



TOWNSHIP OF HOWELL

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We have received a great deal of feedback over the past day relating to the closure of parks in Howell, some positive, some negative. Many of you took issue with the abrupt nature of the closing and its impact on youth sports leagues in Howell.

The closure order was issued as a result of increased complaints relating to use of our parks, and the failure of people to follow protocols relating to social distancing and mask wearing. The closure order was worded succinctly so that there was no room for interpretation. The Township needed a temporary hard stop on park usage to ensure the safety of everyone.

As soon as the closure order was issued, we began contacting (and were contacted by) the Directors of our youth sports leagues to discuss the situation. Most of our organized sports leagues have a plan in place relating to COVID-19. We have reviewed them again in light of recent experience to see if they need to be updated or modified. I am happy to say that our sports leagues are an example to us all. They have observed proper protocols and have taken responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others. ***As a result, we will be allowing them to utilize our parks again. We expect them to return to the fields today.*** We continue to work on a plan to phase in usage over the next several days, but at this point we are keeping playground and other 'high-touch' areas closed.

Additionally, while our parks are closed, we will be sanitizing them. Our first priority is to sanitize the youth sports fields. To assist with our sanitization efforts, the Township of Lakewood has agreed to mobilize some of its own DPW, so you will see Lakewood trucks in some of our parks. Once our parks are sanitized, we anticipate re-opening them to passive recreation; this should occur over the next several days.

Finally, a number of residents have asked why we cannot restrict the use of our parks to Township residents. The answer is simple – it is not legal. There have been instances where other towns have tried to restrict the use of their parks to their own residents. They were sued not only for unlawful discrimination, but also for violating the terms of New Jersey Green Acres grants, which require parks to be open to all.