

MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Council
FROM: David E. Cox, Town Manager
DATE: March 24, 2020
SUBJECT: Special Town Manager's Report



This is a special Town Manager's Report that primarily focuses on the Town's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the declared States of Emergency in both the State and the Town. On March 10, 2020, Governor Lamont issued a declaration of a Public Health Emergency and Civil Preparedness Emergency in the State. On March 20, 2020, a State of Emergency was officially declared in the Town of East Hampton. Discussions and preparations have been taking place for some time among staff of the Town in anticipation of the pandemic reaching our state. There are ongoing discussions among staff and an effort to describe the current state of affairs is contained herein. In general, the Town's facilities are closed to the public and we are primarily conducting business via phone, email and other online means. Limited face-to-face meetings are occurring by appointment. All of these protocols are regularly reviewed for effectiveness and for appropriate extension.

Assessor's Office

- This office is functioning with one person in the office and one person working remotely. All services continue to be provided via online access and other remote processes. The ongoing revaluation effort will continue as well. The only change to the revaluation effort will be the suspension of interior inspections of properties. Exterior inspection will continue.
- Unrelated to the pandemic, our Assessor, Gail Gwiazdowski, has resigned. She will leave our employ in mid-April to begin work for another Connecticut municipality. She is thanked for her service. A replacement will be sought immediately and staff will continue to work with the contract appraisal service to complete the revaluation project.

Building Department

- The plan review and inspection services are continuing with a few modifications. In person plan review is limited to appointments and a drop box has been developed for application delivery. Permits are issued via email. Inspections continue. A protocol was developed with the Chatham Health District that provides for an advanced call to the inspection location to evaluate health risks and ensure that the inspection is still needed and cannot/should not be delayed. The call-ahead is especially important for residential

inspections for occupied houses as we are attempting to limit the number of people exposed to one another.

Clerk's Office

- Staff is scheduled so that only one is in the office at a time. The other individual is working remotely. Nearly all of our services and records can be provided online or can be done remotely and those that cannot (e.g. Marriage Licenses, fulfilling certified record requests through Vital Check, etc.) are being handled by appointment or by the person in the office. The delay in the Presidential Primary does eliminate one service, for the time being, that would require a fair amount of customer contact and office work.

Collector's Office

- Staff in this office is also divided so that only one is in the office at a time. The other staff person is working remotely. All of the services provided by the Office continue and are handled through online transactions, email and phone. Payments that need to be made are being arranged for exact cash, check or online payment. Cash and checks are accepted through the drop box at the front door of Town Hall. Certain procedural hold times have been reduced to facilitate moving payments ahead more quickly and online fees for ACH transactions (from checking and savings accounts) have been temporarily waived. Staff continues to make an effort to reduce or eliminate fees related to credit card payments. No change at this point.

Finance

- This Department has implemented procedures to reduce the need for in person transactions among staff. Information exchange, including invoices for payment, with the Board of Education staff and remote Town departments are handled via email to the extent possible. Remote access has been established for accounting purposes and staff is working remotely when possible.
- The Budget process has been delayed in response to the situation and to the Governor's various declarations. Currently, staff is evaluating the declarations and determining a recommended timeline and process for completing the budget process in advance of the beginning of the 2021 fiscal year. It is likely that this will require some action by the Council in the upcoming week.

Land Use Department

- Despite the Governor's declarations that extend deadlines for various applications that may be in process for the Land Use Department, efforts are being made to address the applications that are in process now. The Inland Wetland and Watercourses Agency (IWWA) and the Planning and Zoning Commission will be meeting as planned via Zoom meetings to consider those proposals. Otherwise, the Land Use office continues to operate by appointment only and will continue to respond to matters and concerns brought to it. To the extent possible, staff will be undertaking some work remotely but the Zoning Official will usually be in the office.

Library

- The Library closed to public access on Monday, March 16. Currently, one full time employee and a reduced part time staff manage the minimal on-site library operations that are occurring. Additionally, the other two full time employees are operating remotely. Staff has developed and continues to produce online programming including story times and other activities for library patrons and the public using Facebook Live and Zoom meetings. At this time, patrons are not able to access physical books but all online services remain active.

Parks and Recreation

- The Department has canceled its group activities and has issued refunds. Currently, Departments staff is working remotely and is developing online programs including fitness and other activities. They have been using Facebook for communication and for posting of ideas and information for the public.
- Parks, trails and playgrounds remain open and the public have been reminded that these should be used while keeping the social distancing concepts in mind. People should not congregate in large groups in public spaces.

Police and Other Public Safety

- The Police Department, Fire Department and East Hampton Ambulance continue to operate in their usual manner. In accordance with directives from the State, the Medical Director from Middlesex Hospital and guidance from Chatham Health District, protocols have been implemented to maintain and protect responder health.
- Supplies have been tight but our public safety departments have received replenishment from the emergency reserves held by the State and FEMA. Nevertheless,

staff continues to follow measures to extend the supply as much as possible while protecting patients and responders.

- Staff from the public safety departments along with the Town Manager and the Emergency Management Director have been meeting weekly via telephone conference to coordinate activities and supplies. These meetings will continue throughout the emergency.

Senior Center

- The Senior Center closed on Monday, March 16. Since that time, a reduced crew have been coordinating contacts to seniors to monitor their wellbeing and to determine their needs during this emergency. With the assistance of CRT, meals are being provided to a small number of seniors who are either picking the meals up at the Center or are receiving the meals by delivery. The Center continues to evaluate ways to provide additional meals if needed.
- The Center will be providing limited transportation assistance by providing bussing for seniors to get to the grocery store weekly. Arrangements have been made for taking small groups and for the bus to be sanitized between trips.
- Staff will continue to monitor and evaluate the needs of our community's senior population to determine what other services we can provide or what services may need to be expanded.
- To assist in connecting with seniors, the Center is implementing a Facebook page and hopes to use it to provide information soon.

WPCA

- The wastewater treatment facility has reduced its staffing to prevent contact and to safeguard against illness affecting the entire staff but is otherwise operating normally. Safety precautions are in place to prevent exposure. Staff members that are able to work remotely are doing so to the extent possible.

Youth and Family Services

- The Youth and Family Services Department has been impacted by the loss of its main counseling staff, which comprises persons attending university programs in the

profession. Those universities have ended the programs that allow those persons to work for us. As such, the director has established telephone consultations for individuals who need the service and has suspended sessions for those who are able.

- The Department continues to respond to utility needs and other emergencies that may arise. The Governor has temporarily suspended any evictions or other housing related actions that might cause a person to be without shelter so response to these cases is not impacting our resources.

Town Manager/Other

- The Town Manager has been communicating regularly with staff and the public safety departments during the COVID-19 emergency. Additionally, the Town Manager has been participating in the various state conference calls through which state information is conveyed. Material that is received has been forwarded to the Town Council and others as appropriate to help disseminate information. Last Friday morning, an Emergency Declaration was made by the Town Manager to compliment the Governor's declarations and in an effort to ensure that the Town remains eligible for any outside assistance that may be available and appropriate.
- Many Town meetings have been canceled or postponed, including the Budget Public Hearing and Board of Finance budget workshops. Meetings that will occur for the duration of any order that limits crowd size will be performed by conference call or the Zoom meeting platform. The Governor has authorized and mandated some changes to the method by which towns will be approving budgets for the upcoming fiscal year. In consultation with the Town Attorney, the Finance Director and Town Manager are developing a resolution for consideration of the Town Council that will outline a new process. The process will utilize as much of the normal process as possible including a public hearing plus a written public comment period coupled with the usual Board of Finance workshops. It is anticipated that the Board of Finance will still recommend a Budget to the Council but, in accordance with the Governor's directive, the Town Council will act as the final approval authority. It is anticipated that the Council will be asked to consider that resolution in the upcoming week.
- Efforts to minimize contacts extend to the operation of the Town's Transfer Station. On March 21, the Town Transfer station did not accept bulky waste, tires or furniture, which require close customer interaction for payments. The Council is being asked to consider a fee waiver and to allow continued resident use of the transfer station

without need for a pass sticker. The free services provided at the transfer station, which include disposal of metals, large appliances, waste oil, mattresses, car batteries, electronics and brush have always remained available.

- Transition to the new Town Hall is proceeding, however, the expected move dates have been moved to May 7 through May 9. Town operations would open at the new location on May 11. No Grand Opening Ceremony is planned at this time. Once it is safer to be together as a community, we will hold an event.
- Residents are reminded to be diligent as they continue to avoid contact with others. In general, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, please maintain "social distancing" of at least 6 feet, stay away from group meetings and other opportunities for transmission, wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds and stay home if you are sick. For the most current updates and recommendations, visit ct.gov/coronavirus. For general questions, call 2-1-1.

DC

Attachments

cc: Management Staff