

MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Council
FROM: David E. Cox, Town Manager
DATE: May 21, 2020
SUBJECT: Town Manager's Report



The following information includes follow up from general items that were discussed at previous Council meetings as well as updates of a general nature from the departments. The items are organized by department and are intended to provide information on activities currently being undertaken by the Town's departments and those matters that are upcoming. Not all departments will be represented in each Report.

Clerk

- In anticipation of a significant increase in absentee ballots for the upcoming elections, the Secretary of the State is providing municipalities with a secure drop box to be located outside Town Hall for the collection of ballots. It is not known when the box will arrive but its use will be encouraged as voters determine whether to go to the polls or vote absentee now that the restrictions have been eased for absentee voting.

Collector

- Staff is developing a new insert that will be included in tax bills that describes payment options and the low-interest payment option related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The insert will be outlining the online payment options, including a waiver of the fee for payment from a checking or savings account, as well as encouraging use of the drop box or mail options. The tax bill and the insert will also be addressing ways for residents to sign up for second payment reminders if they are not making the full payment in July.

Land Use

- The Land Use Office has worked collaboratively with the Building Official, Fire Marshal, Chatham Health District, and Police Department to create guidance and an application process to allow for temporary outdoor dining at restaurant facilities throughout town in accordance with Executive Order 7MM. These applications consist of filling out a single form and submitting a site plan detailed enough to be able to determine that patrons will be safe from vehicles and social distancing guidelines are being adhered to. Several restaurants have already begun taking advantage of this opportunity. Executive Order 7MM and related authorization given by the Planning and Zoning Commission allows staff to make temporary site plan changes that would normally need approval from the Planning and Zoning Commission in order to facilitate outdoor dining where it has not previously been allowed. Patron safety is the main factor with these

applications due to their location in or adjacent to parking lots. It is imperative that patrons dining at restaurants are not put in harm's way when seated adjacent to moving and parking vehicles. Staff continues to work with restaurant operators to come up with creative solutions so they can once again offer their menus to our residents.

- All land use board meetings continue to be held via zoom. Most Commission initiated activity has slowed down, but applications from homeowners and businesses are moving ahead in the usual process. While several applicants have put their projects on hold due to the desire not to meet digitally, many projects continue to move forward. The Department has received two applications from Edgewater Hills. The first is for the development of Market Square 2, the next three-story mixed-use building at the development, which will mirror the existing building fronting along Route 66. The second application received is for a subdivision of land beyond the new Town Hall which will eventually be home to more garden apartments. This is an exciting amount of development for the Town during this uncertain time.
- The Planning and Zoning Commission has begun discussing the possibility of developing home occupation regulations. The Zoning Regulations included provisions for home occupations until 1990. At that time, the language was removed from the regulation, leaving a hodge-podge of legal non-conforming home occupations (approved prior to 1990), and a number of businesses operating essentially in violation of the current regulation. Our neighboring towns (Portland, East Haddam, Glastonbury, Haddam, Colchester, Marlborough) all have language for home occupations, and the Town has lost residents and potential businesses each year. There are many details that need to be ironed out, such as grandfathering existing businesses, determining the appropriate types of operations and how they are advertised on the street, and more; but this has the potential to be a great opportunity to grow our business community.
- The update to Section 3.1, Lake Pocotopaug Protection Zone, has been put on hold until we can have an in-person Public Hearing. Due to the sensitivity of the matter, and the desire of the Commission to have as open a process as possible, it has been decided that an online public hearing for this decision may not be appropriate. While it is disappointing that the current health crisis is standing in the way of the goal of having this update completed by the 2020 construction season, the process will be able to pick up where it was left off as soon as in-person meetings can safely resume.

Library

- The Library began accepting the return of materials this week via the outside drop box and began receiving back books that were in other libraries when the shutdown occurred. Additionally, it will begin providing contactless curbside pickup of library materials for East Hampton residents starting Tuesday May 26. Card holders are able to place holds for the items that they want online through the library catalog or can call the library to make their requests with a staff member. Staff is thinking creatively to provide virtual browsing opportunities for patrons who do not know what they want to read or enjoy browsing the collection. Videos and book lists are being designed that will appeal to a variety of readers and ages.
- The Library continues to promote the "e-Library Card" program which allows patrons to sign up for a Library Card online (instead of the usual in-Library requirement) and begin accessing the collection almost immediately. These cards will also allow East Hampton residents to participate in curbside pickup of tangible materials. In the future, the new patrons will be able to visit the Library to pick up their physical card. More than 140 such cards have been issued in the last few weeks.
- The Library's Summer Reading Program is coming soon. Last year, the library supported over 400 participants compared with 120 in 2018. Additionally, each participating child read 6.5 books over the summer. Research shows that reading only 4 to 5 books during the summer months is equivalent to Summer School attendance. This year's national theme is "Imagine Your Story." Children and teens will set individual, personalized reading goals with a librarian for how many books or minutes they want to read over the course of 8 weeks. Participants check in weekly on their goal's progress and are rewarded with raffle tickets towards end of summer prizes. In addition to the goal-setting program, families will have the opportunity to attend live virtual and educational experiences from staff and local performers. Community partner programs of note include the Teacher Read Aloud Series with East Hampton Public Schools, and Book Buddies with the Senior Center. 2020's Children's Summer Program will be kicking off virtually on June 26, and the Teen program on June 29.

Parks and Recreation

- The Department has been gearing up staff for the holiday weekend and summer season. Staffing levels have been set to allow adequate coverage at Sears Park and safety protocols are being implemented. Visitors to the park will notice stakes on the beach identifying providing guidance for maintaining distance and bearing signs

reminding beachgoers of safety measures they should take. The park will be operating a reduced capacity in compliance with measures enacted at State parks although swimming will be allowed in East Hampton. No large group activities are allowed, and the structures are closed except for single family use. Bathrooms and play structures are closed for the time being. See the attached informational release.

- Staff continues to prepare for summer camps and activities. Under the rules in place for this summer, the camps at Sears Park and in the middle school will be limited to 30 participants in each location and those numbers will be further divided into groups of 10 campers. There will be limitations on interaction between groups and numerous other safety protocols will be in place for participants and staff.
- Staff is also beginning to work with the various recreational sports leagues to ensure they are aware of the various requirements and recommendations in place for their operations now and those that are expected later in the summer. Currently, it is anticipated that some of the group restrictions will be reduced (allowing larger group congregation) in late June, which will help facilitate practices and games. It is anticipated that a meeting of the groups will be held by early June.
- Installation of the Lake Pocotopaug Aeration System is underway and it is anticipated that the first part of the system (west/deeper side of the lake) will be online and operating by the first weekend in June with the balance shortly thereafter. Staff and the Town's consultants are monitoring conditions in the lake to ensure that the start up occurs at the proper time. Conditions still seem favorable to begin the operation as we approach June as the oxygen levels at depth have not depleted too much yet.
- Work on the Watershed Improvement Projects will be underway soon as contract has been executed and the preconstruction meeting was held this week. The work will begin at Sears Park Tuesday in an effort to complete that area as early in the season as possible. Part of the project includes paving of the drive to the boat launch, which will cause closure of the launch for 24 – 48 hours. Advance notice will be provided to users and that closure is planned to occur early in the week when it happens to minimize impact on boaters and avoid the heavy use days later in the week.

Police

- The Police Department has applied to the Department of Consumer Protection, Drug Control Division, for a license to operate our Drug Take Back Box in the new police facility. We

previously had a license, but since we moved to the new facility, we were required to re-apply for a new license. With the assistance of Matt Walsh and the DPW staff, the box has already been installed in the Police Department lobby and we are awaiting state approval, which is expected any day.

- Caleb Cavanaugh, our new officer, is progressing very nicely through his Field Training Program. He has completed about 4 weeks of his estimated 14 weeks of training.
- Additionally, the recruitment process is moving forward to fill the vacancy in the Department roster. The lead candidate is no longer an option and staff is beginning work on the next candidate. After an interview with the Chief, that person will be scheduled for a polygraph examination, psychological examination and physical. The next academy is slated to start June 12 but it is not known whether our new Officer will be able to be in that class.

Public Works

- Crews are continuing to support the move to the new Town Hall and emptying of the Police Substation, the Parks/Recreation and Youth and Family Services Annex. The Substation and Annex have all been cleared of items and are ready to be turned back to their owners at the end of the month. Focus will shift to final clean out of the old Town Hall including removal of items that will be brought to the new facility as well as determining appropriate final disposal of items not being removed. Furniture and equipment in good shape that is not moving is being redistributed in the organization as appropriate and a plan for the other items is being developed. We are still anticipating complete departure from the old Town Hall by the end of June.
- Lake Drive and Meeks Point paving has been completed and punch list and corrective actions are being undertaken. Some minor work on the Meeks point paving project is still being conducted including application of topsoil and seeding along with paving of some driveway aprons. It is anticipated that these items complete within the next week.
- Town wide street sweeping is well underway. The area around the lake is complete and the balance of the first round should be completed by the end of the week of May 18.
- Re grading of gravel roads is underway and will continue for the next few weeks until they have all been addressed.

Senior Center

- Programs continue to grow as people see what is being offered online including Bingo, Yoga, writer's Workshop and a new Lunch Bunch, which will occur twice per week starting in June. In addition, we are supporting the Project Graduation virtual 5k run/walks. We are looking to provide East Hampton Senior Center "Bufs," a type of face mask, to our walkers and membership as we can.
- Staff is working on the June newsletter and Facebook remains linked to the website for the newsletter. We continue to struggle with some limited computer access for many in our service population, which limits their opportunity to join in. Staff continues to make phone calls, provide the newsletter and answer phones as a way of reaching out. Staff has heard from several people how glad they are that the Rivereast is back as it is their only way of knowing what is happening in Town.
- CRT continues to provide meals for 'Grab and Go' meals. There are 19 people receiving the frozen grab and go lunches. No word yet about how long they will continue to offer these meals.
- Friendship Tours is also going on-line and trying to come up with creative ways to provide travel experiences via zoom. They are meeting with small groups of directors for feedback and marketing strategies. Success will depend on the costs and how long people are to stay safe at home.
- Staff is taking advantage of on-line training regarding our My Senior Center software. They are watching tutorials and then meeting on Wednesdays to discuss. Additionally, two staff members and two members of the Commission on Aging will be participating virtually in the Age and Action Conference sponsored by NCOA, which is scheduled from June 8 through 11.

Youth and Family Services

- It has been calm for Social Services and Youth and Family Services in the last two weeks. Only two calls for fuel assistance were received and they were referred out to the Food Bank, which was able to assist more quickly. No calls from the community reporting food insecurity or trouble accessing grocery stores have been received recently and neither the Senior Center nor the Food Bank has contacted the department for help, but routine contact is maintained.

- The Department has been getting phone calls for therapeutic services. Despite not having most of our counselors, staff has been contacting families to maintain services as much as can be done. Some referrals have been made to the State via the 2-1-1 system.
- The Department uploaded its first check-in video to its Facebook page. In it, families were informed of the 2-1-1 system and Psychology Today, a website that showcases local therapists. In order to provide additional resources now and in the future, the Department also will begin to compile a list of local therapists and their preferred method of payment, as such a list does not currently exist in this department. Families who have been calling about therapeutic services have been encouraged to reach out to their pediatricians for referrals. Families dealing with imminent mental health situations are encouraged to call 2-1-1 for information on Mobile Crisis.
- The Director attended several Zoom meetings recently regarding mental health and its effect on children and families. Staff has been in contact with the schools during the pandemic and will begin to participate in additional mental health Zoom meetings facilitated by the schools. The principal of the elementary school reached out to staff regarding assistance with a student who has not been doing any distance learning. Staff contacted the family to determine whether there were needs that the Department could help meet in order to get the student going. Staff will continue to work with the family as it can.
- The Department plans to begin producing a monthly newsletter, which will be uploaded to both the Department Facebook page and to the Town's main page.
- The Prevention Coordinator has gotten permission from the grant providers to shift some of the program's focus from substance and addiction to mental health. The Department will be looking at ways to assist in reaching those target goals.

Town Manager/Other

- Town operations have moved to the new Town Hall. Staff is settling in and learning the ins and outs of the new building and are working out some of the "bugs" as we start putting heavier use on the facility. Contractors are still on-site completing final corrections and will be working with staff on furniture adjustments and similar small issues.

- The decorative clock for the new Town Hall site has been installed near the driveway to the site on Edgewater Circle. Thanks to the Mottos and the staff from Newfield for handling the final installation. The electrician will be connecting the power soon and the clock will be complete. Thanks, as well, to all of the sponsors that made the clock possible.
- Staff continues to refine reopening plans related to allowing public into the Town Hall and other Town facilities. Some of the initial phases are being implemented next week with the beginning of certain services at the Library. In the upcoming weeks, it is anticipated that public will be officially allowed in the building on an appointment basis and as we move closer to the last part of June, it is anticipated that some level of greater access will be allowed to facilitate tax payments and other interactions. Residents will still be encouraged to use our online services.
- Closing on the sale of the Old Town Hall occurred this week and the transactions are being completed. As a reminder, the Town retains possession of the property until the end of June through no-cost lease. The additional time will allow staff to clean the building and dispose of any items that are not being relocated. Staff will also be completing the removal of items like the time capsule, monuments, markers and signage. The time capsule will be relocated to the new Town Hall and other markers will be relocated to appropriate locations once those decisions have been made.
- As always, residents are reminded to be diligent as they continue to avoid contact with others. In general, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, wear a cloth covering over the mouth and nose as required by the Governor's order, 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

cc: Management Staff



May 21, 2020

Town of East Hampton Sears Park and Boat Launch Operational Plan Overview

Town Parks and Boat Launch, and other town outdoor recreation areas comprise of over 90 acres spread across the town. These public open spaces have been providing the opportunity for individuals and immediate families to get outside and exercise in these difficult and stressful times. This Operational Plan provides current guidelines for town staff and residents for the operation and use of the Town of East Hampton ball fields, walking and hiking trails, park grounds, Sears Park beach, boat launch and other areas in a manner that is consistent with safety protocols and social distancing guidelines. This Plan is based on consultation with the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), and guidance documents and executive orders associated with the public health emergency and recommendations from the Chatham Health Department. This Plan is also informed by Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance issued for the parks and recreation sectors. This Plan will be updated as new information and operational conditions require.

Any questions about this guidance should be referred to jhall@easthamptonct.gov. Any questions about COVID-related health issues associated with outdoor recreation activities should be referred to the Chatham Health Department.

General Physical Space & Occupancy Limits

The Town of East Hampton recreation areas remain open and available for the public to enjoy, while practicing social distancing. The Parks and Recreation Departments recreation areas are currently implementing operational changes to eliminate gatherings of groups of six or more people and ensure minimum distances of six feet between visitors. Play structures, park buildings and most other enclosed structures, including restrooms, have been closed to the public for the foreseeable future.

Health Advisory for Visitors

While this guidance provides a way for the public to enjoy East Hamptons recreation opportunities, the risks to visitors cannot be fully mitigated. Visitors who choose to visit these facilities during this time should be aware of the potential risks. Individuals over the age of 65 or with underlying health conditions should consider not visiting town parks, particularly on warm weather days or during peak mid-day times when visitor numbers are high. If you are not feeling well, stay home! Signs and

symptoms of coronavirus include fever, cough and shortness of breath. A full list of signs and symptoms of COVID-19 is available from the CDC.

- ☒ Stay close to home. Do not travel long distances to parks or other recreational areas.
- ☒ Avoid crowded recreational areas.
- ☒ Practice proper social distancing; stay at least 6 feet from other people.
- ☒ Wear a face covering over the nose and mouth, at all times when proper social distancing cannot be maintained.
- ☒ Engage in outdoor recreational activities with members of your household, only.
- ☒ Practice good hygiene when outdoors. Wash your hands, carry and use hand sanitizer, cover your mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing, and avoid surfaces that are often touched: picnic tables, doorknobs, handrails, equipment, etc.

Social Distancing Measures

Restrictions on Gathering Size

- ☒ Sears Park Picnic shelter and Gazebo has been closed to groups. They are open for individual use only and social distancing must be maintained. Signage has been posted to alert visitors.
- ☒ Picnicking is limited in parks. Tables have been removed in some locations to adhere to safe social distancing. Groups of 5 or less (household members only) are permitted to sit at picnic tables and eat food. Park Staff will sanitize tables every half hour.
- ☒ Town staff are actively monitoring usage of our facilities and grounds for social distancing compliance. If appropriate social distancing is not observed, town staff will inform and educate visitors, directing them to spread out.
- ☒ Contact sports and ball games are not authorized at this time. Staff will discourage all contact sports within the park. Basketball shooting and tennis play will be acceptable with small groups of 5 (household members only)
- ☒ Playscapes are closed.

Capacity Daily Closures

Sears Park has been evaluated as to whether the pre-existing capacities can be utilized while assuring proper social distancing. Sears Park can accommodate 200 people and will initiate a closure once 80% population is present (160 people in the park). Once a closure is implemented by staff additional parking outside of a facility and walking in will not be allowed. Total capacity targets have been established for beach front and Sears Park based on a variety of factors, including:

- ☒ Daily observations of the number of cars and the quality of social distancing at peak times
- ☒ The size and characteristics of the park, including potential concentrations of visitors in certain areas (beaches, courts and picnic areas) based on facility usage at the time
- ☒ capacity reaches 80% of maximum beach capacity.

Additional tools that can be utilized to set capacity limits include surveys and GIS overlay. Parking capacity levels notwithstanding, park attendants are prepared to close parks to additional visitors when the attendant and Parks and Recreation Director concludes that park visitation reaches a point that proper social distancing is difficult to maintain. If Sears Park closes to capacity on a given day reopening will occur in the following manner: one car exits another one enters until 50% capacity is observed (see guidelines noted under capacity daily closure). If this approach of limited capacity closures proves unsuccessful or unsustainable, more restrictive measures such as prohibiting swimming or closing a park indefinitely could be implemented.

Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7R, dated March 30, 2020, authorizes Municipalities to prohibit visitors from parking outside a closed park and walking in after a facility reaches capacity. As these facilities reach capacity on busy days, staff will close the entrance to new visitors, and work to eliminate additional visitors from parking outside the facility.

Parking Stickers

Parking stickers are free of charge, you can get a parking sticker from the gate attendant when you arrive. You will need your car registration showing proof of residency available to receive your sticker. The gate attendant will take your name, address and license plate number for our records.

Boat Stickers must be purchased online at www.easthamptonrec.com a \$50 fee will be needed at the time of purchase as well as your registration of the vessel you will be launching. Please give staff at least 3 days to process this request and send out your sticker by mail. Gate attendants will NOT be giving out boat stickers.

Services and Amenities

Swimming and Beach front

Guidance from the Connecticut DPH indicates that recreational swimming is not a known form of transmission of COVID-19, in saltwater or freshwater. At this time, the Town of East Hampton is making the decisions to allow swimming at Sears Park. Safe social distancing will be encouraged and monitored by our lifeguard staff.

Please help us to ensure all residents and staff are safe by following the guidelines above. The Parks and Recreation Department understands the importance of recreation space for families of East Hampton. Please help us stay safe during this difficult time.

Jeremy Hall

Parks and Recreation Director
Town of East Hampton
jhall@easthamptonct.gov