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Town Manager

TOWN OF
WATERTOWN
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**Town Manager's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update
April 10, 2020**

COVID-19 Numbers

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health is reporting that as of April 9, 2020 there are:

- 18,941 cases statewide
- 4,045 Middlesex County
- 503 deaths statewide

For more state data, visit www.mass.gov/coronavirus.

Watertown has a total of 86 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 22 community members have recovered from the virus. Three Town employees have had confirmed cases. Watertown has recorded its first COVID-19 fatality. The fatality is a 66 year old male who had complications. Our thoughts go out to the family as they mourn the loss of their loved one.

How will you find out about local emergencies?

To get Emergency Alerts from the Town of Watertown text WATERTOWNMA to 888-777. Your cell phone number will be in the system without having to establish an Everbridge account. You also have the opportunity to add your email address into the system at this time. You would then receive all emails and/or texts from the system. If you already have an Everbridge account, this is not necessary, as you will continue to receive the notifications sent by the town.

Financial Relief for Taxpayers

In accordance with "An Act to Address Challenges Faced by Municipalities and State Authorities Resulting From COVID-19," Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020, the Town of Watertown has adopted local options to extend the due date of the 4th quarter real and personal property tax payments and a waiver of interest on water/sewer bills paid by June 30, 2020.

1. The due date of your real and personal property tax bill has been extended to **June 1, 2020**. June 1, 2020 is the new due date even if the due date for payment on your previously mailed tax bill is May 1, 2020.
2. The Town of Watertown will also waive interest and other penalties on water and/or sewer bills with a due date on or after March 10, 2020 as long as payment is made before June 30, 2020. This waiver of interest does not apply to bills with due dates that were before March 10, 2020 or if the bill is not paid by June 30, 2020.

CARES Act Unemployment Benefit Implementation: (News Release)

Yesterday the Baker-Polito Administration announced details for the initial implementation of federal unemployment benefits in the CARES Act, the federal based COVID-19 relief package. Understanding the great urgency of Commonwealth residents to access these benefits, the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) has issued new guidance to instruct all qualifying residents of what actions they can now take to access CARES Act benefit programs. These new unemployment benefit programs include:

- Retroactive and continuing additional \$600 per week for regular unemployment compensation for eligible claimants. **This program is being implemented now.**
- Expanded support for people not traditionally covered in the unemployment system, such as self-employed or gig economy workers. **DUA is building a platform to implement this program, which will be available soon.**
- 13-week extension of benefits for individuals who have exhausted previous unemployment benefits. **DUA continues to await federal implementation guidance for this program.**

Town Council Meetings

Town Council President Mark S. Sideris announced the following: Town Council will resume meeting remotely on Tuesday April 14th at our new time of 7PM via Zoom. We will be providing a link, as well as a phone number on the agenda, for the public to be able to watch as well as participate. The meeting will also be covered by [Watertown Cable Access](#). If all goes well with this meeting, the subcommittees of the Town Council will also be scheduling meetings for items that have been referred to their respective committees. They will also be meeting remotely via Zoom. We will be using the same format for the next Town Council meeting on April 28th. Meetings will be run the same way as we always have with 2 public forums being the opportunities for the public to speak. When we have agenda items that are listed as public hearings that will be another opportunity for the public to speak. We are meeting this way to follow the rules in place during this Covid-19 state of emergency.

Notice to Contractors Regarding Construction

The following notice was issued by the Town's Building Commissioner, Peter McLaughlin:

In compliance with the Governor's 'Essential Workers Only' order, the Town is suspending all construction activity that is not categorized as below or is not in full compliance with the Governor's " Commonwealth of Massachusetts COVID-19 GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR ALL CONSTRUCTION SITES AND WORKERS AT ALL PUBLIC WORK":

- **Workers** performing housing construction related activities, including **construction of mixed-use projects that include housing**, to ensure additional units can be made available to combat the Commonwealth's existing housing supply shortage.
- **Workers** supporting the **construction of housing**, including those supporting government functions related to the building and development process, such as inspections, permitting and plan review services that can be modified to protect the public health, including allowing qualified private third-party inspections accountable to government agencies).
- **Workers**, including contracted vendors - who support the operation, inspection, maintenance and repair of essential public works facilities and operations, including roads and bridges, water and sewer, laboratories, fleet maintenance personnel, construction of critical or strategic infrastructure,

traffic signal maintenance, emergency location services for buried utilities, and maintenance of digital systems infrastructure supporting public works operations. Critical or strategic infrastructure includes public works construction including construction of public schools, colleges and universities and construction of state facilities.

This applies to projects currently permitted and we will not be issuing any new Building Permits until further notice is given.

As all are quite aware, we are navigating these unique and uncertain times and making decisions based upon a situation that has never before been experienced. We appreciate your prompt cooperation.

Watertown COVID-19 Informational Call Center and Email

For general COVID-19 questions not specific to the Town of Watertown, all Massachusetts residents are encouraged to call the State's **2-1-1 Hotline** that is staffed by operators 24/7 and with translators available in multiple languages. Residents with questions can dial 2-1-1 from any landline or cell phone or use the live chat option on the **Mass 2-1-1 website (mass211.org)**.

The Town of Watertown has established a COVID-19 informational call center to allow residents and business owners to ask non-medical questions specific to COVID-19 in Watertown. The call center will be staffed Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm and the number for the call center is **# 617-972-6565**. Questions can also be emailed to **COVID19@police.watertown-ma.gov**.

Please call 9-1-1 in the event of an emergency.

Calls should not be made to 9-1-1 for questions regarding COVID-19.

Four (4) electronic sign boards have been placed around Town with the message: "Stay safe, stay home". Further message updates will be provided as needed.

Health Department

The Health Department has created a new portal for Covid Information : COVID-19 Resource Center where all Covid 19 related information will be posted :

<https://www.ci.watertown.ma.us/978/COVID-19-Resource-Center>

The [Watertown Community Foundation's Resiliency Coalition](#) is supporting a part-time Volunteer Coordinator to work with Jenna Willis, Town/[Wayside's](#) Social Service Resource Specialist, to coordinate a network of volunteers to assist residents with essential needs. Stephanie Venizelos, Community Wellness Program Manager will be working with Jenna to connect the new coordinator to stakeholders in Town who have expressed interest in being involved in a community volunteer initiative.

Attached is the [flyer](#) that was distributed widely today with information about free food delivery to our Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligible residents. The flyer is posted on the new Health Covid-19 Resource Center. The Health Department will be adding resources on wellness topics such as social isolation and staying active to this new page regularly.

CDC Recommends Wearing Cloth Face Coverings When in Public

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [now recommends wearing cloth face coverings](#) in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies). Wearing a cloth face covering is not a substitute for social distancing, but an extra measure

while you are running essential errands to minimize the spread of the virus. The CDC provides instructions on how to [make your own cloth face covering](#).

Grocery Store Guidance:

On April 7th, the Department of Public Health released further guidance to promote social distancing at grocery stores. The new guidance requires that each grocery store limit occupancy to 40% of its maximum permitted occupancy level (except stores with a maximum occupancy of less than 25 people). It also sets out procedures by which staff should monitor occupancy levels. The guidance builds on a [previous March 23 order for grocery stores](#), which set out policies for ensuring access to handwashing facilities and protecting employees in higher-risk populations, among other requirements. [Click here to read the new guidance](#).

Check Your Symptoms for COVID-19 Online

Massachusetts has launched an online resource that residents can use to assess symptoms and find the right care. Not to be used in place of emergency medical care, residents can visit a website to get advice from an online health assistant safely at home, for free. [Read full details](#).

State Launches New Rapid Testing Site in Lowell

Governor Baker announced the launch of a new rapid testing site in Lowell, which will enable on-the-spot COVID-19 testing and results at no cost, and up to 1,000 test per day. COVID-19 testing at the original Shrewsbury pilot testing site will stop. [Read the full release](#).

Protect Yourself from COVID-19 Scams and Financial Scams

Sadly, when there is a crisis there are people who will take advantage of the situation. There are numerous scams related to COVID-19 which should be reported to the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline. Financial scams, such as lottery, internet, and other scams should be reported to the National Elder Fraud Hotline. [Read more about these scams and how to report them](#).

Watertown Public Schools

The Watertown Public Schools continue to provide remote continuous learning opportunities for our students during the COVID-19 closure. The District recently released the Extended Learning Plan-Phase 2 to ensure continuity of instruction throughout the closure through May 4. Information on the Plan can be found at: <https://bit.ly/WPSELP20>. The teachers, principals, directors, and the English as a Second Language coordinator continually reach out to families to ensure access to our online resources. The WPS Technology Department and our principals deployed 40+ hotspots and well over 200 Chromebooks to elementary school families. Our middle school and high school students have school-issued Chromebooks as well. The School Nutrition Department continues to provide Grab n Go meals to any student who could benefit from this service on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the WHS parking lot from 11am to 1pm. They are currently serving meals to 175+ students.

Watertown Free Public Library

The Watertown Free Public Library will **remain closed until Monday, May 4th**. The library has a full schedule of online storytimes for children and virtual programs and workshops for adults and teens as well. The full schedule is available on the library website www.watertownlib.org. All programs are listed on the event calendar. Additionally, an electronic newsletter detailing many other resources available remotely will be emailed every Monday (sign up for the newsletter through the website). A community resource guide developed by the library will be available soon.

Watertown Council on Aging/Senior Center/Food Pantry

The Watertown Council on Aging/Senior Center will **remain closed for all programs and services** including all activities, exercise classes, AARP tax appointments, SHINE counseling, podiatry and blood

pressure clinics, shuttle bus runs and Senior Parking Permits **until Monday, May 4th**. The Watertown Food Pantry continues to be open Tuesdays, 10 AM until 2 PM at 80 Mt. Auburn Street, rear. Donations may be dropped off at that time too. Senior Center staff is available to answer your questions and to help connect you to resources you need. Call the Senior Center at (617) 972-6490 or send an e-mail to SeniorCenter@watertown-ma.gov.

Watertown Veterans' Services

Watertown Veterans' Services is closed to the public but is still available to assist with administering and applying for benefits. Families and Veterans may reach out to inquire about applying for benefits. Watertown Veterans' Services, in partnership with the Greater Boston Veterans' Collaborative has a detailed spreadsheet with benefits and services—including but not limited to: financial, mental health, transportation, and food resources—available to Veterans and others during this pandemic. The list is constantly being updated and interested Veterans and families should contact Patrick George, Veterans' Services Officer (VSO) for the most up to date list. Please contact the VSO at: PGeorge@watertownma.gov or (617) 972-6416 (Office) and (781) 645-9127 (Cell)
[COVID-19 Resource Guide](#)

Parks and Recreation

All programs offered by the Watertown Recreation Department will **remain cancelled until Monday, May 4th**. **All fields, courts, track, tot lots and dog parks in Watertown will remain closed until May 4th**. Please adhere to this request and follow all guidelines by the Watertown Health Department and all governmental agencies.

Town Hall will remain closed to the public until Monday, May 4th. Town Hall and the Department of Public Works Administrative Offices remain available only by phone or online. All calls and emails will be responded to Monday through Friday 8:30am-5:00pm.

[Visit the Department directory for phone numbers.](#)

This includes the following Town Offices:

- Town Manager, TownMgr@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 972-6465
- Health Department, Health@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 972-6446
- Senior Center, SeniorCenter@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 972-6490
- Recreation Office, Recreation@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 972-6494
- DPW Administrative, DPW1@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 617-972-6420
- Inspectional Services, buildinginspector@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 972-6480
- Treasurer/Collector, Treas&Collectors@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 972-6450
- Assessor, Assessor@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 972-6410
- Town Clerk/Vital Records, TownClerks@watertown-ma.gov, (617) 972-6486

Emergency Management Team

The Town of Watertown Emergency Management Team is meeting daily to monitor the developments in the outbreak of the coronavirus. We have used these meetings to keep an organized flow of information and to develop strategies to best respond to the needs of our community. We will continue to update the community through the Watertown Health Department's web page.
<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/965/CORONAVIRUS>.

Please continue to take the following actions to limit the spread of COVID-19:

- Stay safe, stay home
- Practice social distancing – when in public spaces try to remain at least 6-feet away from others.
- Stay home if you are sick – and avoid close contact with others.
- Cover your mouth – when you cough or sneeze use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands.
- Wash your hands – with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based sanitizing gel.

We also recommend the following resources:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) Resource Page:

<https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus>

Center for Disease Control COVID-19 information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Town Manager’s Coronavirus (COVID-19) (5) [Statements/Updates](#)

We are in this together

We are living in an unprecedented time where our world, our nation and our community, is faced with the threat of an international pandemic known as COVID-19.

All of our Town employees are incredibly committed to ensuring the Town can safely meet the needs of our community while we are also protecting our employees’ safety. All departments have implemented vigorous social distancing and hygiene protocols. I am so grateful for all of our employees’ efforts under difficult circumstances.

The members of the Honorable Town Council continue to be available to help all residents and to provide updates/information to protect the health and safety of all the residents of Watertown.

I want to thank all of the members of our community for your cooperation and efforts to date; and for your continued actions to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Watertown is a resilient community and we are all in this together. We will continue to support each other and stay strong, Watertown Strong!