

## **Guidance on the Closure of Public Facilities**

In light of the COVID-19 disaster gripping the state, the question of whether to close public facilities (i.e., city hall, community centers, parks, playgrounds) to the public to prevent further spread of this disease has been asked. This leads to a second question, how would such a closure work?

As with many decisions cities and towns face every day, the authority to decide what city facilities stay open during a time of crisis is a matter of local control. Either the mayor, as chief executive officer of the city, or the city council, as the governing body, have the authority to decide that city facilities should close to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

Of course, in light of the need for social distancing, a city council meeting to declare this would be risky. Thus, we advise the safest course of action is for the mayor to issue an order closing city facilities. This could be part of or in addition to any declaration of emergency the mayor has made or will make. We would also advise that when making the declaration the mayor explain the reasons for the closure, i.e., “In order to protect the public from further spread of COVID-19 and to assist with the governor’s directives to limit social distancing, the city will be closing the following city facilities to the public . . .”

To be as effective as possible, we encourage your city to provide as much notice as possible to the public, i.e., place notices at the city facilities, notify residents via any and all city social media platforms and website, and local news outlets.

If there are ways for the public to safely conduct business, make payments, submit applications and submit comments to the various offices and city officials of your city, clearly direct the public to those avenues.