still hesitant to *buy into* the gravity of the current public health emergency, I urge you in the strongest terms to reconsider. Indeed, I have four reasons for you to do so.

I. The Numbers

The first reason to take this crisis seriously is the very stark set of numbers we are now seeing.

The tally of those newly infected with, or dying from, this insidious illness continues to grow at an alarming rate. Nationally, Tuesday was one of the deadliest days yet, with 423 fatalities recorded and the total death toll reaching 3,603. The Covid-19 outbreak is now officially more deadly than the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which killed 2,977 people.

In addition, there were 21,430 new cases reported yesterday, bringing the national total to 186,101. To put this in perspective, more than half of all confirmed coronavirus cases in the United States have been diagnosed in just the past five days.

A University of Washington School of Medicine study now predicts that by April 15, the daily tally of deaths across this country could reach 2,200. Let me repeat that. Two weeks from now, we could be seeing 2,200 deaths per day from this insidious virus. The study notes that, by this metric, the total US death toll over just the next four months could be as high as 82,000.

More startingly still, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, has stated that even if all of the federal and state social distancing guidelines are followed (a highly optimistic assumption), the nation could still experience between 100,000 and 240,000 deaths by the end of the year, with millions more infected and sick.

The bottom line is that we are presently confronted by a situation with a great deal of uncertainty. There are "many moving parts" to the equation and the estimated numbers regarding infections and fatalities shift almost daily. Nevertheless, one thing is certain and that is this contagion is going to hit us very hard.

I share with you these sobering numbers on a day in which confirmed cases of Covid-19 in our own state (as of 2 pm this afternoon) surged by 3559 for a total of 22,255 infected with 355 deaths (88 since yesterday). In the last 24 hours alone, the number of confirmed cases across New Jersey has gone up 19% and the number of deaths 33%.

As for Chatham Borough, the total number of confirmed cases (based on positive coronavirus test results) stands at 13.

It is important to note that this virus does *not* discriminate in terms of age. Of the thirteen people infected, one is in his late teens, three are in their twenties, four in their thirties, one in her forties, two in their sixties, and two in their seventies.

The message here is clear. No one is immune from this highly infectious virus. You need to take every precaution to prevent yourself from getting sick. Doing so is not just about keeping yourself

safe. It is about protecting those around you. And by extension, it is about protecting the entire community of Chatham.

I have now participated in over twenty conference calls with public health officials at every level of government. One thing is very clear. The experts are unanimous in their view that this coronavirus outbreak is a challenge unlike any we've ever seen before, at least in our lifetimes.

But if the numbers I've just cited haven't yet persuaded you, perhaps the following data and information will.

II. Confirmed Cases a Tip of the Iceberg

The second reason to take this crisis very seriously is that confirmed cases reported to us are just a tip of the iceberg when it comes to the true numbers presently infected with the virus.

As I just noted, the current number of coronavirus positive test results for Chatham Borough is 13. However, we also know the following:

1. The current lag time between administering a coronavirus test and receiving the result is up to ten days.
2. The incubation period after infection with the virus but before onset of symptoms is typically 5-14 days.
3. The evidence suggests a significant portion of those infected will either be asymptomatic or experience only mild symptoms.
4. A similarly significant portion of those displaying symptoms are currently being instructed by their health care providers to self-quarantine at home and only proceed to the hospital (for testing) if they experience difficulty breathing or run a very high fever.

As things presently stand, therefore, the *true* number of *currently* infected individuals is undoubtedly greater than the reported number of positive test results for any particular municipality – including Chatham.

Simply put, positive test results for the coronavirus are akin to a snapshot taken two weeks ago (or more) of that fraction of infected individuals later deemed sufficiently ill to be tested.

One consequence of this is that the number of residents in Chatham Borough infected *right now* with the coronavirus is higher – perhaps considerably so – than the official numbers currently being reported.

A further corollary of this is that the risk of catching the virus from others in town is therefore *greater* than what the relatively low number of positive test results in the Borough (13) might otherwise indicate.

John Ioannidis, a well-known professor of epidemiology at Stanford University, was quoted in the Financial Times on Monday as having said “we don't know if we are failing to capture infections by a factor of three or 300.”

Whatever the multiplier might be, there is a clear consensus amongst public health experts that we *are* failing to capture a significant number of the infections that are now out there in our daily tallies of positive test results.

This, I would argue, is a very good reason to take this outbreak seriously and heed Governor Murphy's directives to (a) practice social distancing and (b) stay at home.

Of course, the silver lining in this analysis is that the current mortality rate estimates might actually be too high, perhaps by a considerable margin. If that is correct then this is a smidgen of good news I will gladly take in this otherwise disconcerting picture.

III. The Need to Flatten the Curve

The third reason to take this public health emergency seriously is to flatten the curve of infected individuals that will soon require hospitalization.

This is something we are hearing a great deal about right now. And justifiably so.

In fact, our greatest challenge over the next three months will be to avoid overwhelming our medical treatment facilities with coronavirus patients.

We are presently at the *beginning* of an expected exponential rise in the number of individuals who will be infected with the virus.

More narrowly, we are at the start of a sharp increase in infected people who will require hospitalization and (even more acutely) admission to the ICU.

Governor Murphy on Monday likened what we are about to see to "a fire through dry grass with a strong wind behind it." This is by no means hyperbole. The coronavirus is coming. What we see happening now in New York City *will* happen here. In fact, we in Chatham Borough are three to four weeks behind our neighbors across the Hudson. Every public health official I've spoken to over the past 15 days has said this.

Conceptually, "flattening the curve" means creating additional time for hospitals to prepare for the tremendous rise in Covid-19 cases they are about to see. The idea here is the longer it takes for the coronavirus to spread amongst the population, the more time our treatment facilities will have to secure additional beds, ventilators, and other equipment to handle the expected increase in patients. I'm sure you have all seen the chart.

That is why (a) social distancing and (b) staying at home are so vitally important right now. These practices are the only tools we have to flatten the curve of infected individuals who could soon overwhelm our existing number of hospital beds. This isn't rocket science. It's just common sense.

The nightmare situation we need to avoid is having our local hospitals overwhelmed by the anticipated explosive demand for hospital and ICU beds.

If anyone thinks this couldn't possibly happen here in New Jersey, consider the following:

1. At present, the state's hospital bed capacity is 18,000 and its ICU bed capacity is 2000.
2. With 0% of the population practicing robust social distancing, the expected need at peak infection for hospital beds (here in NJ, sometime in mid-May) will be nearly 80,000, and for ICU beds 40,000.
3. Even if we practice social distancing at 31% effectiveness, the expected need at peak infection will still outstrip the current supply for hospital beds at 35,000 and ICU beds at 18,000.
4. But as we lower the peak and push it forward in time, our hospitals gain a fighting chance to increase the number of beds and other equipment they will need.

The bottom line is that New Jersey desperately needs to buy itself more time to increase the number of beds, ventilators, and other equipment its hospitals will need to weather the coming storm.

Moreover, the only way our state can do so is if each and every one of us takes seriously the Governor's directives to observe his social distancing and stay-at-home directives.

Folks, I'm not kidding about this. In a sobering assessment, Governor Murphy stated on Monday that even if we practice social distancing with 100% effectiveness, we will *still* be unable to close the gap in time between the anticipated demand and available supply of hospital and ICU beds at peak infection.

Nevertheless, we must do everything we can to narrow this gap. Lives will depend upon it.

As such, I am counting on each and every one of you to maximize your effort to "flatten the curve." Practice social distancing and stay at home as if your lives depended upon it. It may just be that they really do.

IV. The Virus is Already Here in Growing Numbers

The fourth reason for taking this crisis seriously is that the virus is already here, and the number of infected residents is now growing.

As I stated a few moments ago, we have an unknown but increasing number of people in the Borough who have been instructed to self-quarantine in their homes. These folks have either been diagnosed with the virus, or they are presumptive cases because they are symptomatic (although not seriously so).

Some of these folks are dear friends of mine. For example, Council member Carolyn Dempsey is a presumptive case along with her husband Brian. They are both home self-quarantining. As of this afternoon they are both feverish and fatigued, but otherwise okay.

Another beloved member of our Borough Hall “family”, Carol Nauta, is in the hospital after initially self-quarantining at home. Her husband, former Chatham Borough Police Captain Bill Nauta, is in the CCU. I’ve been told Carol may be coming home any day now. Hopefully Bill will soon follow.

Our hearts and prayers go out to the Nautas, Dempseys, and all others in town who are presently battling this terrible illness. May you all feel better and return to good health very, very soon.

V. Uplifting Chatham Stories

One of my political heroes, Winston Churchill, is revered for, among other things, his inspiring words during a perilous time. Over the past two weeks, I have been thinking a great deal about two sentences he uttered during his first broadcast as Prime Minister to the British People in May of 1940. You will forgive the slight paraphrase:

“It would be foolish to disguise the gravity of the hour. It would be still more foolish to lose heart and courage ... in the face of this mighty challenge.”

Folks, this is no time to panic. But it is a time to be vigilant and prepared. Moreover, it is a time to practice social distancing while never losing sight of the fundamental connectedness that continues to undergird us as a community.

My friends, it is precisely because we are bound to each other as a community that we seek to physically separate ourselves in the interest of protecting the health and well-being of the greatest possible numbers.

But in, and through, this social distancing we remain connected in so many other ways – civilly, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

Some of our residents have exemplified this deeper bond in inspiring ways and I’d now like to give them a brief “shout out”:

1. To all those who’ve volunteered to function as adjuncts to the Chatham Borough OEM, working through the Chatham Senior Center as an “Emergency Courier Service” for anyone at all unable to venture out for food, medicine, or supplies during this public health crisis, we say thank you!
2. To the Chatham Library, which has enterprisingly initiated a “1000 Masks Challenge” for residents to construct face masks for the purpose of helping front-line health workers protect themselves while on duty, we say thank you!

3. To the newly created Facebook group “Front Line Appreciation Group (FLAG) of Chatham & Madison”, which uses donated funds to support local restaurants and eateries to feed, thank, and support front-line health workers, we say thank you!
4. To our local faith leaders, who are pulling out all the stops to keep their congregations together via online meeting platforms, thereby providing their members with the communal and spiritual support they need to help weather this crisis, we say thank you!
5. To our heroic school teachers, who are working overtime under extremely challenging conditions to jury-rig and make fly content delivery platforms for their students’ lessons and assignments, we say thank you!
6. To our courageous police officers, fire volunteers, EMS volunteers, and OEM volunteers, who are facing unimaginable tests of character, let alone tremendous personal risk, every time they go to work or respond to a call, we say thank you!
7. To all of our Borough Hall employees, including Department Heads, staff, and DPW employees, who are confronting logistical challenges and face personal risk on a day-to-day basis – all or the purpose of keeping the Borough running, we say thank you!
8. And to anyone else I may have missed, from the bottom of our hearts we say thank you!

VI. Conclusion

In closing, I’d like to remind you that this coronavirus situation is evolving rapidly. So please continue to consult reliable sources regularly for up-to-date information.

There are five “go-to” websites:

1. Chatham Borough website at www.chathamborough.org.
2. Chatham Borough Health Department website at www.westfieldnj.gov/health
3. NJ’s Covid-19 Information Hub at www.covid19.nj.gov
4. NJ’s Department of Health website at www.nj.gov/health
5. US Center for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov

We will get through this. I have no doubt. But by working together, we *can* ensure the best possible outcome for everyone.

Thank you and stay well.

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