

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Council  
FROM: David E. Cox, Town Manager  
DATE: September 7, 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.

### **Assessor**

- The Town's new Assessor, Deborah Copp, began her tenure on August 24. Deborah comes to East Hampton with about 15 years of experience as an Assessor and Assistant Assessor in Salem, Lisbon and Haddam. She will be invited to an upcoming Council meeting at which she will be able to meet the members.

### **Building Department**

- Based on availability for area licensed building officials, the Town has again contracted with Bob Roraback, the Marlborough Building Official, to provide plan review services. Currently, he is working a flexible schedule that includes as many hours as he can provide. He will focus entirely on application and plan review while Glen LeConche will focus on inspection with plan review as needed. This approach will continue for the foreseeable future as the budget will allow.
- The Department is implementing procedures for a shorter turn around on permit applications related to replacement of boilers, furnaces, air conditioning, windows and doors as well as siding work and roofing. In addition to these being the first short turn around permits, these would also be targeted for an enhanced online permitting process the department is working on. The enhanced process provides a more directed application process than the usual form that may be filled out online. More details on this new process will come once it is released.

### **Finance**

- The Town sold bonds on Wednesday, August 26 for the purpose of permanent financing of High School and Town Hall construction related debt in the amount of \$8,180,000 and for refunding debt issued in 2006 and 2009 in the amount of \$1,295,000. The Town, which maintains its AAA rating for this issuance, received a rate of 1.43% for the

20-year life of the High School/Town Hall bonds and a rate of 0.542% for the 10-year life of the refunding bonds. Refinancing these bonds is expected to save the Town about \$145,000.

### **Library**

- The Library will resume normal operating hours on the Tuesday after Labor Day. Effective September 8, the Library will be open Monday through Wednesday from 10:00am until 8:00pm and Thursday through Saturday from 10:00am until 5:00pm.
- The Library was featured in a complimentary article in the Rivereast Newspaper on Friday, August 21 regarding the Library's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is attached to this report.

### **Parks and Recreation**

- Staff continues to work with the State and our contractor to finalize the permit for the Bio Blast treatment. After several conversations with representatives of DEEP, staff has received the draft Temporary Authorization for the treatment, which has been sent to supervisors in the Bureau of Materials Management and Compliance Assurance for final review. Staff anticipates an executed permit Tuesday, September 8. Based on that information, EverBlue is planning a BioBlast treatment this week and would be treating Wednesday through Friday. The Temporary Authorization (permit) includes various water testing requirements, which will be handled by NEAR, and will require those test results and another application for each treatment. DEEP staff is working with Bureau management to produce a three-year authorization but it is not known whether that will be allowed. As the Council will recall, this is new territory for DEEP and it is suspected that they will proceed cautiously for some time.
- The Town's lake scientist, Northeast Aquatic Research (NEAR) continues to provide regular testing of the lake water. As reported, most of the sampling results have been good. Staff has remained concerned about water clarity and the most recent reports of Cyanobacteria (Blue Green Algae) levels. While the Cyanobacteria counts are quite high, none of the signs of toxin release are showing in the water. Additionally, there continues to be disparity between the counts produced by NEAR and those produced by the Town's aeration contractor (EverBlue). As such, as was done last year, a third laboratory is being asked to count the Cyanobacteria and provide that information. Once that information is known, it will be released. At this point, the advisory notice

posted in late August continues at Sears Park. The notice indicates that some factors are present for problematic blue green algae but that no warning is in place. Water users are provided information on what to watch for as they enjoy the water. The Health District notes that users "should avoid contact with water that looks green or blue-green (sometimes described as looking like pea soup). Any mats, films, or scums on the surface of the water that are blue-green in color, look like spilled paint, or have a noxious odor should be reported to Chatham Health District and avoided."

- The Sears Park project has been completed and grass is starting to grow, measures are still in place to protect against runoff and will remain until full vegetation is established. The detention basin in the Skyline subdivision was finished on Thursday, September 3. The next project involves Clark Hill and the rehabilitation of drainage swales and ditches, which is expected to continue through the middle of this week. This project will be followed by work on Mott Hill and then on Hawthorne. All projects should be completed by mid-September.
- Staff will be reviewing the next round of 319 grant funded projects at a meeting this week. The next phase will fund several projects next year including the pond area adjacent to the Town Hall site, Paul's and Sandy's/Old Marlborough Rd., Fawn Brook (Bay rd.) and Christopher Brook. In addition to these locations we will be looking to complete work on West Point (Chatham Apartments), Lake Vista, Old Marlborough and other areas through the Town Capital Reserve Budget.

## **Police**

- The Department is excited to report that after an extensive recruitment process, lasting over 7 months, the Town was able to find and hire two qualified candidates to fill our current vacancies. Sorie Kamara and Steven Wawruck III both passed the extensive process which includes a polygraph, psychological, medical screening, drug test and detailed background review. They will be sworn in on September 8 and will be starting the Police Academy on September 11. They are expected to graduate from the Police Academy during the last week of March 2021. After about 16 weeks of field training both officers will be on their own, sometime during the last week of June 2021. Sorie Kamara is currently employed as an Urban Park Ranger for the New York City Parks Department and Steve Wawruck is employed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation as a Maintainer.

### **Public Works**

- Between August 20 and September 1, the catch basin cleaning contractor completed cleaning 450 catch basins this included all the catch basins within the lake Pocotopaug watershed, and many others in other areas of town. There will be a second round of cleanings in early spring.
- Public works crews will complete storm drainage repair and upgrades on Holly Drive this week and will then move to Dogwood Drive later in the week to begin repairs there. Crews have also been concurrently working on drainage repairs on Sunset Drive. All this work is in anticipation of paving these roads along with the Library and Company 1 Fire Station parking lots and driveways this fall.
- Crews have completed the majority of the storm brush cleanup, though there are still many large logs left to be removed and restoration along some roadside shoulders where trees were up rooted. Work will continue on these activities throughout the next several weeks.
- The Town's mechanic has been working on replacing the large water tank on the vector truck. The existing tank was in poor condition and nearly rotted through and a replacement tank was purchased by the former director from another town. It is in excellent condition though it needed some substantial welding fabrication work to fit our vehicle system. This work is being done in house and represents a significant cost savings to the Town and will prolong the life of this piece of equipment. It is also an example of the versatile work of which the Town's mechanic's shop is capable.

### **Senior Center**

- Staff continues to implement programs online via Zoom including Bingo, Yoga and Writer's Workshop. The Lunch Bunch program occurs online twice monthly with one meeting intended for socializing and the other as a Lunch and Learn at which a guest speaker is presented. Senior Center Staff continue to address consumer isolation for the folks who are not connected to technology via conference calls!
- September is National Senior Center month and the Center continues to face many challenges especially when seniors want to gather to celebrate. As it has done recently, the Senior Center continues to come up with innovative ways to celebrate without contact and with social distancing and masks. This month, celebration of National Senior

Center month will include a drive thru picnic lunch at the Town Hall. Water's Edge Center for Health and Rehab and the Marlborough Health & Rehab will sponsor the bag lunch. In addition, the EHCOA will provide dessert through the Chatham Creamery. Staff looks forward to showing off the new Town Hall (and helping people become used to its new location) and to celebrate the Senior Center with the slogan of "Delivering Vital Connections! Mind, Body, Spirit, & Community!"

- The Volunteer Shopping program is still in place although the demand has slowed down. We help 2-4 people a month. It is still a viable program with seniors inquiring and utilizing it intermittently.
- CRT continues to provide meals for 'Grab and Go' meals. The state re-opening committee has recommended that congregate meals not start at this time at Senior Centers. CRT will continue to provide the Grab and Go frozen meals until further notice.
- Senior Center Directors in the Chatham Health District will be meeting with CHD to coordinate re-opening procedures in order to provide consistency among the towns as the Centers begin to reopen to seniors.

### **Youth and Family Services**

- Social Services has resumed in-person therapy with the first in-person session occurring the week of August 24. Following each in-person therapy session, clinicians will be sanitizing furniture and door handles and will record that information on a check list to show that the room has been sanitized for the next client.
- Social Service has started assisting people with energy assistance and Operation Fuel. As of now, staff is limiting the number of people coming into the office for energy/fuel help. Instead, applications are being completed over the phone. In some instances, as necessary, staff will go to the home of a homebound individual in order to pick up paperwork. Appointments are being made for signing of paperwork needed to complete the application process.
- In partnership with the Library, Social Services will lead a support group using the Zoom platform. The first three topics, scheduled for 9/15; 9/22; and 9/29 are titled "Dealing with Uncertainty," "Social Isolation," and "Helping our children," respectively. The overarching goal of this series is to reach out to East Hampton residents in order to

provide an additional platform of support during what is undoubtedly an uncertain and stressful time.

- The Department continues to see an increase in the number of calls from residents at risk for eviction once renter's protection ends. It is not known how many evictions will occur for which we will be asked to assist, but it is a concern from a budgeting perspective if there are several evictions and must store possessions or otherwise assist displaced individuals.
- Staff continues to work with both the Senior Center and the Food Bank to ensure residents food stable. Recently, a vulnerable resident who was calling the office every Friday after working hours has now been set up for every-other-week food delivery through the food bank. Staff will continue to work with these groups to connect residents with the proper resources.
- Staff has approached Epic Arts to determine whether it would like to partner with the Department on Juvenile Review Board (JRB) cases so that these youth participants are able to use the arts venue as a possible diversion resource. Further, once school resumes, Social Services is going to inquire about having a block of time to meet weekly with JRB participants, which is intended to reduce recidivism, strengthen the JRB program, and allow for more efficient reporting at the end of the year.

#### **Town Manager/Other**

- It appears that most of the remaining items on the Town Hall "punch list" have been resolved with the exception of the Audio/Visual systems. Additionally, work remains on the controls system for the detention area, but this was not included on the punch list due to the nature of the work. For the Council's September 8 meeting, staff has developed a temporary work-around to allow the use of Zoom for the meeting.
- It has been determined that the Town Manager's Emergency Declaration related the COVID-19 pandemic, which was issued in March, will be allowed to expire on Wednesday, September 9, 2020. Instead, the Town will rely on the Emergency Declarations of the State. The Town will continue to follow the orders and guidelines issued by the State and all rules related to use of Town facilities will remain in place. East Hampton residents continue to do well as it relates to protecting the community from spread of the disease. For about 4 weeks, no new cases were identified among the

community. However, last week's report from Chatham Health did note four additional cases were identified in Town. Residents must remain vigilant.

DC

Attachments

cc: Management Staff

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# Despite Pandemic, Library Circulation Continues to Climb

by Jack Lakowsky

East Hampton Public Library Director Ellen Paul said Monday the library is still on track to exceed last year's checkout rate, despite the library's lengthy closure between mid-March and July 6.

Paul told the *Rivereast* that the library was originally predicted to reach 100,000 items checked out this year, but COVID-19 disrupted this steady traffic flow.

"Despite being closed for more than three months, we still did more than 82,500 checkouts between June 2019 and July 2020," said Paul.

Paul said this is still an increase over checkout rates for the 2018-19 fiscal year, which saw 70,000 items loaned out.

Paul said e-book borrowing has also increased by almost double.

The library's children's programs and activities also saw an increase in participation in 2019-20. Even with the months-long closing, Paul said about 7,500 attended the library's programs, compared to about 5,900 the prior year, a difference of 1,600 attendees.

"Imagine what we'd have done if we were open the entire year," said Paul. "Imagine if we'd been able to have summer reading as planned."

Paul said the number of children who participated in the library's summer reading program was down to about 200 this year, compared to 400 last year.

"We knew we wouldn't sustain 400 this year," said Paul. "We're proud of 200, at this point."

Paul said, although the number of participants may have decreased, actual participation rates increased. The group was smaller, but more engaged, she said. Paul explained that, last year, 55% of the 400 children returned for three consecutive weeks. This year, participation was more consistent, with that figure rising to about 70%.

The library partnered with Belltown's Epoch Arts to create for summer reading participants eight serialized short films, one for each week of the summer reading program. The one-act shows were tailored to this year's theme of "A Hero's Journey." As kids met their weekly reading goals, they unlocked episodes in the story to be viewed online.

"Hopefully, next year, we're able to boost those numbers back up," said Paul.

Paul said the library's momentum continued because it was propelled by years of previous work, and therefore able to withstand the statewide shutdown started in March through executive order by Gov. Ned Lamont. The shutdown was initiated to combat the spread of COVID-19.

Paul said, over the past few years, improvements have been made to the library building, its services and collections. Paul said the community is seeing returns on its investment. Paul said patrons who hadn't visited the library in years have once again become regular visitors.

"People are recognizing that we're an integral part of the community," said Paul. "And that we're here for them."

Library-goers have been diligent about COVID prevention protocols, Paul said.

Cyndi Shirshac, vice chairperson of East Hampton's Library Advisory Board, said instilling these safety rules was the board's first priority. Shirshac said the board ensured safety measures were in place and well-known to staff before the library reopened.

"Our main concern was safety for staff, safety for patrons, and having enough PPE and sanitizer," said Shirshac.

Shirshac said that, once the "hurdle" of safety was dealt with, library staff and the board worked on delivery of materials, specifically offering curbside pickup from an outdoor bookrack.

Shirshac said finding the best ways to reintroduce the library's activities and programs through streaming and platforms like Zoom will be the board's next tackling.

"We already know that a benefit of streaming is that you can reach a larger audience," said Shirshac. "But we're also aware that people may be burnt out from their computers, so we're trying to work with that, too."

Both Paul and Shirshac commended library staff for their efforts. Paul was on family leave while her staff retrofitted the library and worked

with town officials to ensure the library was ready to reopen promptly, and safely.

"I can't say enough about how they picked up the ball and ran with it," said Shirshac. "Its not in their job description to be on the front lines of [a pandemic response]."

Shirshac added that Paul has also gone "above and beyond."

Paul said the library's "laser focus" has been aimed at community relations and communication.

Unlike many libraries in the state, the East Hampton library is open for browsing. Computers are also available for use, although every other device was removed to accommodate social distancing. Also, to this end, some furniture has been removed. Visitors must wear masks.

Paul said, due to reduced hours and capacity, library's traffic has yet to reach pre-pandemic checkout rates, seeing about 60 patrons per day. But she said this is rising steadily. Paul said the library saw a spike in visitations during the widespread power outages caused by Tropical Storm Isaias, jumping to about 80 per day before leveling back out as electricity was slowly restored.

Paul said reduced hours are currently the library's biggest challenge.

Paul said the library's crowd has been made up of older adults and seniors. She said she is happy to have them back, but that she also severely misses seeing children and families in the library. She said she understands this caution. As a parent to a toddler and newborn, Paul said she is only bringing her children out for absolute necessities.

Paul knows many are not yet comfortable browsing and perusing the bookshelves. Therefore, the library will continue curbside pickup service indefinitely. Curbside pickup has been popular with patrons, Paul said.

In fact, Paul said she and library staff had discussed curbside pickup before the onset of the pandemic, a rare instance of COVID-19 not stalling plans but accelerating them into fruition.

Patrons can reserve items over the phone or go to the library's website. The materials will be prepared and can be picked up on a rack near the building's entrance.

"We're working on a number of things to enhance browsing for those who don't want to come in," said Paul.

One way of improving browsing for patrons

who want to walk the safe route can try the library's newly created "exploration kits." Staff will curate these mystery kits, whose contents will be unknown to the borrower.

"It's a great way to discover something new," said Paul.

Another new library offering is the "family fun pack." Packs are sorted in one of three categories: vacation, hobby, or esoteric. Vacation packs, for example, will be stuffed with an array of memoirs, cookbooks, and folktales, all originating from diverse cultures. Paul said these offer the enrichment of learning about a new culture from the safety of the home.

Paul said these fun packs have been popular, with 30 families checking them out in three weeks. Paul said, given their popularity, they are likely to remain a permanent offer.

The library, Paul said, has plans to bring back its popular weekly program, "baby-rhyme time" through an online, remote platform. Paul said this program was sidelined due to the pandemic, and that between 30 and 40 people take part each week. To celebrate the program's return, Paul said the library is planning to host a diaper drive sometime in September.

Along with returning programs, Paul hopes to in September expand the library's schedule to normal hours. Paul guessed this could happen sometime around Labor Day, but that the ever-changing pandemic situation makes any future planning tenuous.

However, despite the uncertainties of the COVID-19 era, Paul said the Library Advisory Board will continue with plans it developed in response to a strategic planning survey which was issued to the public at the beginning of the year.

"The community is going to see a lot of their thoughts in the plan," said Paul.

The board, Paul said, will present its final draft of the plan to the Town Council at its Sept. 22 meeting.

## Old Home Days Items Available

Even though East Hampton Old Home Days was canceled this year, organizers are selling 2020 commemorative merchandise to help fund next year's "glorious celebration."

Items include various styles of T-shirts, a mug, tote, leggings, sweatshirt, tank top or baby onesie. Order by visiting [ehohd.org/ohd-store](http://ehohd.org/ohd-store), and use the promo code OHD2020 for free shipping for a limited time. Items can also be ordered by calling Pam Joslyn at 860-294-4845. Items available through Aug. 31.

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