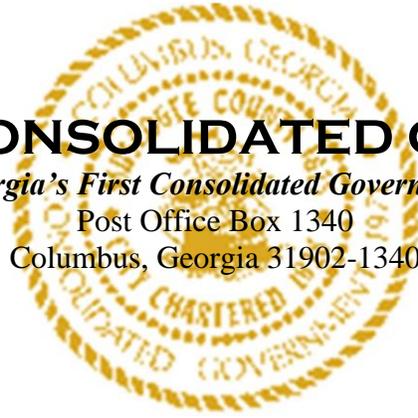


COLUMBUS CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT

Georgia's First Consolidated Government

Post Office Box 1340
Columbus, Georgia 31902-1340



B.H. "Skip" Henderson, III
Mayor

Telephone (706) 225-4712
Fax (706) 225-4790

MEDIA RELEASE

April 3, 2020

COVID-19 Press Release

Today, April 3, 2020, Mayor B.H. "Skip" Henderson III and City Manager Isaiah Hugley are announcing limitations on Public Access to Columbus Consolidated Government Buildings through April 30, 2020 due to the ongoing developments with COVID 19. General public access to all government buildings will be prohibited; however, all City departments will remain open and will provide services to citizens in a modified/non-traditional way. Descriptions of how city services will be delivered are listed in the attachment below.

This is the latest action in an ongoing effort by State and City leadership to "flatten the curve" of this virus. The Mayor still hopes that Columbus will not be as adversely affected by this virus as some other cities, but he also recognizes that it would be irresponsible not to take steps to try to mitigate any crisis. This newest administrative action is a further attempt to limit the rapid spread of this disease so that our local hospitals can manage potential cases without being overwhelmed all at one time. If Columbus can do that, hospitals will be able to more effectively utilize care and resources for those who need them.

To accomplish this, Columbus citizens will have to work together. The citizens of our community will ultimately determine the success or failure of these actions. The City government and local hospitals can and are preparing for the worst-case scenario, but everyone hopes that, by practicing personal responsibility, citizens can help avoid the difficult circumstances in which other cities have found themselves.

To be clear, the Office of the Mayor; City, State, and Federal governments; the Health Department; and the Center for Disease Control recommend self-isolating as much as possible, washing your hands regularly and for twenty (20) seconds, and keeping up with the latest reputable news. We will get through this, but everyone in the community must work together to help Columbus avoid the spread of this dangerous virus.

Mayor Skip Henderson
706-225-4712

**Columbus Consolidated Government
Restricting/Limiting Public Access to CCG Public Buildings
Due to Ongoing Developments with COVID - 19
Effective: Monday, April 6, 2020**

Government Center Tower / East and West Wings Buildings

Sheriff's Office:

The Muscogee County Sheriff's Office will continue to provide security and manage all essential entry and exits for the Courts and other offices at the Government Center as outlined. We will also continue to provide security and monitor necessary entry and exits at the City Service Center.

Courts:

Superior and State Courtrooms, Juvenile Court, Jury Manager, Law Library, Accountability Courts and Drug Lab

Courts will remain in a state of judicial emergency or reduced operations through April 30, 2020.

Superior and State courtrooms in the Government Center will remain available for bond hearings and pleas which will result in an inmate being released immediately from confinement in the Muscogee County jail. These proceedings, including sessions of the Rapid Resolution Program on April 8 and 22, are scheduled ahead of time in consultation with the jail, Sheriff's Office and Clerk. For these proceedings, the judge will need use of a courtroom which must either remain open for public view or for audio and video feed via the internet, but the inmate and defense counsel will usually be at the jail for these proceedings, participating by remote video conference from one of the jail courtrooms (which must also be open for public view or for audio and video feed via the internet).

The public will also need access to the Hope Harbour advocates on the seventh floor for screening and assistance with stalking and family violence protective orders. These services will need to remain available during business hours.

Our Superior Court and State Court judges must also remain available in the Government Center for walk-in traffic during business hours by law enforcement officers who need search and arrest warrants, as well as private lawyers who need an injunction. Such walk-in traffic for Superior Court can usually be handled by one judge (usually the presiding judge).

Jury Manager:

Traffic for the jury manager's office should be handled by phone or email as no jury or grand jury proceedings are in session until after the statewide judicial emergency.

The Muscogee County Law Library:

Remains closed for walk-in traffic per the email I shared with the two of you last week.

Juvenile Court:

Muscogee County Juvenile Court will continue to have preliminary detention hearings preliminary protective hearings on Wednesdays at 2:00 p.m. These hearings will be conducted via video and teleconferencing. All filings should be emailed to juvenilecourt@columbusga.org. Any questions regarding Juvenile Court matters can be emailed to juvenilecourt@columbusga.org. Fines and fees payments are being extended during the pandemic, however, any parent wishing to make a payment can do so electronically. Please call 706-653-4290 to make a payment.

Accountability Courts and Drug Lab:

Program participants will be allowed Government Center access for sessions of court, lab tests and some court programs.

Municipal / Magistrate Court Judge:

First appearances and bond hearings of people coming to court from jail, brought by the Sheriff (also family members of persons appearing in court) will continue.

Probation officers and public defenders will be allowed access in and out of the building, as necessary.

Please contact the Magistrate Court Clerk's Office for all Magistrate Court Clerk matters by calling Magistrate Clerk at 706-653-4390.

Municipal Court Clerk:

Consistent with the Municipal Court Judge, the Municipal Court Clerk's Office will service the municipal court regarding first appearances and bond hearings of people coming to court from jail. Criminal Court is held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays based on court dockets received the morning of court (family members of persons appearing in court can attend). Civil court has been postponed at this time, until further notice.

Marshal's Office:

The marshal's office will continue to carry out the precepts of the office of the Clerk of the Municipal Court, and the Judge of the Municipal and Magistrate Courts.

District Attorney's Office:

The Office of the District Attorney will observe the following basic protocol.

The City of Columbus has given the employees of the DA's Office the equipment and support to complete almost all work tasks remotely. Because of this, all employees will work from home except when fulfilling court obligations or performing tasks that must be done in the office.

- Citizens needing a face to face meeting with a member of the DA's Office staff or information from the DA's Office should call the office at 706-653-4336.
- Citizens needing a face to face meeting with a victim advocate or information from the Victim-Witness Office should call 706-225-4426.
- Some calls may be answered by an automated voice messaging system. These messages will be checked hourly and forwarded to the appropriate staff member for action.
- Face to face meetings with DA's Office staff and victim advocates are available by appointment if necessary.
- There is a box at the security check point on the ground floor for all hand deliveries.
- There are business cards and Victim Witness brochures available at the security check point for walk up citizens.
- The Office of the District Attorney will continue to perform its work including preparing for and attending court and returning phone calls and emails.

The Solicitor General's Office:

Contact Information for the Office of the Solicitor General

Due to concerns regarding COVID-19 public health emergency, the Office of the Solicitor General is CLOSED to the public. However, we are still operational, although we are functioning with very limited in-office staff. Most of our staff are working from home.

To Check for Rescheduled Court Dates

Many State Court Criminal court dates have been rescheduled because of the COVID-19 health crisis. To determine if your court date has been rescheduled, please check the COVID 19 Judicial Emergency Schedule located at:

https://www.columbusga.gov/statecourt/state_court_covid19_schedule.pdf

To contact the Solicitor General's Office, we can be reached in the following ways:

Phone: You may call us on our main phone line at (706) 653-4327. If there is no immediate answer, please leave a voicemail with your name, case number, and phone number and we will return your call.

To Serve Documents on the Solicitor General's Office: During this time, documents may be served on the Solicitor General's Office by email directed to SGFrontOffice@columbusga.org

Email: If you know the prosecutor you need to communicate with, you may contact a specific prosecutor by email as follows:

Suzanne Goddard, Solicitor General	sgoddard@columbusga.org
David Ranieri, Chief Asst. Solicitor General	dranieri@columbusga.org
Ed Albright, Sr. Asst Solicitor General	ealbright@columbusga.org
Altovise Filmore, Sr. Asst Solicitor General	afilmore@columbusga.org
Cecelia Hailes, Sr. Asst Solicitor General	chailes@columbusga.org
Michelle Huiet, Sr. Asst Solicitor General	mhuiet@columbusga.org
Bianca Goodman, Asst. Solicitor General	Goodman.Bianca@columbusga.org
Matt Barnes, Asst. Solicitor General	Barnes.Matthew@columbusga.org

Mail: Mail should be addressed to:

Office of the Solicitor General

P.O. Box 1340

Columbus, GA 31902-1304

Please be sure to identify the defendant's name and case number in any correspondence to our office.

To contact the Solicitor General's Victim Assistance Office:

Phone: You may call the Solicitor General's Victim Assistance Office on their main phone line at (706) 653-4580

Victim Assistance Email: Or if you know the Victim Advocate you need to communicate with, you may contact a specific advocate by email as follows:

Rhonda Dial, Director, Victim Witness	rdial@columbusga.org
Charlene Thompson, Victim Advocate	Cthompson@columbusga.org

Other Important Phone Numbers are:

If in immediate danger, call:	911
Columbus Alliance for Battered Women	(706) 324-3850
Russell Co. Crisis Center	(334) 297-4401
Columbus Police Department	(706) 653-3000
Sheriff's Department	(706) 653-4225
Columbus Rape Crisis	(706) 571-6010

Department of Family and Children Services	(706) 649-7311
District Attorney's Office	(706) 653-4336
Georgia Legal Services	(706) 649-7493
Fort Benning Military Police	(706) 545-5222
CONTACT (24-hour Helpline)	211 or (706) 327-3999

The Solicitor General's Office remains dedicated to serving the public during this difficult period. Our staff will be working to return phone calls, emails, and processing mail and inquiries as efficiently as possible

Superior Court Clerk's Office:

In accordance to the orders from the Supreme Court of Georgia and Chief Superior Court Judge, as well as a governing memorandum from the Chief Superior Judge, public access was limited to our office, with the exception of providing services for essential functions of the court. Pursuant to the mandate and guidance in the orders and governing memo, we are conducting an ongoing assessment of our in-office staffing needs to monitor the essential function services in all our divisions.

Further, "to protect the health, safety and liberty of all citizens in this State" as specified in the State Supreme Court Order, special attention is being allotted to staffing needs for essential functions in both our state and superior court criminal divisions.

Superior Court Civil Division will be available to the public for Temporary Protective Orders (TPO). However, TPOs are processed through Hope Harbour, contact number (706) 225-3519 or (706) 326-4063. Hope Harbour has instructed that **assistance with TPO petitions will be completed over the phone** between 9:00 am to 4:00 pm and further instructions on filing will be provided. Further, if immediate shelter is needed for victims, please call Hope Harbour's crisis line at (706) 324-3850. After the TPO initiation process is completed through Hope Harbour, we encourage the public to call (706) 225-4372 for assistance with TPO court scheduling information in order to ensure the Clerk's office is in compliance with social distancing and shelter in place guidelines mandated by the state. If unable to call, please feel free to come to the Clerk's office, 2nd floor, for TPO court scheduling information.

Superior Court Criminal will be available to the public to provide information on inmate bond hearings, but we encourage the public to call (706) 653-4353 to comply with social distancing and shelter in place guidelines mandated by the state.

State Court Criminal will be available to the public for cash bond refunds.

Real Estate will remain open to title searchers. However, in order to ensure our office is following the social distancing and shelter in place guidelines mandated by the state, access for title searchers will be provided by appointment only, please call (706) 653-4358. Thank you.

Probate Court:

Under a state of judicial emergency, to the extent feasible, the Probate Court is required to remain open to perform essential functions. The Probate Court is already closed to the public except by appointment only. The Court does not intend to change that policy, but, to the extent possible, will further limit appointments.

Probate Court's essential functions include addressing psychiatric and other emergency situations. Therefore, the Court will continue to meet with people to sign Emergency Orders to Apprehend individuals that may be a danger to themselves or others. Also, the Court will continue to have court hearings for people with severe mental illness that are in the jail, the Bradley Center or West Central Georgia Regional Hospital. In addition, the Court will continue to hold emergency guardianship hearings and other emergency hearings.

We are using video conference technology in the courtroom so that as many people as possible are appearing by video. However, the attorneys and a few witnesses may still need to come to the courtroom. (We continue to "social distance" while in the courtroom.)

Also, to the extent feasible, we will continue to allow title searchers limited access to the Probate Court by appointment only. This is an essential for the Columbus economy. The Court is working on a way to use our new Tyler Odyssey system to allow some of the title work to be done outside of the courthouse, but we have not

finalized that plan yet. Once in place, we will be able to further limit title search appointments.

Presently, we have allowed attorney runners to drop off and pick up documents in a drop box outside the office. If the building is closed to the public, we will suspend that practice and require all originals be file by mail.

Most of the staff are working from home ... most of the time. The staff is checking and responding to emails and voicemails and inputting data remotely. Judge Siegel is in the courthouse from around 7:30 to 11:00 am and Judge D'Antonio is in the office every day from 9:30 am to 5 pm. The Court has an alternating deputy clerk coming into the office on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to deal with the mail, etc.

Human Resources Department:

HR will manage incoming calls by staff in the office or will handle remotely. HR will suspend notary service. A limited number of HR employees will report to work to handle and process mail and deliver and receive information from Finance. All new hires, in-processing, and separating employees will be done on-line. Telephone Number: 706-653-4059 HR Website:

<http://www.columbusga.org/HR/>

Finance Department:

Purchasing Division:

The Purchasing Division will not hold any public bid openings until further notice. As always, approximately two days after the bid opening, the bid tabulation will be available for public view on the Columbus Consolidated Government/Finance/Purchasing Division Webpage at the web address below:

https://www.columbusga.gov/finance/purchasing/docs/tabulations/bid_tabulations.htm

Bidders can also send an email to BidOpportunities@columbusga.org to request a copy of the bid tabulation.

Recorder's Court Building:

Recorder's Court:

- The Court will continue to conduct hearings for those defendants who are incarcerated, including Advisements-of-Rights sessions mandated by the US Constitution.
- Only family members, victims, witnesses, the media and pertinent court personnel will be allowed in the courtroom during the above listed hearings.
- All Traffic and Environmental Citation Cases/Payment dates will be rescheduled/extended for at least 30 days from the original court date.
- New Court dates will be made available to Citizens via mailed notices and emails (where applicable).
- Citizens can provide their email addresses and/or contact information to Recorder's Court via email at ContactRecordersCourt@columbusga.org.
- Citizens who wish to make citation payments may do so online at www.crcpay.com or by telephone at (706) 358-4232.
- Citation payments can also be made (**in the form of a check or money order ONLY**) to 702 Tenth Street Columbus, GA 31901.
- Lastly, citation payments (**in the form of a check or money order ONLY**) can be "dropped off" in the silver drop box below the drive thru window at 702 Tenth Street Columbus, GA 31901.

Public Safety Building

Columbus Police Department/CPD

The Columbus Police Department will continue its 24 hours a day 7 days a week operation through the 911 Center.

The main lobby at 510 10th Street will remain open from 7:30 AM until 5:30 PM daily for walk in traffic to be serviced at Desk Services. When the lobby is closed, there is a phone located just outside of the front door that citizens may use. That phone rings directly to the 911 Center. The North, East, and South Precinct lobbies are always secured and closed for walk in traffic. All service request at the precincts are handled outside of the buildings by the officers dispatched by the 911 Center.

Reports may also be called in to the Report Writing Room from 8:00 AM- 11:30 PM at 706-225-3215. Most accident and incident reports can be obtained online at columbusga.org/police.

Please visit the Columbus Police Department webpage at Columbusga.org/police for information pertaining to general information, accident reports, incident reports and other inquires.

Columbus Fire / EMS:

The Columbus Fire and Emergency Medical Services will handle all office business such as fire reports, permits, and hydrant reviews by phone, email, and remote means due to Public Safety Building being closed off to lobby area only.

City Services Center Building

Tax Commissioner:

**Muscogee County Tax Commissioner's Office
(Office Operations)
March 31st, 2020**

MUSCOGEE COUNTY TAX COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Columbus, GA – In light of ongoing developments with the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and rapidly changing protocols as issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as the state of emergency having been declared by the President of the United States and the Governor of the State of Georgia,

The Tax Commissioner's Office (Motor Vehicle Registration and Titling) and (Property Tax) will be open to the public through the end of day Friday, April 3rd, 2020.

Effective Monday, April 6th, the lobby will be closed to the public until further notice.

The office will continue to process transactions via the mail and internet. Questions can be addressed via the phone/e-mails indicated below.

Max Patrick, Deputy Tax Commissioner - **Property Tax**

mpatrick@columbusga.org

706-653-4211

David Britt, Deputy Tax Commissioner - **Delinquent Tax**

dbritt@columbusga.org

Tyrone Whittaker, Deputy Tax Commissioner - **Motor Vehicle**

twhittaker@columbusga.org

706-653-4208

We will also utilize CCGTV to keep the public updated and informed.

We remain dedicated to serving the public during this difficult period. Our staff will be working diligently to return phone calls, emails, and processing mail/renewals as efficiently as possible.

Tax Assessor's office:

The Tax Assessor's office is closed to the public until further notice; however, the Tax Assessor's Office remains available to assist the taxpayer with any questions or concerns regarding property valuations, personal property returns, or requests for exemption. The Tax Assessor's Office can be reached by calling 706-653-4398 and selecting from the following options: taxes, personal property, residential property, or commercial property. Taxpayers also have the option to leave a message and an appraiser from the appropriate division will return their call as soon as possible. Taxpayers may also email the Tax Assessor's Office directly at CCGBOA@columbusga.org, or they may access links to the appropriate division managers on the Contact Us page of the Public Access Site <http://publicaccess.columbusga.org>.

Finance Department:

Revenue Division:

The Revenue Division remains available to assist with any questions or concerns regarding Occupation Tax/Business License Renewals and other receivable collections. The Revenue Division staff may be reached at 706-225-4100. Businesses are required to mail, fax, or email their Occupation Tax/Business License Renewal forms for processing along with an acceptable form of payment. Acceptable forms of payment include checks, money orders, or credit card authorization. Please do not mail cash. All other receivable collections and/or payments will continue as expected. Receivable payments can be made via fax with a valid credit card authorization form, by mail with a check or money order or by telephone. All required forms and additional information may be found on the Finance Department - Revenue Division website which is:

<https://www.columbusga.gov/Finance/revenue.htm>

Elections and Registration:

1. Absentee ballot applications received in the mail or by email will be processed, approved, and absentee ballots will be mailed beginning April 6, 2020.
2. Faxed absentee ballot applications will be processed by office staff at the end of each day although email or mail is recommended. Fax 706-225-4394
3. Electronic voter registration applications through the Department of Driver Services and the official online platform through the Office of the Secretary of State will be processed. The voter registration deadline is April 20, 2020.
4. Voter registration applications received in the mail will be processed through April 20, 2020.
5. Board of Elections and Registration business will be conducted by telephone or electronically after providing adequate notice by email to the Clerk of Council.
6. Required candidate disclosures or questions should be emailed to: (jjames@columbusga.org) or faxed (706-225-4394).
7. Social media updates (Facebook: Muscogee County Elections and Registration) will be provided as new information is received.
8. Absentee ballots returned through the postal service will be processed and securely maintained.
9. Questions? Email nboren@columbusga.org; tgeist@columbusga.org; taustin@columbusga.org; igalay@columbusga.org
10. More information? Mvp.sos.ga.gov (Georgia's My Voter Page)

Election: Early Voting

1. The City Services Center Community Room will open for early voting April 27, 2020 through May 15, 2020 from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm Monday through Friday and 9:00 to 4:00 pm on Saturdays and Sundays.
2. Alcohol wipes and hand sanitizer will be provided for employees, voters, and equipment.
3. The social distancing rule of 6 feet will be enforced for voters standing in line.

Annex Building (Veterans Parkway and 10th Street)

Public Defender:

If public access is restricted at the City Annex Building, the Public Defender's Office can be reached at 706-653-4301. Those individuals who already have an attorney should remain in contact with their attorney for updates on Court dates. Attorneys and staff will remain in contact with clients incarcerated at the Muscogee County Jail.

Engineering:

Engineering staff will be available to answer all calls. The mainline number for each Department will be placed on the front doors. Appointments can be made to drop off permit plans. Engineering is now accepting plans digitally for review and comments. Those who routinely come to the office will be notified of how to do business with the engineering department while we work through these challenging times. Please contact us at 706-653-4441 or by web, columbusga.gov/engineering.

Community Reinvestment:

A notice will be placed on the front door of the Annex to provide contact information (email and phone numbers) for staff members. Staff will continue to work from home or in the office to respond to any request. This information will also be provided on all social media sites and the website.

Inspections & Code:

All staff will be available by phone or email to continue to provide services for the built environment.

Inspections & Code Department will continue to accept new residential and commercial plans only via email and payments will have to be submitted in the form of checks via mail and credit card via fax or email.

Commercial trade permits will continue but only via email or fax, and payments will have to be submitted in the form of checks via mail and credit card via fax or email.

All of our permits and forms are available at:

<https://www.columbusga.gov/inscode/permits.htm>. To lessen our inspector's exposure, new residential alterations/additions permits, and inspections will not be accepted unless in emergency situations.

Existing residential permits and inspections will be completed only if the buildings are currently uninhabited.

To accommodate existing permits, drop boxes will be created at the entrance to provide picking up of issued permits for contractors and citizens.

We request all contractors call ahead and we can place the permits at the entrance for pickup.

Property Maintenance Inspectors will suspend all tenant/landlord complaints and will only monitor abandoned houses and demolition cases.

Special Enforcement will continue business as usual, except for now practicing social distancing.

Inspections & Code will continue to pick up signs from the ROW, however we will suspend on premises check for Business Licenses.

Any other general questions can be sent by phone (706-653-4126) or email

Inspections@columbusga.org.

Planning Department:

A sign will be placed on the front door of the annex stating that individual members of the Planning Department can be reached by their office phone number

and/or email address. This information will also be placed on our webpage, Facebook, and through our Constant Contact email system.

Cooperative Extension

All face-to-face programming and events, including 4-H activities, have been canceled or postponed through April 30.

Our Extension web site <https://extension.uga.edu/> has information about hundreds of topics. If you do not find what you need, you can contact us, and we will follow up with you. We also have a toll-free line 1-800-ASK-UGA1 (1-800-275-8421). We have added many timely resources and fact sheets on staying safe and healthy during the COVID-19 outbreak as well as related topics.

<https://extension.uga.edu/topic-areas/timely-topics/emergencies.html>

Convention and Trade Center Building

Trade Center:



Employees of the Columbus Georgia Convention and Trade Center will still be required to report to work while following our Trade Center Emergency Operations Plan.

- The front desk will be staffed 8a – 5p to receive phone calls only. There will be no walk-in service. Signage will be posted to inform the public of how to proceed with their event planning process.
- The Trade Center will be reachable by phone at 706-327-4522, and available by appointment to participate in virtual meeting experiences for those who prefer face-to-face interaction.
- Except for in-person payments, all receivable payments will continue as expected. Payments can be made electronically with a valid credit card authorization form, by mail with a check or money order, or by telephone.

Columbus Civic Center Building



Civic Center:

The Columbus Civic Center Box Office will be closed to the public. Refunds for cancelled events may be obtained once we open back up to the public for those who purchased tickets through the Box Office, or you may obtain your refund from your point of purchase, i.e. Ticketmaster or other Outlets. The Administrative Office will answer phones remotely.

Parks and Recreation Buildings /Facilities:

Parks and Recreation:

All parks and recreation facilities are closed. Please call 706-225-4658 for assistance.

All rentals of facilities, pavilions or park space are cancelled until April 30. Currently, Parks and Recreation will not be booking any additional rental dates until further notice.

All playgrounds, pavilions, tennis courts, volleyball courts, basketball courts, exercise stations and recreation equipment are off limits at this time. Things to remember - please always remember social distancing and remain at least 6 feet apart. Also, please do not have more than 10 people together at any time in any of the park spaces.

METRA Transit System Building

METRA Transit - Bus Service:

The Department of Transportation/METRA will operate the following services:

- Fixed Route and Dial-A-Ride will operate a Saturday's schedule from 4:30 a.m. until 8:30 p.m.
- The last lineup of buses will depart the Transfer Center at 6:30 p.m.
- Parking citations will be paid online at: www.columbusga.gov/parking or at drop boxes located at the Public Safety Building and Records Court
- METRA's Admin Office will be closed to the public
- All non-essential employees will work from home
 - Customers may call 706-225-4673 for information about METRA's service