



CITY OF
ELIZABETH CITY
HARBOR OF HOSPITALITY *North Carolina*

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council
FROM: Rich Olson, City Manager
REF: City Manager's Weekly FYI ~ July 17, 2020
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1. On Tuesday, the City received our sales tax report for the month of April from the State of North Carolina. In March, cities and counties in North Carolina were advised by the State to expect a 15%-20% reduction in sales tax proceeds caused by the COVID-19 virus and several Executive Orders the Governor imposed for the safety of the state's residents. Once the City received this notice, I put in place a number of austerity measures to ensure that the City would be able to finish fiscal year 2019-2020 in sound financial shape. In addition, fiscal year 2020-2021 was reworked to reflect the challenging times the City would be facing due to the virus. Staff was pleasantly surprised when the State informed us that our April sales tax allocation would be \$301,639.98 compared to last April's \$298,370.85, which reflects a small 1% increase instead of the anticipated decrease. I can only presume that the increase was associated with the federal government stimulus checks most of our citizens received beginning in April. It will be interesting to see how our sales tax distribution finishes out this fiscal year.
2. Beginning July 1st, 2020, the City switched our health insurance provider from the League of Municipalities to Blue Cross & Blue Shield. I received our last utilization report from the League this week. From January through June, the City paid \$1,324,858 in premiums, while only having claims of \$945,018. This equates to a medical loss ratio of 71.3%, which is the lowest the City has had in my 17 years here. One of the primary reasons for this is the COVID-19 virus. Most hospitals cancelled all non-emergency surgeries and doctor's offices discouraged patients from coming to the offices unless it was an emergency. Eight percent of the City claims were associated with our employees using the emergency room. The City had 48 claimants and 141 claims, which cost our insurance carrier \$46,177. This amounted to over 8% of our total health

care dollars spent. I would like to thank the City employees for taking their health seriously.

3. Since our last electric smart meter project update, our team has made great strides. As of this afternoon, 500 additional meters have been installed since last Friday, for over 1,517 swapped meters to date. During these next two weeks, installers will shift to Cycle 2, then Cycle 3 starting on the 31st. Of the routes covered so far, 71 customers were skipped for meter replacement; 20 of these were already rescheduled. Utility customers that are skipped and must be rescheduled may experience a three-week delay having their smart meter installed; the technicians must follow the strict Cycle Calendar, which updates every two weeks. We received multiple shipments of meters this month and several more are due next week; 5,060 meters in all. Six pallets of meters arrived today, and another 2,410 are due by the middle of next month. With our receipt of the expanded inventory, our NexGen contractor will be assigning an additional installer to our project next week. Staff continues steps toward developing the customer intelaHome portal interface. The best news of all – we have successfully billed all Nexgrid meters! Last Thursday, Data Processing Division generated Cycle 1 invoices, and for the first time uploaded meter readings from Nexgrid into the Tyler Incode 10 utility billing software for multiple routes. Minor issues had to be resolved, but I am delighted to say that the outcome was a success. All customers with smart meters were thoroughly checked for accuracy. I am confident that the majority of the customers will be pleased with our technological advances and what it means for utility billing.
4. On Wednesday, Assistant City Manager Judge attended a follow-up virtual meeting with Sentara Albemarle Medical Center (SAMC) executives, Albemarle Regional Health Services administrators, and local community leaders to finalize the Sentara Community COVID Testing for High-Risk Individuals event. To assist public health officials contain the spread of COVID-19 in overlooked, under-tested, underserved and/or uninsured communities, St. Stephen Missionary Baptist Church, Corolla Chapel, the Elizabeth City | Pasquotank County South Park Sports Complex and the Albemarle Regional Health Services are partnering with Sentara Healthcare in offering free testing for our community. The initiative is intended to expand testing of persons that are identified by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) as having a higher probability of contracting the COVID-19 virus, and who may not have resources to access testing otherwise. Free testing priority is given to those working high-risk jobs for transmission; those living in a group setting with high risk of exposure; public housing; homeless; senior citizens with symptoms; those at high risk of severe illness; and those having attended a large group gathering of 20 or more individuals within the last 10-14 days. Elizabeth City area testing will occur on the following dates:

- July 22, 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., St. Stephen Missionary Baptist Church, 506 York Street, Elizabeth City
- July 31, 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m., South Park Sports Complex, 110 Capital Trace, Elizabeth City

Testing is limited and on a first come, first served basis. Tents and tables will be setup. Participants can choose between a “drive-through option” or “walk-up” option. Adherence to social distancing must be followed at all times. Testing event lines will cut-off 15 minutes prior to the scheduled end time. Those in line before that cut-off will be seen as long as tests are available. Testing is completely free and confidential. Sentara Healthcare staff perform all nasal swab testing. Sentara personnel will call attendees with their results, both negative and positive, within 7-10 days of test collection. For more information contact: Albemarle Regional Health District at (252) 388-WELL (9355).

5. On Tuesday, the Elizabeth City Police Department received notification from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) regarding its Community Policing Development (CPD) Microgrants program grant application submitted in March. In its application, the department had identified recruitment, hiring, and retention as its topic of interest and sought to acquire funding in the amount of \$10,000.00, which would cover the cost of producing a new police recruitment video, staff training, along with printing and other supplies and expenses in further advancement of the department’s Recruitment Team. There was no budget impact for this grant, as there were no required matching funds. In the notice, the COPS Office advised that Microgrant funding requests in FY2020 far exceeded the funding available under the program this year and our application was not among those selected for funding. The application did receive positive comments, including praise for a clear innovative strategy; sound, achievable goals; partners with experience and capacity to accomplish project goals; and its proposal and budget narratives were complete, cost-effective, and justifiable. Chief Buffalo and staff will continue to seek grant opportunities that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of police operations.
6. Work has begun on the Weatherly Pocket Park along the Elizabeth Street corridor! Our Parks Division staff has started by getting the area cleared of debris, leveling the ground and adding a base of sand to the property. The sidewalk should be repaired next week and several loads of soil brought in to ready the area for irrigation and sod. The installation of irrigation and sod should begin in the next few weeks. Once this park is complete and the other pocket parks updated, the ride down Elizabeth Street will be more beautiful than ever!
7. Due to Governor Cooper's directive this week to extend Phase 2 until August 7th, the Parks and Recreation Department has postponed several

leagues and the re-opening of the Senior Center. The T-Ball, Adult Co-Ed Kickball, Adult Co-Ed Softball and Men's Softball leagues and the re-opening of the Senior Center will hopefully begin the week of September 7th.

8. Earlier this month, the Elizabeth City Police Department received notification from the North Carolina Governor's Highway Safety Program (NCGHSP) that application for its 2020-2021 law enforcement equipment grant was denied. In its grant application, the department was seeking five in-car cameras for police cars, which the grant would have funded with a 50/50 match. The total grant budget proposed was \$30,000.00. In the official correspondence from NCGHSP, budget restraints were listed as the primary reason for denial of grant funding, adding that prioritization of grant proposals were necessary in order to provide the largest possible impact on highway safety. Chief Buffaloe and staff will submit another NCGHSP early next year when the application process becomes available once again.

9. Through the FY 20-21 budgeting process, the Community Development Department has secured funds to proceed with an online planning, code enforcement, building permits and inspections software system. The software is called OpenGov. OpenGov is a cloud based software that will help the department with online electronic submission of various permits in both the planning and building inspections division, along with code enforcement violation cases. OpenGov will provide an online training for staff on how to navigate the software. The new software system is set to go live in the next 90 days. Director Thompson will be meeting with each of the divisions within the Community Development Department to work through the transition and make sure that the software captures all the information that each division and department will require during their review. Community Development will also continue to allow hard copy submission of permit applications and inspection requests. Not only will OpenGov will be a new system for employees to utilize, but it will also provide public interaction and communication with clients. The need for an online permitting software system has become especially important in the last few months as we continue to seek ways to provide exceptional customer service but also enforce social distancing standards. To view the comprehensive guide for OpenGov, please click on the following link. <http://go.opengov.com/ebook-guide-to-cloud-based-permitting.html>

10. On Wednesday, the Public Utilities Department received their highly anticipated street sweeper the Elgin Crosswind1! This new sweeper offers wide sweeping paths, superior dust suppression, an 8 cubic yard hopper and 240 gal water tank,



plus excellent fuel efficiency to allow maximum productivity between trips to dumping, re-watering, and fueling. This sweeper will be replacing the sweeper that some residents previously referred to as "Old Smokey". No longer will residents see the sweeper spraying clouds of dust behind it and this sweeper will vastly improve street sweeping operations throughout the City! Street sweeping is a service that is provided to every Elizabeth City street on a quarter annual basis.

11. Earlier today, United States Coast Guard Community Services Command (CSC) Change of Command Ceremony, in which Captain Bruce C. Brown was relieved by Captain (s) Jeffrey T. Eldridge, followed by the retirement of Captain Bruce C. Brown, was held with a reduced physical footprint, to include close



family, friends, and participating military members. Assistant City Manager Judge was among those honored to attend the momentous event in-person. Our community will remember Captain Brown from his tenure as Commander of Coast Guard Base Elizabeth City, starting in summer 2014. In this role, he was responsible for one of the Coast Guard's largest and most complex installations, providing regional support to more than 4,000 military and civilian employees. Some of the Base's principal tenants included Aviation Logistics Center, Air Station Elizabeth City, Aviation

Technical Training Center, HC-27J Asset Project Office, National Strike Force Coordination Center, Special Missions Training Center and Sector North Carolina. During his service here, Captain Brown and his wife Vonda, championed many causes and charities including Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc. initiatives and our bid to become a Coast Guard City. Since the change of command in 2017 and receiving the Key to the City recognition, Captain Brown has served as the Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard Community Services Command where he was responsible for the leadership and operations of the Coast Guard Exchange System (CGX) and program management for the Coast Guard's Morale, Well-Being, and Recreation (MWR) programs. Commander shares his regards saying, "If I served with and/or for you it has been a privilege and an honor. Each of you had a profound impact on my career and I am forever grateful for that, and will cherish the memories of 36+ years of service. For all the other friends and family that have been there for Vonda and I throughout the years, we are eternally grateful for the love, support and friendship." The sentiment is shared and I personally wish Bruce and Vonda future years of happiness in the town where they met over 38 years ago, Ocala, Florida.

12. In May, the City applied to the AARP Community Challenge Program for a \$10,000 grant to help build a new, elevated crosswalk by the Senior Center. On Monday, AARP informed us they had denied our application, citing the large volume of applications received. This is disappointing, and follows AARP turning down the crosswalk grant in 2019 as well. Residents will recall that two parking lots serve the Senior Center, one being across Church Street. We had proposed installing a 4-inch concrete table and crossing lights on Church Street to make it safer for seniors to use that lot. With the application denied, the City and County will have to discuss how to proceed from here. One of the challenges we now face will be the lower than anticipated attendance at the Center due to the Covid-19 virus. Once the Senior Center opens we will be required to limit the number of seniors in the center at one time in order to maintain social distancing rules. The need for our seniors to utilize the church Street parking may not be an issue for an extended period of time.
13. Today is the City's Chief Building Inspector, Stanley Ward's, last day on the job. For 38+ years, Stanley has had his hands in all developments in the City. Whether it is a residential, commercial or industrial building, Stanley was the one who reviewed the plans and inspected the structure through the building process. During his tenure, he has worked for six City Managers and several dozen City Council members. Stanley and his employees worked over the years making sure that structures were sound after hurricanes or following an occasional vehicle collision. He will be missed by his peers and by myself. Stanley has a wealth of knowledge,

which will be hard for the City to replace. I thank him and wish him the best in his retirement.

14. Over the past week, members of the Elizabeth City Police Department and the Elizabeth City Fire Department have both volunteered to assist Habitat for Humanity of Elizabeth City. Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit organization that



helps families build and improve places to call home. The organization believes affordable housing is not only beneficial, but plays a critical role in building strong and stable communities. Eight ECPD Officers worked on last Friday and ten ECFD Firefighters worked last Friday and yesterday, all using their muscle (on hot July days!) to give of their time and help in building a new home for an Elizabeth City resident. Both agencies were honored to be a part of such a worthwhile endeavor and it is partnerships like these show that alone, we can do a little, but together we can do a lot.