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## Road construction continues

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Utility work at the intersection of Grandview Parkway and East Front Street in downtown Traverse City.

Record-Eagle/Jan-Michael Stump



TRAVERSE CITY — Road construction projects around the area are going ahead, even as private contractors working on builds have shut down.

The Michigan Department of Transportation is exempt from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's executive order barring all non-essential in-person work through April 13, MDOT North Region Communications Director James Lake said. He pointed to an explainer from the governor's office stating construction to build and improve roads is allowed.

Richard Liptak, MDOT Traverse City Transportation Service Center manager, said the state agency is considered an essential service and is moving ahead with projects already in the pipeline. Those include a lane widening on U.S. Highway 31 in Grawn and bridge work on M-204 in Lake Leelanau.

In Grawn, MDOT will repave and widen the highway just west of Chum's Corner to add a center turn lane, according to information from the department. The project will stretch around 2.5 miles from east of Sullivan Road to M-37 at Chum's Corner. It'll cost \$4.4 million.

Lake said the project is in response to crashes that happened there and the increase in traffic.

"It is a heavily trafficked corridor but it's also a safety project," he said. "Adding the center left turn lane provides a refuge for drivers who are turning left to do so safely."

In Lake Leelanau, MDOT will replace the deck of the bridge spanning The Narrows, according to a project release. That'll make room to build separated pathways on both sides of the bridge. Workers also will rebuild the historic pedestrian railings, add new railings and improve the bridge approaches, all for \$1.7 million.

Both projects are slated to start Monday, Liptak said.

Meanwhile, half-finished construction projects sit vacant around Traverse City, including what's destined to be 4Front Credit Union's new administration center.

Cunningham-Limp, a Novi company with a Traverse City office, was in charge of building the structure at Pine and Front streets but company President Randy DeRuitter said work is stopped. He said the executive order had some ambiguity but after consulting with trade associations and attorneys he determined construction wasn't considered essential.

DeRuitter said the order allows for projects to be shut down safely, and field crews will check the projects routinely to make sure they're safe and not being vandalized.

It's tough for the subcontractors working on the project and their employees, DeRuitter said.

"And yet I have spoken with our major suppliers on that project, and they certainly respect the position that we took and are being respectful of that, and we think it's the right thing to do," he said. "We've all got to play our part, and nobody's happy about it but it appears to be effective."

The work stoppage no doubt will affect project timelines, DeRuitter said. Construction on 4Front's administration center was slated to be done in December, while work on West Bay Beach Resort was set to wrap in time for summer.

The Home Builders Association of Michigan decried Whitmer leaving housing construction out of the order, with association CEO Bob Filka noting in a statement that numerous other states took the opposite stance.

Plus, shutting down one part of the construction trade could affect the entire supply chain, Filka said in the statement.

Bobby Leddy, deputy press secretary for Whitmer, referred to an explainer stating projects needed to "maintain and improve the safety, sanitation and essential operations of a residence" are allowed while cosmetic and non-emergency projects aren't.

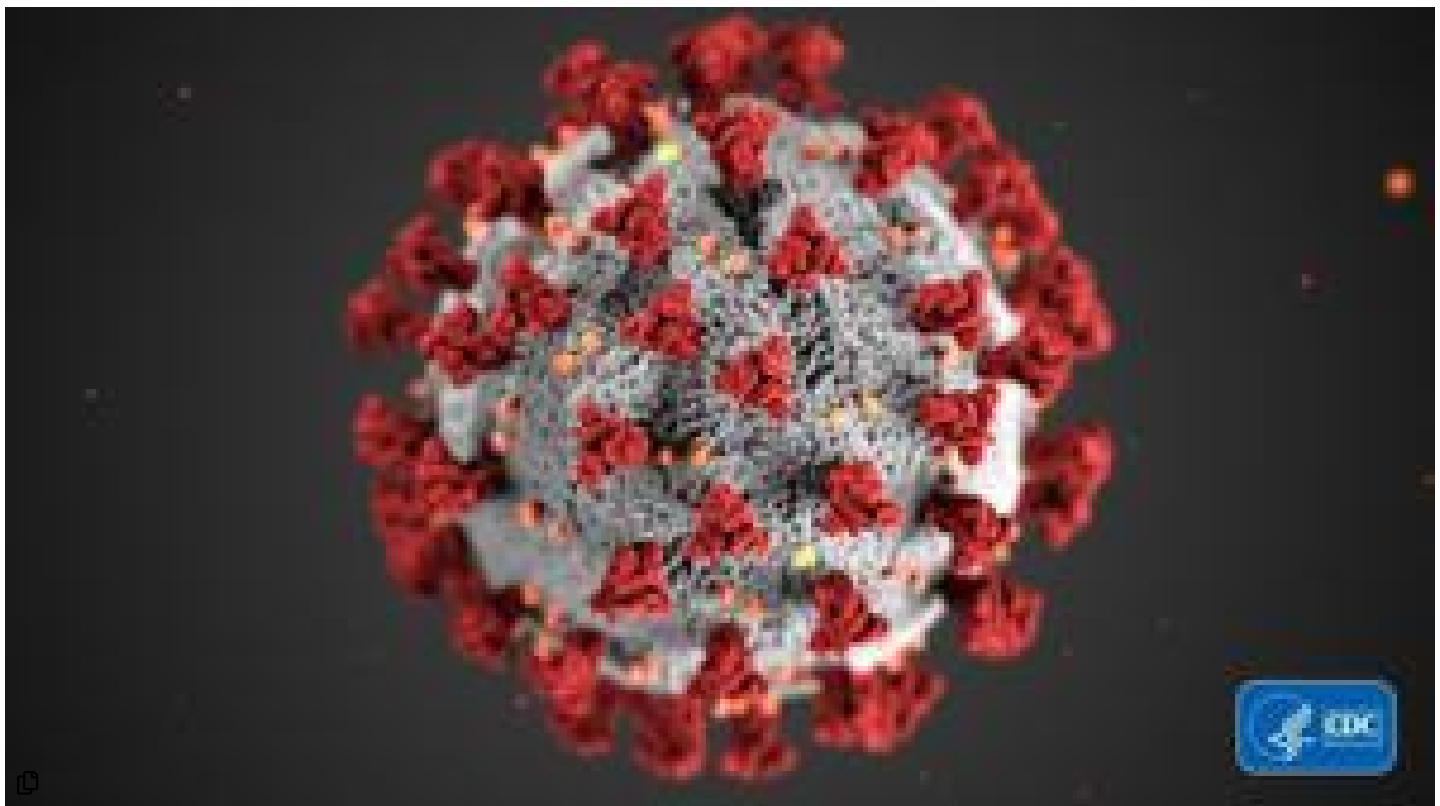
Team Elmer's finds itself on both sides of the order, with nonessential projects like pouring concrete floors for residential projects shut down and others going ahead, company Communications Manager Tonya Wildfong said.

"Anything that's deemed nonessential, we are currently not operating, so if a water line breaks or a sewer line breaks, we have emergency crews on call to repair those," Wildfong said.

Other critical projects include replacing a major part at a wastewater treatment plant, lifting a freezer motor atop a grocery store and other work on businesses or installations deemed essential, Wildfong said — Team Elmer's is the contractor for the road widening project in Grawn, Liptak said.

Some shoreline stabilization work continues as well where erosion threatens a home, Wildfong said. Workers are following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines to stay safe.

Otherwise, everyone with the company is home or working from home until at least April 14, Wildfong said.



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