Coronavirus (COVID-19) Situation Awareness Report

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

FACT OF THE DAY: Vaccines against pneumonia, such as pneumococcal vaccine and Haemophilus influenza type B (Hib) vaccine, do not provide protection against the new coronavirus. The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine. Researchers are trying to develop a vaccine against 2019-nCoV, and WHO is supporting their efforts.

SECOND FACT OF THE DAY: Stay home.

The global, national, state, and City Declaration of Emergency because of the COVID-19 pandemic remains in effect and will until further notice.

On March 25, 2020, the Baker/Polito Administration issued new Executive Orders to combat the growing COVID-19 infection rate in Massachusetts. Today’s orders, attached to this report, are:

- Extends the closure of day cares, private and public schools to May 4, 2020.
- Mandates additional protection for pharmacy and grocery workers
- Guidance of Evictions and Rent Redetermination

UPDATES:

- TEXT: COVIDMA to 888-777 and get coronavirus information on your mobile phone.
- FINES: Under local and state orders, fines for businesses and individuals violating COVID-19 orders begin at $50.00 up to $300.00.
- CALL: 211 for reliable coronavirus information and resources
- CHAT: with a 211 operator at http://www.mass211.org/
- EAT: Easthampton School Department's breakfast and lunch program for anyone between the ages of 0 to 18 years, as well as Southampton youth, at Easthampton High School, 9 am. In essence, 11 am on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. On each distribution day, families will receive two days' worth of food. On Fridays, they will receive meals for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.
- CARE: Exempt Emergency Child Care for 1st Responders and essential employees are found here: https://eeclead.force.com/apex/EEC_ChildCareEmergencyProcedure
• DEFEND your rights:
  o General resources: [https://www.mass.gov/guides/resources-during-covid-19](https://www.mass.gov/guides/resources-during-covid-19)

**ECONOMIC RELIEF:**

• **DO NOT WAIT TO APPLY FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.** Apply now if your income has dropped or you are without employment or self-employed – the definition of who qualifies expanded. [https://www.mass.gov/alerts/important-unemployment-information#undefined](https://www.mass.gov/alerts/important-unemployment-information#undefined)

• The IRS pushed the April 15th federal tax filing date is now July 15, 2020.

• Small business and student loan resources: [https://www.mass.gov/guides/resources-during-covid-19#-small-businesses-](https://www.mass.gov/guides/resources-during-covid-19#-small-businesses-)

• The MA Department of Public Utilities has restricted all-electric and gas companies from shutting off service – is applies to **ALL RESIDENTIAL** account regardless of income.

• M.A. Housing Court has issued a Standing Order to halt evictions of tenants. Call 413-748-7838 or [www.mascourts.org](http://www.mascourts.org) for more information.

• The Department of Housing **suspended FHA evictions and foreclosures**. Details: [https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_20_042](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_20_042)

• If you need help with mortgage payments, check with your bank or mortgage company to see what relief programs they may have – many do.

Below is vital information by the city function. **For full updates, please visit the list of resources at the very bottom of this report:**

**Easthampton Municipal Government**

For continuity, core City operations and services are in place through this Declaration of Emergency. City employees are checking emails and voicemails as frequently as possible. The majority of City employees are working remotely or on a limited schedule. During the Declaration of Emergency, emails and calls directly related to COVID-19 are answered first. Direct urgent inquiries to [mayor@easthamptonma.gov](mailto:mayor@easthamptonma.gov) or 413-529-1400 ext 143.
All non-essential committee meetings are postponed through April 7, 2020. There is important work happening within City boards and committees all the time. We understand that this may be inconvenient for some, or potentially slow projects and discussions temporarily. Attorney General Healey provided new Open Meeting Law for essential city business found here: https://www.mass.gov/the-open-meeting-law

**Easthampton Public Buildings**

Only essential or on-call staff have access to public buildings until further notice. Essential staff conducts municipal government functions that are only and regularly possible on-site. On-call staff intermittently access public buildings to conduct the municipal government functions of their job not possible remotely.

This restriction is to curb infection for all staff, the public, and our essential/on-call employees. Exceptions to this mandate are police and fire, DPW water/sewer, highway, and wastewater crews with staggered staffing patterns and outdoor work in the park and recreation department. Other than these exceptions, no employee is allowed to access public buildings without the Board of Health and the Mayor's approval.

All public buildings remain closed to the general public – this includes schools, the Council on Aging, and parks. Only the Public Safety Complex lobby at 32 Payson Avenue is an accessible area to the public. Public contact with Dispatch will be via the lobby phone. Drug drop off, and firearms licensing processing are suspended until further notice. Additionally, the sharps dispensary container is in the lobby.

**Mayor's Office**

Mayor LaChapelle has asked all Department Leaders to prepare plans by Wednesday, April 1 that:

1. Re-assess essential functions and staff needed for an extended period from now until **MAY 6, 2020**
2. Create a plan to run their departments and prepare FY21 budgets with the hypothetical assumption the Declaration of Emergency continues through May 6, 2020

During uncertain times, planning allows us some surety and awareness of what resources we have and what we may need to react to a very fluid state of affairs.

Both email (mayor@easthamptonma.gov) and voice mail (413-529-1400, ext.146) are being monitored with COVID-19 urgent matters prioritized. Send press inquiries to the Mayor's Office.

The Mayor's office will send out a regular Coronavirus (COVID-19) Situation Awareness Report for the duration of the City's Declaration of Emergency. The report is on the verified City Facebook page and the City's website www.easthamptonma.gov.

Email mayor@easthamptonma.gov with offers of help in the form of goods or volunteer hours. The Mayor's office is trying to connect offers with community resources for small businesses, food, and housing-related payments. We are gathering this information to match what is needed and where and the length of assistance. We do not want to overwhelm agencies providing services with the help that does not match their needs.
Also, high-risk groups like seniors and those with underlying health conditions are the priority. It is not every volunteer who can serve high-risk residents. Volunteers are a long-standing need in the coming months.

**Audit**

The Auditor and Assistant Auditor are maintaining all financial functions remotely. Additionally, they are creating accounts to track and receive emergency funds so the City can submit for COVID19 resources as soon as possible.

**Building Inspection**

As of now, construction in Easthampton must adhere to updated public health and social distancing guidelines in order to continue.

OSHA has categorized construction as a Low-Risk occupation, the lowest of its four categories. For example, utility work typically isolates equipment operators, truck drivers, and laborers, all of whom work outdoors at significant distances. However, not all activities are as inherently safe.

Consequently, the City requires all contractors to submit a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) and Site-Specific Safety Plan (SSSP) for continued operations during the emergency declaration. For private building construction, the Inspectional Services Department is reviewing those plans and requiring additional measures as appropriate. For City contractors and utilities, the Infrastructure & Asset Management Department is restricting specific activities and has developed COVID-19 protection plans. For example, utilities will be allowed to work within the public roadway but will not be allowed to complete service connections that require property entry until after the crisis is over.

Subject to change, all inspections will be suspended except for time-sensitive inspections. The State Building Department allows for pictures for small project sign-offs. For large projects, structural inspections are still happening. Please call the Building Inspection Department at 413-529-1400, ext. 128 with any questions about inspections.

**City Clerk**

Here is a link with information about the now May 19th special state election for the 2nd Hampden Hampshire Senate District seat: [http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/covid-19/covid-19.htm](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/covid-19/covid-19.htm) Applications for either absentee or early vote ballots for the May 19th Special State Election may now be requested to be mailed.

This link gives some good info and includes applications, which may be emailed to City Clerk Barbara LaBombard at cityclerk@easthamptonma.gov, as long as they contain a signature. [http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/covid-19/covid-19.htm](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/covid-19/covid-19.htm)

**City Council**
Governor Baker issued an Executive Order regarding Open Meeting Law and COVID-19. Per his order, the City Council President is working to enable remote participation by Council, Committee and Board members for meetings essential to the operation of City business.

Wednesday, March 18, the City Council held the first virtual meeting in Easthampton's history. The agenda was limited to items that had to be moved forward or formally extended by Council. The Council President is working with the City's Technology Department to implement a virtual system that allows for public input.

**Collections and Assessors**

**From March 13 through April 30, 2020, late fees and processing of property-related warrants are suspended.** The Drop Box is still available to the public. It will be emptied daily. Real Estate Taxes and Personal Property bills can be paid online at: [https://unipaygold.unibank.com/customerinfo.aspx](https://unipaygold.unibank.com/customerinfo.aspx)

**Department of Public Works**

Essential services – provision of water, sewer, and wastewater – continue to operate on standard protocols. Staffing has been split into smaller working groups, practicing social distancing. For non-life threatening DPW emergencies outside business hours, please call the non-emergency Dispatch number (413-527-1212) to report the issue.

**Dispatch**

Dispatch is operating with new protocols for 911 calls. Callers will be asking about possible COVID 19 exposure and symptoms. These protocols are to lessen the spread of infection and ensure first responders know how to treat patients.

**Fire Department**

**Effective immediately,** the Easthampton Fire Department is suspending Smoke & Carbon Monoxide detector inspections in compliance with Governor Baker's Executive Order until 90 days after the State of Emergency is lifted.

The following conditions must be met in order for the inspection to be delayed:

- The buyer and seller agree, in writing, that the buyer, not the seller shall be responsible for equipping the property with compliant Smoke & Carbon Monoxide detectors and;
- The buyer agrees to equip the property per 527 CMR 1.00, Chapter 13
- A copy of the agreement shall be provided to the Fire Chief before the scheduled closing date.

For further information, please contact **Deputy Chief Wayne Hennemann at 413-527-4200 ext. 2140**
If you are seeking a burning permit, come into the Public Safety Complex lobby to obtain one. At this time, we are not collecting the five-dollar fee. If you have a seasonal burning permit, call the Fire Department to see if the state is allowing burning on that day.

**Health Department**

The Board of Health has the authority to fine who are not complying with signage, crowd size, and social distancing protocols as well as all other Executive Orders. **Fines begin at $50.00 and can go up to $300.00.**

Per Governor Baker's **March 23, 2020**, Executive Order, gatherings of 10 or more persons in a single room or venue at one time are prohibited. Gatherings of 10 are permitted ONLY if every person can maintain six (6) feet of space between them.

Due to the **inability to maintain the minimum social distancing of 6 feet**, hair salons, esthetic (skincare) salons, spas, nail salons, barbershops, and body art establishments operations are **suspended operations at least through Sunday, April 5, 2020.**

The Health Agent is available via at **beichstaedt@easthamptonma.gov**. Inspections at this time are suspended until further notice. All scheduled inspections are in the process of being rescheduled to a later date to be determined by our alternate inspector.

Food Establishments, bars, convenience stores, etc. should email the Health Agent and ask to be added to the email list if they have not been receiving our emails. Information including sample signage that food establishments can use can be found on our website at [https://easthamptonma.gov/health-department.html](https://easthamptonma.gov/health-department.html) Updates can also be found on our Facebook at [https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonHealth](https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonHealth)

**Parks and Recreation**

The Park Office closed to public, please email **parksandrec@easthamptonma.gov** with question or help. Parks are open for passive recreation with the following rules:

- Maintain social distancing (6 feet)
- If you are feeling sick, stay home
- All Playgrounds are closed
- High School and Youth Sports are postponed until at least April 27th - no practices or games allowed
- The Nonotuck Park double gates will remain closed until further notice

The Easthampton Parks and Recreation Department will abide by all guidelines set forth by The Mayor’s Office and the Easthampton Board of Health.

**Payroll**
Information about City employee payroll is sent to work email accounts. If you cannot access your email remotely, please call Treasurer Jen Gallant or Personnel Director Bob Dickson at 413-529-1400.

Employees and veterans who do not have a direct deposit can pick their check-up at Dispatch at 32 Payson Avenue.

**Personnel**

Members of the public are encouraged to apply for positions now posted on the City website.

The only permanent job offers made during the Declaration of Emergency are to applicants who have had an interview before March 10, 2020. Interim and temporary appointments will be made if essential to City operations until further notice.

**Planning**

Due to the COVID-19 state of emergency, the Planning Department is not accepting any new applications for projects that require a public hearing.

If you have questions or would like to discuss a potential application, please email the appropriate staff person:

- Jeff Bagg, City Planner (Planning Board) jbagg@easthamptonma.gov
- Jamie Webb, Assistant Planner (Zoning Board of Appeals) jwebb@easthamptonma.gov
- Cassie Trager, Conservation Agent (Conservation Commission) ctragert@easthamptonma.gov

**Police Department**

In conjunction with U.S. Attorney Lelling's advisory, the police department warns residents of falling prey to these COVID-19 scams.

Massachusetts residents who believe they are victims of fraud or other criminal activity related to the pandemic should contact the United States Attorney's Office at USAMA.victimassistance@usdoj.gov or call 1-888-221-6023 and leave a message. Members of the public can also contact the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) by visiting http://www.ic3.gov/. If you or someone you know are in immediate danger, please call.

All on-premise consumption licensees cannot sell alcohol to the public until 11:59 pm on April 5, 2020. This order includes restaurants, bars, hotels, general on-premise, clubs, war veterans' clubs, continuing care retirement communities, pub-brewers, farmer – series pouring permits, and manufacturing pouring permits. On-premise consumption of food or drinks is prohibited; only takeout and delivery of food are permitted.

The current inventory of firearms licenses will be mailed via the U.S. Mail. New applications are not being processed at this time.
**Private Schools**

All private daycares, elementary, and secondary schools are shut down per the Governor's Executive Order at least through April 6, 2020. There are exempt daycare centers open with the focus on care for 1st Responder and essential staff's children. The list of approved centers follows this document.

**Public Schools**

Governor Baker has just announced the extension of the school closure until May 4, 2020 for all Massachusetts Public Schools. Guidance from the Commissioner of Education will be coming out this week for school districts to review. We are poised to work through the Commissioner's guidance and adjust our plans as needed.

The most important thing is to keep our staff and our families safe and healthy. Our Leadership Team, our faculty, and all our staff are dedicated to the children of Easthampton and we will continue to update everyone as this situation continues to change.

The Tuesday, March 24, School Committee meeting is canceled per the Mayor's Order. The school budget hearing will be rescheduled for the earliest possible date.

Please email or call. Do not come to the Easthampton Public School's central office or individual school buildings. School staff will be checking emails and voice mails remotely.

The breakfast and lunch program for anyone between the ages of 0 to 18 years, as well as Southampton youth, is at Easthampton High School, 9 am – 11 am on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. On each distribution day, families will receive two days' worth of food. On Fridays, they will receive meals for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

**Treasurer**

Payroll services have been set up for remote processing. Bank accounts and essential financial services continue on a regular schedule. As to date, no financial transactions have been deferred, given the financial markets and emergency banking protocols. The payroll schedule remains the same. However, if a Veteran or employee does NOT have a direct deposit, their check will be available at the Public Safety Complex in Dispatch. All other checks are mailed via USPS.

**Veteran Services**

Veterans who do not have direct deposit can pick up their checks at Dispatch at 32 Payson Ave. All veteran services are available via email (mayor@easthamptonma.gov) or phone (413-529-1400, ext 143)

**Council on Aging and Enrichment (COA)**
The staff of the COA is working and available during regular business hours to provide alternative arrangements for seniors who need access to essential services. The COA is doing wellness calls to seniors, providing transportation, and is working on a protocol for volunteers. For questions, call 413-527-6151.

**Keep Informed through RELIABLE Sources**

Please access these reliable sources of information for the coronavirus (COVID-19) throughout the State of Emergency:

- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- [https://easthamptonma.gov/health-department.html](https://easthamptonma.gov/health-department.html)
- [www.epsd.us](http://www.epsd.us)
- [www.facebook.com/easthampton413](http://www.facebook.com/easthampton413)
- [https://www.facebook.com/easthamptonfire/](https://www.facebook.com/easthamptonfire/)
- [https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonPD/](https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonPD/)
- [https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonHealth/](https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonHealth/)