



Watauga Municipal Court

Action Plan - COVID19

In preparation for the opening of the Municipal Court to the general public, a review of court security and court processes have been conducted and it has been determined that security policies and procedures already in-place are effective and efficient as long as manpower in the Department are maintained and we are compliant with the current COVID19 adjustments for public interaction by using the actions listed below:

1. Currently, we have approximately 1250 cases on hold awaiting our direction to proceed. In an effort to minimize the number of "in person" appearances, the Court will be contacting defendants by phone, texts, standard mail and/or through their attorney. They are given the choice to either participate in a virtual court session and/or encouraged to handle their cases electronically through email, fax, night drop, or regular mail.
2. The Prosecutor will hold tele-conferencing sessions with attorneys in order to reduce the number of in person attorney dockets needed to alleviate the current backlog. The Judge is holding his first zoom court session Thursday, May 14, 2020. It may be possible to hold extra sessions during the week to help alleviate the current backlog should the need arise. It would be my recommendation to continue having one additional Prosecutor tele-conference and one additional court tele-conference with the Judge into the far-reaching future, becoming a set standard for court proceedings. Keeping it as part of the permanent process will not only alleviate the workload on court days, but it will be a convenience to many of the defendants as well as to us, and we may discover a reduction in the issuing of warrants if people can tele-conference instead of missing a physical court appearance.
3. In preparation for us to receive "in person" appearances in the lobby, the Court has implemented the following:
 - a. It will be a requirement for defendants to wear protective masks when entering the court building. We will be advertising through signage, website, notices, texts and phone calls. Those defendants who refuse to wear a mask will be required to wait outside the building. Once all those wearing masks have been seen a member of the Court staff will call for each defendant that refuses to wear a mask and they will be seen one at a time at the end of the docket.
 - b. We are establishing social distancing guidelines for the court lobby as well as the courtroom. The lobby design will be altered and marked accordingly. The clerks at the window will provide direct observance and the Marshal will provide the oversight.
 - c. All Court employees must pass a temperature and health questionnaire screening prior to reporting to work in the Court offices. The Clerks are protected from defendants by glass enclosures and are a safe 6 ft. away from each other's assigned desks.
 - d. We are in the process of determining a permanent solution for consecutive exchange of paperwork and payment. However, currently, clerks are wearing gloves when opening mail



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and disposing them right after. Consecutive transactions will require clerks to sanitize and/or get up and wash their hands between each transaction.

- e. We will continue to receive cash, checks, money orders and credit card payment, with the emphasis being placed on credit card payments.
 - We have placed credit card swipe's outside the clerk's window so defendants can manage their own transaction. We still need to obtain a signature so sanitizing wipes will be available for defendants to use on writing instruments to complete their signatures on both credit card authorizations and court order acknowledgements.
 - All employees will have access to gloves and masks. We have 1 sanitizer unit at the clerk's window and 1 standing sanitizer unit in the lobby.
4. The Prosecutor's area will be set up to allow all participants to be at least 6 ft. apart from each other.
5. The Marshals have masks and gloves available for their use, especially at the entry control point (metal detector). It must be understood, that the social distancing at the metal detector will be difficult to maintain at all times, due to the searches that must be conducted at that point in order to provide a safe and weapons free environment in the courtroom.
6. Based on the directive from the Office of Court Administration, the Court will not resume "in person" hearings until June 9, 2020. Once in session, the courtroom will present additional situations with seating. Depending on requirements at that time, we can mark where they are to be seated maintaining social distances. Since the courtroom is considered an "Open Court" setting, we cannot deny people entry. However, the Judge can temporarily suspend allowing children in the courtroom, and implement certain restrictions such as requiring them to wear protective masks or been seen at the end of the docket and not allowing more than 35 people in the courtroom at one time. Many defendants scheduled for dockets are typically no-shows, but unfortunately, this cannot be a guideline in every instance.
7. Building Services will designate specific days and times to deep clean our courtroom, lobby area and public restrooms. Marshals will be responsible for ensuring the security screening area has been thoroughly cleaned and sanitized prior to opening area and after closing.
8. This plan has been reviewed and approved by the Watauga Municipal Court Judge and the Watauga Emergency Management Director and will remain in effect until such time as the Emergency Management Director notifies the Court Administrator that it is no longer required.



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J. Stewart Bass
Presiding Judge, J. Stewart Bass

5-21-20
Date

Randy Barkley
Emergency Management Coordinator, Randy Barkley

01 June 2020
Date

Andrea Gardner
City Manager, Andrea Gardner

6-1-2020
Date

Arthur L Miner
Mayor, Arthur Miner

01 June 20
Date

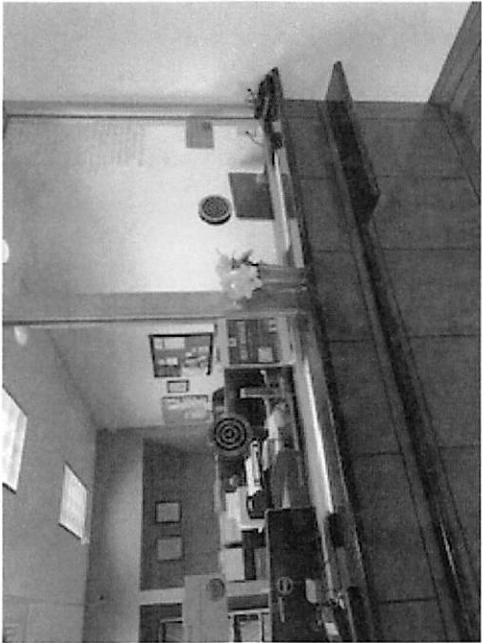
David Evans
Eight Region Administrative Regional Judge, David Evans

6-8-2020
Date











GOVERNOR'S STATE POLICE
OPEN TEXAS

WATAUGA
COUNTY

Please visit www.texas.gov/open-texas for the Governor's Report to Open Texas

State of Texas
Public Health Order 2020-014

MAXIMUM 25% OCCUPANCY

35

TOTAL PERSONS

APPLICABLE TO ALL BUSINESSES AND SERVICES

- This business order sets the maximum number of persons allowed to be present at your business or service at any time. It is effective as of April 22, 2020, and is subject to change in the future. Occupancy is based on the number of persons and not the number of tables or chairs.
- This order does not apply to restaurants, bars, and other food and beverage establishments.
- This order does not apply to all areas of the state. All areas under this order are subject to local health orders. For more information, visit www.texas.gov/open-texas.







