

MUNICIPAL COURT OF SPARTA, GEORGIA

The Municipal Court of Sparta, Georgia, will resume in-person proceedings on all cases beginning Wednesday, August 26, 2020. While resuming in-person proceedings, the Court seeks to balance the needs of public safety, the rights and health of individual litigants, and the health and safety of lawyers, public safety officers, and Court staff.

In compliance with CDC guidelines and the Judicial Council Strategic Plan Standing Committee Georgia Court Reopening Guide, the Court has implemented numerous measures to protect all who appear in Court--whether defendants, Court staff, public safety officers, or lawyers. The measures are detailed below.

General Infection Control Measures:

- All employees and the public will be required to wear a mask or face covering when entering the court facility. For purposes of this policy, "court facility" means the building which houses the Sparta city council chambers along with the mayor's office and the city clerk and city treasurer's offices. The City of Sparta will make every attempt to provide masks for those who do not have masks; however, the public and employees are asked to provide their own mask or face covering if possible.
- The municipal court room will be limited to the judge, the court clerk, the solicitor, the probation personnel, the police officer who issued the citation, the defendant, the public defender (if necessary), any necessary witnesses, and any other persons deemed to be necessary by the judge.
- Defendants will be encouraged to contact the solicitor ahead of court if they wish to discuss their case. Any cases that may be handled without the necessity of the defendant appearing in court will be so handled if possible.
- Housekeeping personnel will clean and sanitize the bathroom frequently.
- Restrooms shall be clearly marked, checked for soap and paper towels regularly, and limited in capacity.
- Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 during a court proceeding will be isolated in a separate room with only medical personnel or family members necessary to assist the symptomatic person until the person is able to leave the court facility.

Provide Notice to the Public of Increased Health and Safety Measures

- Hearing notices will be modified to include a notice that the Court has implemented heightened safety measures and will include a copy of the measures.
- The revised hearing notice will include the following language:

"In the event you (1) are currently infected with COVID-19 or in quarantine due to exposure to a person with COVID-19, (2) are a member of an immune-compromised or medically fragile population (or living in a household with someone who is immune-compromised or medically fragile), (3) are over the

age of 65, or (4) have small children but do not have child care due to COVID-19, you should contact the court at (706) 444-5753 at least 72 hours prior to your scheduled court appearance to inquire about a continuance. A continuance has not been granted unless court personnel (either the Court Clerk or the Solicitor) has verbally confirmed your continuance. Leaving a message does not excuse failure to attend your court date.

- Information will be supplied in the hearing notice regarding interpreters if necessary for defendants.
- Signs will be posted and court personnel and police officers will direct attendees on how to comply with the health and safety measures and where to enter and exit the court facility, as well as where to sit and stand during the court proceeding.

Provide Healthy and Safe Access to the Courtroom

- Court personnel and/or police officers will take all attendees' temperature with a no-contact thermometer, ask COVID-19 screening questions, and provide hand sanitizer at a greeting station set up outside the building prior to admitting any defendant, witness, or necessary party. The questions will include (1) Whether or not they have traveled to or from any areas in which COVID-19 is particularly active; (2) Whether they have, within the past ten days, experienced symptoms of COVID-19, including cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever above 100.0 degrees, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, headache, or new loss of taste or smell; (3) Whether they have been in contact with someone known to have COVID-19 within the last 14 days; and (4) Whether they have been tested for the virus and the result of any such test.
- Anyone who has a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher when taken by court personnel or police officers will be denied entry.
- Anyone reporting a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher within the prior 72 hours will be denied entry.
- Any person denied entry for medical reasons will be advised to seek medical treatment and his/her case will be continued.
- If any person is denied entry for medical reasons, court personnel or police officers will collect the following information: name, contact information, case number, and specific reason for denying entry.
- Only one case will be scheduled at any time period. All other defendants, officers, and witnesses will be required to wait outside and socially distance until the case is called. Court personnel and police officers will monitor people waiting to enter the court facility to make sure they practice social distancing. Parties will be requested to not arrive for court until their scheduled time.

Maintain a Healthy and Safe Courtroom

- Attendees will be required to maintain a 6 foot distance from all other attendees (unless they reside in the same household) and court personnel.

- All individuals from one court hearing who are not parties to the next hearing will be required to leave the courtroom prior to individuals for the next hearing being admitted.
- Housekeeping personnel shall clean and sanitize the court facility before and after court sessions. Cleaning times shall be provided periodically between case times.

Healthy and Safe Court Employees

- Employees are discouraged from sharing phones, desks, and other equipment wherever possible.
- Employees' workstations are adequately spaced to promote social distancing.
- Employees shall enter the court facility from the walkway between the main City Hall building and the court facility.
- Employees are required to wear face coverings at all times.
- Any employee who exhibits signs of illness must stay home or seek medical attention and be cleared before returning to work.
- Employees are trained on best practices to prevent infection.

Healthy and Safe Jurors and Potential Jurors—Inapplicable as the City of Sparta Municipal Court does not conduct jury trials.

Healthy and Safe Inmates and Detainees

- Inmates will be screened in the same methods as provided above for access to the courtroom prior to being transported to the court facility.
- Inmates will be transported one at a time and will be required to wear a mask, both during transport and while in the court facility. The transport vehicle will be sanitized after the inmate is transported back to jail, and no other inmate will occupy the vehicle until it has been sanitized.
- Inmates will not be staged in a holding area, but will be picked up from the Hancock County jail when the Court is ready to conduct the hearing.
- Hand sanitizer will be available to inmates.

With regard to everyone who works in the court facility, the operating guidelines shall require isolation of any person with known or suspected COVID-19 and quarantine of any person with COVID-19 exposure likely to result in infection, in accordance with the DPH Seventh Amended Administrative Order for Public Health Control Measures (<https://gasupreme.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/7-Seventh-Amended-Administrative-Order-for-Public-Health-Control-Measures.pdf>).

When there is reason to believe that anyone who works or has visited a court facility has been exposed to COVID-19, DPH or the local health department shall be notified and notification of persons who may have been exposed shall occur as directed by DPH or the local health department.

These procedures will remain in effect at least as long as any Judicial Emergency Order exists, and shall be modified in accordance with any revisions to the current Judicial Emergency Order.

s// Hon. Blanton Carl Lingold, Municipal Judge, City of Sparta, Georgia