



Jeffrey Babinski  
County Administrator

# HOUSTON COUNTY

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Commissioners:  
District 1  
Jack Miller  
District 2  
Eric Johnson (Chair)  
District 3  
Robert Burns (Vice-Chair)  
District 4  
Teresa Walter  
District 5  
Vacant

March 18, 2020

RE: Houston County Emergency Declaration, Facility/Service Closures

The health and safety of the staff and the entire community continues to be priority for Houston County. As the situation unfolds, Houston County offices remain open but with modifications to protect the public and our employees from potential exposure in line with guidance for social distancing strategies recommended by both the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Houston County Board of Commissioner Chair Eric Johnson has declared a health emergency due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic, to be ratified by the full board on Tuesday, 24 March. The emergency declaration allows County government to proceed with emergency measures needed to contain and control the spread of COVID-19.

## Houston County Services

Houston County will continue to provide services to our residents, but it is prudent to limit public access to our facilities at this time.

The Houston County Detention Center has implemented the following changes to routine procedures:

- All public fingerprinting services have been suspended
- All programming services for inmates have been suspended
- Inmate work crews (Sentence to Serve) activities have been suspended
- All jail and dispatch tours have been cancelled

Inmate visitation process and hours will function as normal, though access to the visitation room may be limited to allow social distancing. The front lobby window remains open for business.

The Houston County Third Judicial District Court is following State guidance on Court scheduling and encourages parties to call (507-725-5806) before they come to court or if they need any clarification on scheduling. Super High and High Priority cases will continue to be heard. Persons necessary to conduct a litigant's hearing, and other persons with prior approval of the court, may attend these court proceedings, but social distancing practices will be implemented. Where appropriate, phone and ITV resources will be used. Please refer to [www.mncourts.gov](http://www.mncourts.gov) for more information.

**Effective Friday, March 20, the following changes will be made to our services:**

- The County Justice Center will remain open to the public, though non-essential visits are discouraged. If the doors are locked, please contact the Department of Corrections (507-725-5808), Court Administration (507-725-5806) County Attorney (507-725-5802), or Sheriff's Office (507-725-3379) to

schedule an appointment or to determine if your business can be conducted over the phone or to obtain access to the facility. No person who has an elevated risk of transmitting COVID-19 may attend any in-court hearing or proceeding.

- The Historic County Courthouse, Highway Department and Community Services Center will be closed to walk-in public access, though all county offices will remain open for business. Residents may continue to access face-to-face service by appointment only. Where possible, we will provide services via phone, e-mail, or mail and encourage use of the drop-box near the Historic Court House west entrance for applications, license plate renewals, and tax payments. Please see our website for full list of phone numbers.

Administrator - 725-5827

Assessor - 725-5801

Driver's License Center - 725-5812

Auditor (Elections) - 725-5803

Public Health and Human Services 725-5811

### **Houston County Public Meetings**

The March 24 Board of Commissioners meeting remains scheduled. At least one Commissioner will participate via conference call. The number will be posted on the website prior to the meeting and public may listen via phone as well. Public attendance may be limited by social distancing requirements. All other public meetings have been canceled until April 6.

### **Houston County Drop Sites**

Drop sites will remain open on the regular schedule with the following changes in operations. Drop Site employees have been instructed not to assist customers with unloading and customers will be asked to remain outside drop site buildings to avoid person-to-person contact. The drop sites will only accept bagged trash, recyclable plastic, tin cans, bottles and cardboard during this time. Customers will not be asked to sign receipts. Residents are encouraged to avoid unnecessary trips to drop sites, if disposal of an item is not urgent, please postpone it.

These temporary measures will be in effect until April 6. Residents are encouraged to check our website for updates and county department contact information.

Respectfully,



Jeffrey L. Babinski  
Houston County Administrator

JLB:jlb