



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 ~ March 20, 2020
COPY: Email Distribution

1. This week, most of City staff's time has been spent concentrating on preparing for and implementing the City's Continuity of Operation plan (COOP) for COVID-19. The Control group, which under state law is responsible for providing direction and determining when it is appropriate to declare a state of emergency has met twice in the last week. On Tuesday, March 16, 2020, Mayor Parker along with her counter parts on the control group issued a State of Emergency, which went into effect on March 17, 2020. The City has taken the following actions as stated in the State of Emergency:
 - The City's Public Safety lobby has closed indefinitely
 - Knobbs Creek recreational Center has been closed
 - ECPC Senior Center has been closed
 - Hugh Cale Community Center has been closed
 - Griffin Street Utility Billing Satellite Office has been closed indefinitely
 - All Special Events are cancelled until May 31, 2020, which include but are not limited to the North Carolina Potato Festival, Tarwheel Cycling event, and all First Art walk events.
 - SOULS feeding program has been suspended until further notice
 - All City of Elizabeth City park facilities will remain open; however, restroom facilities will be closed
 - The City will suspend utility disconnects for the next two weeks for all residential customers
 - The City will continue with Commercial utility disconnects
 - The City is encouraging people who need to pay their utility bill to utilize the drive-up lanes or the Kiosk located at 306 E. Colonial Avenue
 - Travel for all employees has been cancelled and the City work force has been classified as essential and non-essential as per our COOP
 - The City Council regular meeting scheduled for March 23, 2020 will be held

Changes to City Actions

Since the State of Emergency was issued, the City has seen a significant drop in the number of customers utilizing the Customer Service Department located in City Hall. On March 17th, we had 227 customers, while on March 18th and 19th we saw only 162 and 121 customers respectfully. Undoubtedly, when the City informed our customers that we were not going to disconnect our residential clients, some have elected to not pay their utility bill. I would like to remind our customers that they still must pay their bill as it will not be forgiven. Nonetheless, due to the lack of patrons, I have decided to close the customer service lobby to the general public. As stated previously, payments may still be made through the drive-thru lanes and the Kiosk. If a customer needs to establish new utility services, they must make an appointment; this can be done by calling 252-338-3981. I realize that this may cause our customers an inconvenience; however, we need to protect our employees from the COVID-19 virus. I am not certain how long we will be working under these conditions, therefore we will be revisiting the arrangement weekly.

2. In an effort to follow recommendations from the Centers of Disease Control (CDC), our Community Development Staff is doing their best to utilize online resources when possible to implement social distancing. All applications for our planning and building inspections division can be accessed from the City's website at the following links:

Building

Inspections:

https://www.cityofec.com/index.asp?SEC=E8DCA457-E993-4752-A43D-623A1952C6D8&Type=B_BASIC

Planning:https://www.cityofec.com/index.asp?SEC=73C8FB2A-110A-4B63-B812-F1036F66106C&DE=9EDF948B-B810-415E-B792-7535B3060B92&Type=B_BASIC

3. The Public Utilities Department has taken various steps to promote the health and safety of both our employees and the public. Residential water service cutoffs are temporarily suspended to ensure all community members can wash their hands often. When possible, department staff are minimizing large meetings and practicing social distancing by reducing visitor access to the building. If citizens have a Public Utilities need, staff is encouraging they call the main office at 252-337-6628 to submit their request. In addition to efforts listed above, staff are diligently sanitizing their workspaces as well to ensure a clean and safe work environment for employees.
4. For our Technical Review Committee, we are working with the applicants, all department directors, and all outside agencies to receive all project comments electronically without the need of a meeting. Our planning staff is compiling these responses and coordinating with our applicants on any site plan corrections that are needed. The two projects that were on the Technical Review Committee agenda for March 24th are being handled electronically. These projects include a Coast Guard housing project on

Weeksville Road, now called Coastal Park Townhomes; and an application for a Special Use Permit and site plan review for the Timeless Longue, which is a proposed restaurant and lounge to be located on Tidewater Way.

5. The Elizabeth City Fire Department is still responding to fire calls, motor vehicle accidents, and most emergency type calls. Some changes to their protocols have been made, such as having minimal staff enter a building for investigation purposes. If deemed necessary personnel are wearing N95 masks to limit their exposure to the virus, for their protection and the protection of our citizens. Fire and EMS are working closely with one another and only responding together on a case by case basis. Thorough cleaning is being done daily and in between calls. No visitors are allowed in the stations. Prevention staff are still doing plan reviews, investigating complaints, new construction inspections and some fire inspections at low risk businesses. They are cleaning their work areas on a regular basis as well. All staff have access to masks and gloves.
6. Most of the Finance Department has been working as normal. Accounting, Data Processing and Purchasing are largely business as usual. The Customer Service department has had a few changes due to the COVID-19 virus – we have closed the Griffin Street office and have encouraged customers to use the kiosk and drive through lanes at the City Hall location.
7. The Elizabeth City Police Department in its efforts to address the current COVID 19 pandemic, has suspended all face to face meetings, shift briefings, and created a virtual link to have staff meetings and communicate internally with personnel. Externally, officers have been directed to take non-life-threatening calls for service by phone in order to reduce personal contact in efforts to reduce the risk of exposure. However, law enforcement personnel will continue to respond to life-threatening calls for service and follow standard operating procedures. Staff has been directed to practice social distancing, utilize sanitation wipes to clean their offices and patrol vehicles regularly, sanitize any common areas used by staff, wash their hands frequently, avoid touching their face and to stay home if they are feeling sick to self-quarantine. Chief Buffaloe completed a VLOG to share on the police department social media sites to address the uneasiness that citizens are feeling during this epidemic. I want to commend City Staff for their efforts in working closely with local and state officials to make sure we put the best practices in place to address COVID-19.
8. The Electric Department is going about daily tasks as usual while still maintaining health and safety rules for their employees and the community. All employees are reporting to work daily and are available for

after-hour light out calls as needed. Trucks are prepared and stocked for emergency and non-emergency calls. Crews are maintaining proper social distancing and wiping down the office and vehicles as needed. The Electric Department has made arrangements with some local electrical contractors to step in and maintain the electrical system if the Department was forced to quarantine for a period of time.

9. A few months back the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center reached out to Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc. (ECDI) to invite our community to partner on an application to the National Main Street Façade Improvement Grant Program through Main Street America (MSA). We received notice this week that North Carolina was one of the four states chosen to participate in the program, along with Kentucky, New Mexico, and Wyoming. We are proud to announce that Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc. has been selected as one of three (3) communities across the state to participate from North Carolina, along with Downtown Elkin Historic District, and Lenoir Main Street. The Main Street Façade Improvement Grant Program was made possible by a \$746,900 grant from the Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program as administered by the National Park Service Department of Interior. The Main Street Façade Improvement Grant Program will significantly expand the funds available for façade improvements in rural communities. In each of the four states selected, three Main Street community partners will receive grants for façade improvements in their downtown districts. Each community is expected to award between two and nine grants of up to \$25,000 each. This is a pretty big deal to be selected to participate in this program on a state and national level. The grants will be administered by Main Street America, who will work directly with the local property owners selected to receive the grants. ECDI will assistance in facilitating the application process and putting the individual grant applications together from our community. Debbie Malenfant is directly responsible for working with the State to receive funding. This is quite an accomplishment.
10. This week, the Police Department received separate e-mail notifications regarding two different grant awards. Both grants had been applied for in January and staff was notified on Wednesday that the agency had been selected for funding. The National PAL Mentoring Grant for FY2020 was awarded. The Police Department had originally applied for a total of \$36,000.00 in grant funding; the award was reduced to \$18,900.00. Although originally more funding was sought, Chief Buffaloe and I are still pleased that the funding will allow 21 youth to be served in our community. The mission is to increase participating youth's understanding of personal, community, and interpersonal safety and increase their perception of social support. This will be the fourth consecutive year the Department has received this grant funding. Also, the Department received notification of the Bicycle Helmet Initiative for FY2020. Through

this initiative, the Department of Transportation provides bicycle helmets and the Let's Go NC-Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Curriculum. Funding for this grant is made possible through the Share the Road program and there is no budget impact for this particular grant. The funding will be used in part to purchase 100 bicycle helmets to be distributed to local children. This program helps the agency in further educating the public of bicycle safety precautions and other measures to aim to reduce bicyclist injuries in our City; it is overseen by the Community Resources Unit of the Police Department. Neither grant awards require a cost match, so there is no budget impact if accepted.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

The City Council of the City of Elizabeth City will meet in Work and Regular Session on Monday, March 23, 2020, beginning at 5:30 p.m. in Council Chambers, located on the second floor of the municipal building at 306 East Colonial Avenue.