

Township of Bensalem

Joseph DiGirolamo
Mayor



Today, June 5, 2020, our County and our Community transitioned from the “Red Phase” to the “Yellow Phase” of Governor Wolf’s “Process to Reopen Pennsylvania.” Since the onset of the COVID-19 State of Emergency in March, Bensalem Township and its residents have had to operate and live under the many Laws, Declarations, Orders, Proclamations and Directives issued and enacted by our Federal, State and County Governments.

For nearly three months, we have lived under a “Stay at Home” Order issued by our Governor that was only lifted yesterday, on the eve of our County being designated a “Yellow” County. In that time, the Governor and his Secretary of Health have closed our schools, shuttered our businesses, prohibited public gatherings, restricted our travel and forced us to remain in our homes, all in the name, so we were told, of saving the lives of every Pennsylvanian.

Today, we are still being told that the crisis has not passed, that the virus is unpredictable, and that the dangers of its spread and resurgence remain very, very real. Hence, many of the restrictions and prohibitions we have been told to follow still remain in place today, and there is no indication from the Governor or his Secretary of Health when we will be designated by them as a “Green” County and community.

The President has a Secretary of Health and Human Services, a Dr. Fauci and a Dr. Birx, among countless other doctors, immunologists, scientists, infectious disease experts and emergency management personnel to advise him. The Governor similarly has Dr. Levine, the Director of PEMA, and countless other doctors, immunologists, scientists, infectious disease experts and emergency management personnel to advise him, as well. The County Commissioners have their own Department of Health, headed by Dr. Damsker, and their own Director of Emergency Management, Scott Forster, who have been advising them on the County’s response to this crisis, as well. Like all other municipalities in Pennsylvania, Bensalem has been getting all of its information, and all of its direction, from these elected officials and their medical and emergency management experts.

Over the past three months, it has been the challenge of this Township to listen to the multiple, at times contradictory, and constantly changing orders, directives and advice first being handed down by the Federal, State and County Governments, and to thereafter enact policies and procedures for the operation of our Township Government and for the enforcement of all of these laws, orders and directives being handed down by all of these other levels of government.

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Oftentimes, these laws, orders and directives would be issued with little or no warning or guidance as to how they were to be implemented or enforced.

One message, however, has been constant from all of these political leaders, from all of these medical experts, and from all of these emergency management directors - all of them have told us that staying at home and maintaining social distance outside of our homes will help to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus and ultimately save lives.

It breaks my heart that in just the past two weeks, we have been forced to celebrate Memorial Day without our annual Memorial Day Parade and the gatherings that accompany it. That we have had the Opening Concert of our Penn Community Bank Amphitheater Summer Concert Series, and all of the concerts for the month of June, postponed. That we have had to cancel our Township Summer Recreation Program, affecting hundreds of children and families who look forward to, and in many cases rely upon, this annual program. That we have had to cancel the annual Bensalem Relay for Life, scheduled to have been held at our Amphitheater on World Cancer Survivor Day.

We have agonized over these decisions. They have not been easy, but we have been assured by all of the aforementioned experts and officials that these cancellations were necessary for the safety of our community.

These decisions have been made all the more difficult because they follow months of watching our local businesses sitting shuttered and empty. They follow day after day of pleas for help being made to our Governor from residents who have lost jobs and lost life's savings in the wake of our local and state economies being forced to shut down. As we today enter the "Yellow Phase" of the Governor's Reopening Plan, many of these businesses remain closed, and many of these jobs may never be coming back.

These decisions follow months during which our citizens have been denied by the state the opportunity to congregate in the many houses of worship that help to make up the fabric our diverse community. Tragically, they follow months during which countless Bensalem residents have been unable to visit loved ones living in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, unable to be at the bedside of loved ones laying, and in some cases dying, in hospital beds, and unable to attend funerals to honor and mourn the passing of family, friends and loved ones.

Regrettably the difficult decisions are not yet over. Today we continue in the planning of a virtual Graduation Ceremony for our Bensalem High School Class of 2020. These nearly 500 students, as well as students in our other Bensalem High Schools and Parochial Schools, have all been deprived of traditional Graduation Ceremonies and Celebrations, Proms, Class Trips and Honors and Awards Ceremonies. Our community sports organizations and our high school and CYO athletic programs were robbed of their 2020 seasons, and our Bensalem High School Boys Basketball Team was denied the opportunity to complete its magical season and its run through

the PIAA State Playoffs. Decisions are still being made as to whether certain events can be held or if seasons can still be salvaged.

These past few months have been perhaps the most challenging of my time as your Mayor. Over this time, my Directors and I, as well as the public at large, have all been cautioned that the health, safety and welfare of this community, this Commonwealth and this nation were all at risk. We were warned that a small and silent killer was among us that, if not stopped, was capable of killing our citizens on a scale and at a rate not seen in this region in over a century.

We were forced to act, and to act quickly. Every day of the past three months has been spent gathering information, analyzing data, conferring and coordinating with other municipalities and government officials, preparing plans, modifying those plans, and anticipating contingencies, all while still reacting to the daily briefings and unilateral Orders from Governor Wolf and Dr. Levine, many of which came without warning or direction, and often were changed by them within hours or days of the initial issuance.

It has been frustrating. Often the Council, my Directors and I had to implement Orders and Policies that came down from the State with which we did not always agree. In many cases, these Policies and Orders were causing harm and suffering that, while different from the harm and suffering caused by the spread of the Coronavirus, were still causing very real harm and suffering to our residents nonetheless.

As you know, the safety of this community and its residents has always been my paramount concern. This is certainly reflected in our Bensalem Police, Fire and Emergency Management Services, all of which are the best equipped, most well trained, and most community active of any such departments or squads in the Commonwealth.

Our Township Government is responsible to ensure the health, safety and welfare of this community, and in response to the threat of the Coronavirus, we are hopeful that our actions and decisions of the past few months have done just that. Together, our community has suffered through these past several months under policies and orders that we may not have always agreed with, but when all is said and done WE ARE A COMMUNITY, and in the true nature of this community, we all complied with the Governor's policies and orders for the safety of ourselves, and more importantly, for the safety of our neighbors, co-workers, families and friends.

We have come this far, but we have not yet reached the finish line. Again, we are still being reminded that the crisis has not passed, that the virus is unpredictable, and that the dangers of its spread and resurgence remain very, very real. We are all still required to comply with the "Yellow Phase" rules and prohibitions of Governor Wolf's "Process to Reopen Pennsylvania."

At this critical juncture, we cannot allow the many sacrifices of the past several months to have all been in vain. The Township must therefore see this Process through to its end, and we will continue to abide by the orders and directives coming from the Governor, his medical experts, and his emergency management directors regarding the COVID-19 emergency.

I have never been more proud of this community, and I have never been more proud to be your Mayor. As is true throughout our history, our community has risen to the challenges presented to it, and we will come out of this crisis stronger for having endured it.

God Bless All Of You.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James [unclear]". The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.