

**SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
MARCH 26, 2020**

*NOTE: Due to COVID-19, this meeting was held virtually (via ZOOM),
and was live streamed on the City's website.*

Mayor Casavant called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Roll Call: William Embiser, John McCurry, Jr., Stephen St. Cyr, Robert Quattrone, Jr., Amy Clearwater, Norman Belanger, Michael Ready, Doris Ortiz, Marc Lessard

The Pledge of Allegiance was dispensed with due to the circumstance of meeting virtually.

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

Staff Update on Response to COVID-19:

City Manager, Jim Bennett opened the presentation by going over the five goals that were set out 10 days ago when the Council voted for the State of Emergency Order:

- 1) Flatten the curve
- 2) Protect our citizens
- 3) Protect our employees
- 4) Figure out how to continue providing services to citizens
- 5) Deal with employee issues – financial impact; city services and how to deliver and maintain services; identify what the citizens' needs are; communication and providing factual information; IT Dept. has been challenged significantly dealing with the set up of virtual meetings and employee needs to work at home.

He pointed out that balancing fiscal awareness and serving the citizens have become one of Staff's focuses and challenges.

EMA Director and Code Enforcement Officer, Roby Fecteau has been busy collecting information from pertinent agencies, like the CDC, and passing it along to those who need the information to make necessary operational decisions.

As of today, there are 155 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Maine; with 27 of those confirmed cases in York County. York County, like Cumberland County is now seeing community spread. Community spread means people who have been affected by the virus in a certain area, including those who don't know where they contracted the virus. COVID-19 tests have been on short order of the past week or so, but seem to be more readily available for the time being.

Roby went on to review the precautions that folks should be taking, like washing hands, sanitizing hands, not touching face, social distancing, etc. He urged folks to go to the CDC website for more helpful information.

Police Chief, Roger Beaupre has, for almost 2 weeks, made internal adjustments at the Police Department to protect the employees, but still be able to provide essential services to the public. For example, the lobby receptionist is no longer available; but someone can enter the lobby and use the phone made available to the public to contact a PD personnel. Officers will respond to a call with a phone call first to determine if face-to-face interaction is necessary. Social distancing has been instituted amongst Staff. In essence, it is business as usual, with the exception of making the phone call first, before dispatching an officer to a scene.

Fire Chief, Scott Gagne has changed a few operational processes:

- (1) Responses: 911 calls now go through a screening – which is a series of questions that are related to COVID-19. This screening allows the responders to know if they need to be wearing more personal protective equipment. Upon arriving on the scene, the same screening questions will be asked again. This same screening applies to both EMS and Fire calls.
- (2) If a provider does get exposed, that employee would need to be quarantined until that employee can be tested – which is about a 12 to 24 hour turnaround. That employee may go home to be quarantined, or a quarantine location that has been set up at Waterhouse Field for our providers.
- (3) For now, the public can no longer access inside the Fire Department, but can use a phone located in the lobby area to speak to a personnel.
- (4) Providers must be checked twice a day – temperatures are being taken, etc.

Acquired Personal Protective Equipment (masks, gloves, gowns) has become a challenge. Providers are ensuring that usage of the PPE is being done efficiently and stretching out supplies as best possible.

Communications Coordinator, Danica Lamontagne has posted information that City Hall, even though closed to the public, is still here to service the community as best we can. An information hotline has been set up – (207) 284-9020 where folks can call and be directed to the right department to address their concern. In addition, a drop box has been set up for payments and other documents needed to complete transactions. A list of services is posted on the City’s website – including where folks may get food. A new tab has been added to the City’s website – **COVID-19 Response**, which provides a lot of important and helpful information, and that information is being updated daily. Facebook and Twitter is also being used, as well as posted videos made by Staff. She is continuing to publish the Biddeford Beat each week and recaps what has gone on over the past week the publication.

Chief Operating Officer, Brian Phinney cannot stress enough all the work that the City’s IT Staff, Jerry Gerlach and Bill Gooch have done over the past few weeks to ensure a secure cyber infrastructure and ensure our ability to respond appropriately to the Governor’s Orders. Part of the challenge is how they have responded to each of the City’s departments and meeting their different needs. They were instrumental in establishing ZOOM and having a meeting platform for Staff, Council and other City Boards, Committees and Commissions. This work is on-going.

In terms of an operational aspect, personnel have been separated enough to keep employees safe while at the same time assuring that essential services continue and be maintained.

Public Works Director, Jeff Demers explained that Public Works and WWTP have worked very hard to keep the employees and the public safe. The WWTP has put out a public announcement that the ONLY thing that should be flushed down the toilet is toilet paper. Things that should NOT be flushed down the toilet are baby wipes, cleaning wipes, tampons, sanitary napkins, paper towels, tissues, napkins, etc. These items can cause major clogs in the sewer system and backups into people’s homes. WWTP and Public Works employees are taking extra precautions at this time.

The Recycling Center remains closed and he feels this was the right decision for the protection of both the employees and the public.

Overview and Recap:

City Manager, Jim Bennett went through a few bullet points:

- Staff and Operational Modifications:
 - Community Center is closed – Staff is either working at home or are simply staying home. Only the Meals on Wheels program is still functioning at the Community Center, as they provide a much needed service to our community.
 - The Police and Fire Departments have altered operations accordingly; keeping social distancing and employee safety as priorities
 - City Hall Staff is primarily working from home, with the exception of a few who are still reporting to the building. Operational hours are now 8:00am-4:00pm, with the intention to cut down the amount of employee time spent in the building.
 - WWTP and Public Works – Staff has been split in half and are alternating shifts, in an effort to isolated a possible exposure
- Trying to compile a list of Seniors in our community for an outreach
- Have looked at where property tax bills are sent to see how many part-time residents we may have flooding into our community and where they are coming from and what they may possibly bring into our community.
- Working to figure out a way to provide extra trash bags to folks who use the PAYT bags. With people spending more time at their homes, it is inevitable that more trash will be generated.

- Budgets: City and School budgets may be adjusted in light of the current situation. City spending is now more deliberate and cautious.
- Due diligence has been done on the City's bank accounts and the City is fully protected and at no risk.
- All playgrounds and parks have been posted that the equipment there is not being disinfected and folks should use those places at their own risk.
- A Public Works Crew went to the Good Shepherd Food Bank to pick up food, which will be distributed by Seeds of Hope on Friday.
- The City Council will be asked to defer the interest on tax payments due on April 8th for 60 days. To be clear, this would be just for the April payment, and not for bills that are in arrears.
- Policies have been established for Staff to protect the other Staff members. For example, if an employee has traveled, they are not allowed back to work for 14 days.
- The City is serving as intermediary for folks who have volunteered to help and those who need assistance.
- Certain parking restrictions have been relaxed over the past couple of weeks – like parking in the lots, limited parking on major streets, etc. It is being handled on a discretionary basis.
- All expenses due to COVID-19 are being tracked in the event that funds will be reimbursed either through the State or federally.
- Council will be asked to waive parking lot fees for the month of May, for those who purchase permits in April.

Council Questions and Comments:

The Councilors asked many questions and shared their concerns on many different aspects of the City's response to COVID-19. Overall, they are very pleased with how Staff has handled their responses to the current situation and commended everyone for rising up and meeting the challenge.

They discussed options for offering some outreach to the citizens; offering more and other different kinds of services; and started the dialogue of a possible public lockdown, should we get to that point.

Motion by Councilor McCurry, seconded by Councilor Lessard to adjourn.

Vote: Unanimous.

Time: 7:42 p.m.

Attest by: _____
Carmen J. Morris, City Clerk