

April 30, 2020

Dear Patron,

It has been six weeks now since the library closed to the public. I wanted to reach out to you and give details about that decision.

First and foremost, know that we miss our patrons and wish we could see you, talk to you, and get books in your hands. However, for the safety of our patrons and our staff, it is not possible to do so at this time.

I hear from people I encounter, and on social media, how hard it is to be without books. There have been questions about curbside service. We took into consideration the recommendations of the State Librarian, as well as the CDC and WHO, and decided to discontinue lending our physical materials. The Library Trustees, the elected legislative body of the library, made this cautious decision, and the Trustees will decide when and how we will reopen.

It was not an easy decision for them to make. But here are some of the reasons why. One is that there continues to be no definitive data on how long the Coronavirus stays on materials, namely plastic, which covers all our books, audiobooks, and DVDs. I have heard numbers from a couple hours to 11 days. Books are with you in bed. They are open while you are eating. Multiple members of your household may touch them. That is a lot of opportunity for germs. Why not wipe them all down? That is not feasible; we could wipe the plastic covers, but what about every paper page of every book? Where do we even get that amount of disinfectant wipes?

Second, patrons and staff would be at increased risk of exposure by interacting with patrons, passing materials back and forth. This is not similar to restaurant take out. Take out is a one-way interaction. You do not eat your food and then return the container to the restaurant to be reused by another customer. Frankly, if I were responsible for giving one our patrons, many of whom are at higher risk due to age or underlying medical conditions, the virus, I would never forgive myself. That is not a risk I am willing to take.

Third, the Library is following Governor Sununu's order to be closed. And we will be following his phased re-opening plan. The Trustees are currently looking at what phased re-opening of the library would look like. I imagine it would include curbside service as one of the first steps in re-opening.

For patrons in need of books, we subscribe to the New Hampshire Downloadable Books, which lends eBooks, audio books and magazines (<https://nh.overdrive.com>). On our website, www.bethlehemlibrary.org, we have links to other free eBooks and audio books, for both adults and children. Wi-Fi is available free in our parking lot to access these digital materials. Staff is available by phone or email to answer questions about this and any other reference questions you might have. We are here to help you any way we can safely do so.

We look forward to welcoming you back into the library. If you have questions or comments, please contact me, or you can contact the Library Trustees at trustees@bethlehemlibrary.org.

Stay safe, and know I am thinking of you,

Laura Clerkin
Library Director

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