

## Halting non-essential construction in lockdown ‘manageable,’ says Hamilton industry rep

By Jacob Lorinc Local Journalism Initiative Reporter  
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All “non-essential” construction projects will be halted in Hamilton as of Thursday following the announcement of new lockdown measures from the provincial government to curb the spread of COVID-19.

On Tuesday, Premier Doug Ford announced that non-essential construction, including below-grade construction with some exemptions, will be restricted “in response to the alarming and exceptional circumstances at hand, and to further interrupt the deadly trend of transmission in Ontario communities.”

The new rule largely applies to projects like home renovations and some property developments, where construction will be stalled for the coming months until the government lifts its state of emergency.

The restriction will not have much impact on a laundry list of projects deemed essential, including those affiliated with the health sector, long-term-care facilities, transit, or education, though social distancing measures and individual safety requirements might stall the speed of construction.

The list of essential projects also includes construction at petrochemical plants and refineries, mines, affordable housing or shelters.

“We understand the province’s decision and why they’re doing what they’re doing,” said Ryan Kneisz, president of the Hamilton-Halton Construction Association.

“Does it impede some construction? Yes, but that doesn’t mean it’s not manageable. It will slow things down a bit, but health and safety is so paramount in construction that we’re well-prepared for situations like these.”

The construction industry faced similar restrictions to projects last spring, when the province first declared a state of emergency to curb the spread of the virus in communities and at workplaces. The limits to non-essential work will be similar to those in the spring, Kneisz said.

“We’re talking about projects that haven’t really gotten started yet. Projects that came to fruition recently and were about to break ground. Do those projects really have to start this January,

while the province is going through a public health crisis? No. Certain types of commercial retail renovations are not much of a priority compared to work needed on hospitals and infrastructure,” said Kneisz.

The province’s rules drew criticism from some advocates and politicians as well, questioning why so many construction projects are deemed essential.

“Many people are confused by Ontario’s new State of Emergency rules,” wrote Toronto city councillor Josh Matlow on Twitter. “When other workplaces are closed, why is condo construction ‘essential’ during a pandemic?”

**Days before the new measures were announced, groups like RESCON, Ontario’s association for residential builders, asked the province that construction projects get exemptions from any new measures.**

**“Given the low case count within residential construction, we are hopeful that further provincial restrictions will exclude the residential construction industry,” RESCON wrote to the premier.**