

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Ponder Municipal Court

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the courts of the Ponder Municipal Court will implement the following protective measures:

General

1. All judges will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, including conducting in-person proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration regarding social distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. All judges will use reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely, when possible.
3. The presiding judge of the municipal court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and mayor, and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than July 20, 2020

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements:
 - continue to monitor directives and guidance from Town of Ponder leadership and Texas Office of Court Administration;
 - ensure that all Court personnel are following COVID-19 precautions regarding social distancing measures and appropriate respiratory etiquette; and
 - encourage court personnel to seek testing if they present with signs of COVID-19 infection (fever, fatigue or tiredness, dry cough) or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Anyone with positive signs will not be permitted to enter the building and will be directed to seek medical advice.
3. Protective Measures: Judges and Court Staff will strive to follow CDC and Texas DHS recommendations.
4. Maintain the number of public entrances to one (1) into the Courthouse and clearly designate entry and exit points for staff and the public.
5. Encourage defendants to resolve their court matters through alternative contact points (i.e., phone, mail, and drop box).
6. The clerk will continue to work behind protective glass and will work diligently to minimize contact with individuals when conducting in-person business with individuals.
7. Individuals will be asked to use the court provided hand sanitizer before touching court provided writing utensils and/or court documents.
8. The prosecutor, judge, and court staff in the courtroom shall not accept physical copies of materials but shall review the documents presented electronically (or provided to the clerk for

copying). The clerk scanning or copying the documents shall take efforts to minimize any potential contamination by either wearing gloves and changing them between transactions or using hand sanitizer before and after scanning or copying the documents.

9. Judges and court staff will be required to wear a mask or face covering when dealing with the public. They will also be required to practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene recommendations.

Scheduling

The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:

- The Court window will be open as follows until further notice:
Monday through Thursday:
7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. – individuals with matters before the court may appear at the window.
Friday:
7:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. - individuals with matters before the court may appear at the window anytime.
- Courtroom in-person dockets will resume as scheduled July 20, 2020, subject to COVID-19 precautions regarding social distancing, screening, hygiene standards, and appropriate respiratory etiquette. The Courtroom is a shared space which will be thoroughly cleaned before the regularly scheduled court docket.
- Jury trials will not resume until after August 1, 2020.
- Citizens will continue to be encouraged to take advantage of the options available for processing their cases by mail, drop box, and telephone to minimize the number of individuals interacting face-to face with court staff.
- Liberal reset policies will continue when appropriate.

Vulnerable Populations

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable populations.
2. The Court will include information on orders setting hearings, dockets notices, and in other communications notifying individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted in conspicuous locations around the court building.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by special docket settings upon request.

Social Distancing

Courtroom entrance

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. Public common areas will be posted with appropriate signage requiring adherence to social distancing directives.
3. Social distancing in the court building lobby will be supervised by the court staff.
4. Individuals with business before the court will be given priority entrance to the courtroom in addition to an additional person if needed for physical assistance or language translation. A parents or guardian of a juvenile shall appear with the juvenile for a matter involving the juvenile.

Courtroom Gallery

5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating and seating is designated with appropriate markings.

Courtroom Well

7. A podium has been placed in the courtroom and will be used when addressing the Court.
8. In the courtroom, the seating has been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed outside of the courtroom and at the judge's bench.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom and at the witness stand.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations of the court building.
4. Defendants shall be asked to use hand sanitizer prior to using the Court's property including but not limited to writing utensils.

Screening

1. The Court shall post signs outside the courthouse building advising persons that if they have a fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or other symptoms or if they have been in close contact within the past two weeks with a person confirmed to have COVID-19 that they should contact the clerk via telephone to reset their court date or, if applicable, resolve their case using the mail or telephone.

2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, city personnel will ask the individuals if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves and a mask.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.

Cleaning

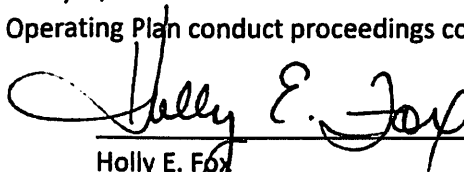
1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned after each use.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

The Judge and court staff will continue to monitor CDC and Texas DHS recommendations as well as directives and guidance from Denton County, the Texas Office of Court Administration, and the Town of Ponder leadership.

I have conferred with court personnel regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and mayor, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

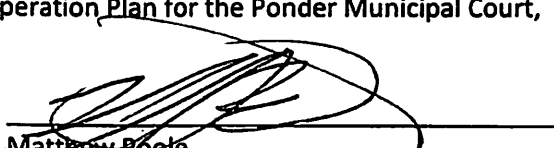
Date: 6/8/2020



Holly E. Fox
Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

I certify that I was consulted about the COVID-19 Operation Plan for the Ponder Municipal Court, have read the plan and agree with it.

Date: 6/8/2020



Matthew Poole
Mayor, Town of Ponder