

# TOWN OF LUNENBURG MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER



**Heather R. Lemieux**  
*Town Manager*

**COVID-19 Update**  
**March 21, 2020**

## **UPDATES FROM THE TOWN MANAGER**

After roughly a week and half after Governor Baker issued a State of Emergency, each day still brings new information that requires us to adjust how we operate. In the last couple of days, my focus has been to plan for immediate issues such as how to delay the upcoming Special State Election scheduled for March 31st, working on a solution for remote participation for our public meetings, conference calls from stage agencies, communications with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, establishing a continuity of operations plan so that we can continue to provide services to our residents and businesses throughout the duration of this historic pandemic, among other needs that require action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a constant flow of new information, including federal and state mandates that directly impact our community, businesses, and employees that requires outreach and a planned response. I want to thank all of the department heads and staff for their level of commitment to maintain operations and offer a helping hand whenever needed. We continue to ask for everyone's patience and understanding during this time, as we are committed to continuing to provide services to our residents and businesses at the same time as keeping our residents and staff safe.

Here are a number of updates specific to Lunenburg, that will also be posted on the town website, town Facebook page, the "townwide" listserv, sent to the Lunenburg Ledger and to Public Access:

COVID-19 Information Center: On Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup> I created a page on our town website that includes all the public service announcements and other important documents and links to information related to COVID-19. This includes Board of Health updates and a link to the Lunenburg Public Schools with all informational releases from the School.

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### Closure of Town Facilities, Schools, Town/School Playgrounds and School Fields :

To follow the Governor's Order of no public gatherings of more than 25 people, all town facilities are closed to the public until April 7<sup>th</sup>, which also coincides with school closing date as of today.

Also, beginning on March 17<sup>th</sup>, all public, including school, playgrounds in Lunenburg are closed to public until April 7<sup>th</sup>. This includes Wallis Park, Kids Kingdom, Marshall Park and school playgrounds. All school fields will also be closed to the public.

The Police Department has been asked to monitor these areas during their patrols to enforce closure.

### Communications with Town Departments:

As of Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> all staff at town facilities that are able to work remotely will do so and any staff that cannot work remotely will work on a rotating schedule so not to work with other members of their department or in close proximity to others. Phone lines will be forwarded so that all calls will be returned and all emails to staff will be returned. Please contact us if you have questions, we are here to help if at all possible.

If you need to contact a particular department, please visit the town's website at <https://www.lunenburgma.gov/> and each individual department's web page includes contact information, including the phone number and e-mail address.

Board/Committee/Commission Meetings: The IT Director, the Public Access Manager, and I performed a live test meeting on Zoom on Thursday and initially there were issues with the audio on broadcasting live on the Public Access channel but these were worked out later in the day. The Board of Selectmen will have the first remote public meeting on Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. The posted agenda reflects how to view that meeting, as well as if residents want to call in remotely to participate. Instructions on how to log in and conduct meetings will be sent out to the departments in the coming days. We ask that boards and committees only meet to conduct essential business and delay meetings, if possible, to a future date.

### Senior Center Updates:

As with other town facilities, the Eagle House will be closed to the public until April 7<sup>th</sup> and this includes all activities at the Senior Center and off-site. Effective Friday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, Eagle House staff will be working remotely but will still be performing outreach, delivery of Meals on Wheels, and other vital services to our seniors. The COA Director has begun virtual museum, aquarium, games, fitness programs appropriate for seniors on the Eagle House Facebook page, along with any COVID-19 scam information forwarded from the State.

Van Transportation Service has been cancelled until further notice and all clients have been notified.

The Meals on Wheels program was extended to all Lunenburg residents age 60 or older who are self-isolating in their homes and an additional four seniors were added. Call the Eagle House at (978) 582-4166, to sign up for Meals on Wheels. As of March 18<sup>th</sup>, volunteers are no longer being used to deliver meals and meals will now be delivered by the COA Director and two other staff members. Deliveries have also shifted to every other day so that deliveries be made on Monday and Wednesday only, with meals for multiple days. Clients are being asked to put a cooler outside their door to place meals in and maintain social distancing.

Any questions can be directed to COA Director Sue Doherty at (978) 582-4166 or [sdoherty@lunenburgonline.com](mailto:sdoherty@lunenburgonline.com)

### Curbside Trash and Recycling:

Casella is still on their normal schedule of picking up trash and recycling.

Information on Town Meeting and Town Elections:

We are still awaiting special legislation from the State on town meetings and finance legislation, as well as special legislation to allow towns to delay town elections and the upcoming Special State Election. This last week I reached out to the other five towns to see if there was any interest in filing a court order to delay the Special State Election on March 31<sup>st</sup>. The town counsels for each community were included in the correspondence to coordinate drafting a Court Order. After numerous emails and phone calls amongst all parties, one of the attorneys from KP Law that represents two of the six communities was advocating that we hold off and wait for the legislature to act, even though we were told by our legislators that there was no appetite to delay the Special State Election and Secretary of State Galvin stated he did not see it as a concern. Around 5 p.m. on Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup> it was announced in the Statehouse News that legislation would be filed on Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> to delay annual elections and special state elections. I am not confident that the Legislature will be able to pass legislation in short order with our Special State Election only days away. My immediate concern is that 25 out of our 30 election workers are over 65 years old and our polling location is in a town facility that is closed to the public until April 7<sup>th</sup>. This facility also houses central office staff, essential to the continuation of educational services.

The Governor filed a bill (H.4572) on March 16<sup>th</sup> and the hearing on the bill was scheduled for March 19<sup>th</sup>. This bill will provide flexible solutions for communities caused by COVID-19 including options to address postponing Town Meetings 30 days due to a public health emergency, allow for delays to extend the date of annual Town Meetings beyond June 30<sup>th</sup>, and reduce quorum requirements. As of the close of business Friday, we had not received notification that anything had passed.

Town Caucus: The Town Caucus is cancelled until further notice.

Annual Town Election: Anyone wishing to take out nomination papers for the Annual Town Election should contact the Town Clerk's Office at (978) 582-4130 extensions 130 and 131. The Town Clerk will coordinate the receipt and drop off of papers.

Tax Payments:

Tax payments should only be mailed to the town's lockbox at the following address:

Town of Lunenburg  
Department 1260  
P.O. Box 986500  
Boston, MA 02298-6500

For any questions, please contact the Treasurer/Collector Myleen Mallari at (978) 582-4130 x 135 or [mmallari@lunenburgonline.com](mailto:mmallari@lunenburgonline.com).

Devens Regional Household Hazardous Collection Center:

MassDevelopment has postponed the operations for April for the Regional Household Hazardous Products Collection Center. The next Collection day will be May 6<sup>th</sup> and May 9<sup>th</sup> 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. (weather permitting). The Devens HHW website and voicemail are updated. Please make sure you link to the [www.DevensHHW.com](http://www.DevensHHW.com) for the most updated information.

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### Update from Unutil:

Unutil's focus in the days and weeks ahead is to ensure essential services remain uninterrupted. Some non-essential services have been suspended. Below is a summary of updates:

#### Services Temporarily Paused:

- Collections activities & disconnections – We have temporarily suspended all non-payment service disconnections and collection activities. If you are having trouble paying your bill, know that our Customer service team is there for you to find a solution that works in this difficult time.
- Non-essential planned electric outages – Unless the work is needed to prevent future disruptions, any planned service interruptions related to maintenance work on the system has been suspended. We are aware many individuals are working from home and children are home from school, and we want to accommodate your needs.
- Energy efficiency on-premise services – We are temporarily suspending all energy efficiency service activities that require home or business visits, such as energy audits. We believe these programs have great value for our customers and we continue to explore alternatives where possible.

#### Services Continuing:

- Electricity and gas service – Our pandemic task force is working diligently to find creative means of ensuring our core services remain uninterrupted, ensuring we continue to meet your energy needs in this difficult time.
- Customer-requested service – Our techs are still responding to service requests as needed for our customers, including turn offs, turn-ons, and relocation services. Our customer service team is now working entirely remotely and is still taking calls and service requests.
- Regular billing and ability to make payments – We continue to offer our full suite of payment and billing options for customers, and our team is standing by to provide assistance through payment plans and other options. We encourage all customers to take advantage of [MyUnutil](#) to manage accounts online.
- Emergency response – Our priority, as always, remains public safety. Contact us immediately for all gas and electricity-related emergencies and we will be there.

The situation we face is unprecedented and rapidly evolving. As program status changes, we will continue to update you with the latest information available. In the interim, visit [unutil.com/COVID-19](http://unutil.com/COVID-19) for the latest information regarding our efforts to provide service to you while working to suppress COVID 19.

### Update on Walmart and Hannaford hours:

On March 19<sup>th</sup> the manager from Walmart contacted me to tell me the hours were changed to 7 a.m until 8:30 p.m. Monday thru Sunday. Pharmacy hours are 9 a.m. until 8:30 p.m. Monday thru Saturday and 10 a.m. until 8:30 p.m. on Sunday. The Vision Care Center will not be handling retail sales any longer only repairs.

Hannaford is shortening their daily hours to provide time for additional cleaning and restocking shelves. Effective today, the Lunenburg Hannaford hours will be changed to 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. Monday thru Sunday. The Pharmacy hours remain unchanged. There will also be a dedicated time when customers who are 60 or over and individuals identified by the CDC as high risk may shop during special hours on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 6 a.m. until 7 a.m.

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Updates from the Police Department: The Police Chief provided an in-depth update on March 16<sup>th</sup> that included information about the steps the Police Department is taking to reduce Officer and citizen exposure to COVID-19 while protecting the life, property and quality of life of the citizens of Lunenburg. This information can be found on the town website at: <https://www.lunenburgma.gov/departments/police>.

Updates from the School Superintendent: The Superintendent has sent out a number of updates over the last week regarding school closures, continuity of education, food insecurity program, and other responses related to COVID-19. All communications from the School and School Superintendent can be found at <https://www.lunenburgschools.net/> and will be pushed out through School Messenger and automated calls.

### **UPDATES RECEIVED FROM THE STATE:**

The Baker-Polito Administration continues to take steps to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Massachusetts. A comprehensive list of emergency orders and guidance is available [here](#).

#### COVID-19 in Massachusetts (as of 3/20/20):

As of March 20<sup>th</sup> there are 413 COVID-19 cases and 1 death. 2,266 patients have been tested to date by the MA State Public Health Laboratory and 1,425 additional tests have been performed to date by commercial laboratories.

#### School Closures and Workforce Guidance for Schools:

Governor Baker has ordered a 3-week suspension of school operations for educational purposes at all public and private elementary and secondary (K-12) schools in the Commonwealth (not including residential and day schools for special needs students), beginning Tuesday, March 17 and continuing until Monday, April 6. Recognizing that local school districts employ a significant number of hourly employees, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education today is issuing guidance to local school districts recommending they continue paying hourly employees, while suggesting they continue to engage in professional development.

#### Childcare Operations:

Governor Baker issued an Executive Order requiring all early education centers and family childcare providers to close, starting Monday March 23 to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) also issued emergency procedures to set forth a process for opening Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs during the COVID-19 outbreak to provide priority access for families of emergency personnel, medical staff, and others critical to confronting COVID-19.

#### Gatherings and Restaurants:

Governor Baker has issued an emergency order limiting gatherings to 25 individuals and prohibiting on-premises consumption of food or drink at bars and restaurants, beginning Tuesday, March 17 and effective until Monday, April 6. [Full text of the order](#).

#### State Office Closures:

Governor Baker directed that all non-emergency Executive Branch employees should not report to their workplace today or Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>. During this period, the administration will work to expand alternative

work arrangements for the executive branch workforce and further develop plans to continue to provide essential state government services.

#### Trial Court Closures:

Court leaders have closed the Trial Courts to for today and tomorrow, Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>. Additional information is available [here](#).

#### Health Care:

MDPH has issued the following guidance:

- All commercial insurers, self-insured plans, and the Group Insurance Commission are required to cover medically necessary telehealth services related to COVID-19 testing and treatment. Insurers must do this without requiring cost-sharing of any kind – such as co-pays and coinsurance – for testing and treatment. [Full text of the order.](#)
- All assisted living residences are to restrict visitors to protect the health of residents and staff. [Full text of the order.](#)
- All hospitals are to restrict visitors. [Full text of the order.](#)
- Hospitals must cancel non-essential elective procedures. [Full text of the order.](#)
- Licensed pharmacies may compound and sell hand sanitizer over the counter. [Full text of the order.](#)
- The Board of Registration in Nursing has updated its policies to expedite the processing of reciprocal license applications for nurses licensed in another jurisdiction to allow those applications to be processed in one business day. [Full text of the policy.](#)

#### Utility Shutoff Moratorium:

The Department of Public Utilities has implemented a moratorium on gas/electric utility shutoffs until further notice. More information is available [here](#).

#### Limiting Need for In-Person RMV Visits:

The Administration today is taking further action to limit the need for customers to visit the Registry of Motor Vehicles in person. Today, Governor Baker [issued an order](#) allowing the Registrar to extend vehicle registrations and modify the conditions of registrations, plates and titles. It also enables the waiver of certain inspection requirements.

#### Smoke Alarm Inspections:

Governor Baker today [issued an order](#) making a change to the inspection statutes that require a smoke and carbon dioxide alarm inspection prior to a residential real estate transaction. The Order would permit the inspection to be deferred if the buyer contractually assumes responsibility for installing the detectors and the subsequent inspection happens within 90 days of the conclusion of the COVID-19 emergency.

#### Unemployment Assistance:

The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) and the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA), in coordination with the US Department of Labor (USDOL), are taking a series of actions to assist workers and employers.

For current unemployment claims:

- All requirements regarding attending seminars at the MassHire career centers have been suspended.
- Missing deadlines due to effects of COVID-19 will be excused under DUA's good cause provision.
- All appeal hearings will be held by telephone only.



The DOL issued guidance to the states instructing state agencies to apply existing law flexibly. Under the DOL guidance, DUA may now pay unemployment benefits if a worker is quarantined due to an order by a civil authority or medical professional or leaves employment due to reasonable risk of exposure or infection or to care for a family member and does not intend to or is not allowed to return to work. The worker need not provide medical documentation and need only be available for work when and as able.

To assist individuals who cannot work due to the impact of COVID-19, the administration is filing emergency legislation that will allow new claims to be paid more quickly by waiving the one week waiting period for unemployment benefits.

EOLWD and DUA are also filing emergency regulations that will allow people impacted by COVID-19 to collect unemployment if their workplace is shut down and expects to reopen in four or fewer weeks. The following conditions apply:

- Workers must remain in contact with their employer during the shutdown.
- Workers must be available for any work their employer may have for them that they are able to do.
- An employer may request to extend the period of the covered shut-down to eight weeks, and workers will remain eligible for the longer period under the same conditions described above.
- If necessary, DUA may extend these time periods for workers and employers.

Employers who are impacted by COVID-19 may request up to a 60-day grace period to file quarterly reports and pay contributions.

Pending federal legislation proposes further relief including additional money for unemployment benefits, and relief to employers for charges related to unemployment benefits paid due to COVID-19.

#### Tax Relief for Businesses:

The Baker-Polito Administration is announcing tax penalty relief to support businesses affected by COVID-19. The Department of Revenue today announced that it will waive any late-file or late-pay penalties for returns and payment due for meals and room occupancy taxes between March 20 and May 31, 2020.

#### Expanded Small Business Resources:

Earlier this week, the Administration announced a [\\$10 Million Small Business Recovery Loan Fund](#) to provide financial relief to small businesses and non-profits impacted by COVID-19. Today, the Administration announced that MassDevelopment's Board of Directors will meet next week to vote on a partnership that will make an additional \$10 million available for the Small Business Recovery Loan Fund.

The state-level emergency loan fund is aimed at providing crucial resources for small businesses that will supplement important federal relief. Governor Baker on Tuesday [formally requested](#) disaster relief from the federal Small Business Administration, and with this week's [announcement that that request had been granted](#), Massachusetts businesses impacted by COVID-19 may now apply for low-interest loans.

#### Municipal Governance:

Governor Baker proposed a package of legislation to help address challenges to municipal governance resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, including potential delays in holding Town Meetings and adopting Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) municipal budgets. Provisions include:

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- Amend existing statute authorizing Moderators to postpone Town Meetings by thirty days. State statute currently permits postponement for “public safety emergency,” and the legislation would add “public health emergency” as a second reason for postponement.
- Permit local Select Boards to postpone Town Meetings beyond the statutory June 30 deadline when the Governor has declared a state of emergency and conditions prevent the completion of a Town Meeting.
- Permit local Select Boards to temporarily adopt lower quorum rules. This would be an opt-in provision to allow a town-by-town determination, and it would enable Select Boards to designate the quorum level. Numerous towns have existing low quorum provisions in their by-laws.
- Permit continued month-to-month spending into FY21 by towns based on the prior fiscal year budget with approval of the Division of Local Services during states of emergency. The month-to-month authorization would continue so long as a state of emergency prevents the adoption of a budget. Cities have similar authority under existing state law.
- Permit towns to access their free cash balance for FY21 spending with approval of the Division of Local Services. This would be based on the July 2019 certified balance and could continue until an FY21 budget is adopted.
- Permit municipal spending from revolving funds at the level set by their Fiscal Year 2020 appropriation until an FY21 budget is adopted.
- Authorize a three-year amortization period for deficit spending incurred as a result of COVID-19 crisis. The default rule would require an FY21 tax rate to provide for one-year amortization and this change would follow the 2015 precedent for snow removal costs.

#### “No Sail” Order for Cruise Ship Operations:

The CDC has issued a 30 day 'No Sail' order for any cruise ship which has not voluntarily suspended operations. The Coast Guard will assist the CDC in preventing cruise ships from embarking passengers in US ports. The Port of Boston does not currently have any cruise ship arrivals scheduled until April 17<sup>th</sup>, though will identify any cruise ships or vessels carrying 250 or more persons (passengers and crew) with an overnight itinerary, planning to embark passengers.

#### MBTA Reduced Schedule:

Starting Tuesday, March 17, trains and buses will run with reduced service to slow the spread of COVID-19. In addition, the MBTA has increased cleaning and sanitation at stations and on vehicles. Additional information is available at <https://www.mbta.com/covid19>

#### Stay Informed

In an effort to ensure you have good situational awareness and early guidance from DPH, all stakeholders and the general public are encouraged to visit the DPH website as updates and guidance changes frequently. The link for DPH website can be found here: [www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus](http://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus).

#### Key Public Health Messages for All Residents:

Protect yourself by following public health advice about keeping your hands clean and covering coughs and sneezes.

- Stay home if you are sick. If you need to consult a health care provider, call ahead first or use telehealth services.
- Protect others who are most at risk of COVID-19 by keeping your distance from people (at least 6 feet away from others), especially those who are older, and people living with chronic health conditions.
- If you are outside, avoid crowds.



- Don't shake hands or hug.
- Stay connected to friends and loved ones by phone or through other technology.
- Get information from trusted sources. Visit <https://www.mass.gov/covid19> for the latest news, case counts, and lab testing results.
- Take care of your emotional health and help others do the same. If you need emotional support during these stressful times, call 2-1-1 and choose the "CALL2TALK" option

#### Communications Resources:

New [Social Distancing](#) infographic released on website. DPH working on an infographic focusing on behavioral health.

COVID-2019 infographic for posting in all public places: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/stop-the-spread-of-germs-respiratory-diseases-like-flu-and-covid-19/download>

A short video for social media, waiting rooms, and other locations: <https://youtu.be/HhUpkGxyjS4>

Social media – follow and retweet DPH on Twitter @MassDPH, updated several times per day.

Massachusetts 2-1-1:

Additionally, Massachusetts residents can call Mass 2-1-1 to learn more about:

- COVID-19 prevention, symptoms, and treatment
- Information about testing
- Guidance for people planning or returning from travel

Massachusetts 2-1-1 is open to callers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Operators fluent in Spanish are available, and more than 150 other languages are supported through an interpreter services line. Residents with questions can dial 2-1-1 from any landline or cellphone, or use the live chat option on the [Mass 2-1-1 website](#). 2-1-1 answered 2,650 calls on March 19<sup>th</sup>, bringing the total number of calls to 11,063 since activation.

#### Planning Guidance

Below are hyperlinks from DPH's website that provide specific guidance and recommendations for: (1) emergency responders and law enforcement, (2) businesses and employers, (3) elementary and secondary schools, and (4) colleges and universities. To access the hyperlinks hold "Ctrl" and click the link.

- Guidance for [emergency responders and law enforcement click here](#).
- Guidance for [businesses and employers click here](#).
- Guidance for [elementary and secondary schools click here](#).
- Guidance for [colleges and universities click here](#)