



June 20, 2020

Dear Councilors,

The staff and Board of Directors of the Northfield Historical Society would like to ask you to consider approving a temporary waiver to our public restroom agreement for the summer of 2020. Due to COVID-19 and the safety protocols for museums in the state, we have made many adaptations to the way we are operating. The museum and the store are fenced off from each other and all visitors must be on a guided tour to enter the museum portion of the building. We're only taking up to ten visitors at a time through the museum and they are supervised the entire time to assure that a predictive path is followed and that they exit out of the correct doors as the state requested for our reopening. Additionally, nearly the entire tour takes place outdoors where visitors are able to social distance. The indoor portion of the tour happens as a walk-through at the end of the tour. This is not ideal for us. We have had to turn visitors away who have arrived outside of the times that we have tour guides and we know this does not lead to a good visitor experience by any means. We're doing the best we can.

With the location of our restrooms being in the center-back of the museum, anyone who needs to use them has to walk through most of the building to get there. That means an unsupervised visitor taking a non-predictive path through the museum - that is exactly what we're trying to avoid by setting up our tours as we have. Additionally, once we've started a tour we know how many visitors we are reasonably accommodating. Restroom visitors who are not already on a tour are outside of our count. Their comings and goings would disrupt the pattern of traffic we're trying to maintain and it will be difficult for our front desk volunteers to assure they are coming and going out of the correct doors. A normal weekday downtown might count four people requesting to use the restrooms, but weekends have been far busier. (For reference, Saturday restroom use in the summer of 2019 was usually 40+ people. We know numbers will not get that high this year, but even 10 requests on a typical summer Saturday could be disruptive or unsafe during the pandemic.)

For all these reasons, NHS would like to close the restrooms to the general public over the summer until September 14th. At that time we will no longer be giving guided tours and our front desk volunteers should be able to escort a visitor to and from the restrooms without impacting the count of people in the building. Your consideration of this matter is appreciated and we will abide by whatever decision is made.

Sincerely,

Cathy Osterman,
Executive Director