

TOWN OF LUNENBURG MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER



Heather R. Lemieux
Town Manager

COVID-19 Update
March 25, 2020

UPDATES FROM THE TOWN MANAGER

After two weeks of Governor Baker issuing a State of Emergency, each day still brings new information that requires us to adjust how we function and 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, constant communication with staff, an onslaught of communications and updates from various agencies and my colleagues, 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, especially our first responders, Police and Fire Chiefs, Jim Garreffi of the Board of Health, the School Superintendent and our IT staff. 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 in Lunenburg and Board of Health Notices:

On Sunday, March 22nd the Board of Health received notification of the first confirmed positive case in Lunenburg and on March 24th the Board of Health received notification of the second confirmed positive case. As our local Board of Health official, Jim Garreffi explained it should be expected that as the number of people tested increases, so will the number of positive cases in our community. It is especially important that people follow the social distancing protocols, that our older residents and those with underlying health conditions, who

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are considered high risk when exposed to COVID-19, should limit social interactions with other people as much as possible. The most recent Board of Health Notice can be found [here](#).

COVID-19 Information Center: On Tuesday, March 17th 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. The page can be found [here](#).

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

Beginning on March 16th, all town facilities were closed to the public and this is currently in effect until April 7th. Today, March 25th, the Governor ordered all schools closed until May 4th.

Also, beginning on March 17th, all public, including school, playgrounds in Lunenburg are closed to public until April 7th. 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 23rd 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 monitored 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. Instructions on how to view meetings and login to participate is printed on the posted agendas. I am working with the appropriate official that posts meetings on instructions on how to conduct meetings and on information that needs to be posted on the agenda to notify residents on alternative means of public access. 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 7th and this includes all activities at the Senior Center and off-site. Effective Friday, March 21st, 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. A new meal delivery service has been identified as well by the COA Director called Heart to Home Meals for Seniors aged 60 and older. Their contact information is hearttohomesmeals.com or call 508-658-3000. As of March 18th, 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 will 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

Curbside Trash and Recycling:

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

Information on Town Meeting and Town Elections:

The State passed special legislation yesterday to delay the Special State Election that was scheduled on March 31st until June 2nd (H.4582) and passed special legislation allowing the delay of municipal elections (S.2608). If the State had not passed special legislation to delay the Special State Election, our only other recourse was to file a court order, which we were prepared to do given that 25 out of our 30 election workers are over 65 years old and our polling location is a town facility that is closed to the public until April 7th. This facility also houses central office staff, essential to the continuation of educational services.

Since the warrant had not been posted for the Annual Town Meeting, the Board of Selectmen may postpone the Annual Town Meeting to a date prior to June 30th under the current M.G.L. I have a proposal before the Board of Selectmen to reschedule the Annual Town Meeting until June 13th and I have reached out to the Town Clerk to find out her preference on a date for the Annual Town Election. The Town Clerk has a meeting with the Registrars and they are possibly looking at combining it with the Special State Election on June 2nd. I will notify the Board as soon as I hear from the Town Clerk.

The Governor filed a House Bill 4572 on March 16th and the hearing on the bill was scheduled for March 19th. 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 30th, and reduce quorum requirements. The Governor filed another bill today, March 24th (H. 4974) called "An Act to Further Address Challenges Faced by Municipalities and School Districts Resulting from COVID-19". This legislation is designed to provide flexible solutions for local officials across the Commonwealth as the challenges of the COVID-19 epidemic disrupt the normal process of administering local government.

Town Caucus: The special legislation that passed on March 23rd will allow the Town Caucus date to be rescheduled. This date has yet to be determined.

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. The deadline to submit papers is Monday, March 30th by 5 p.m. and must be mailed to the Town Clerk, P.O. Box 135, Lunenburg, MA 01462. As long as postmarked by this date she will receive them.

Tax Payments:

Tax payments should not be left in the box outside of Town Hall due to staff working limited hours in the building and working remotely. Tax payments should only be mailed to the town's lockbox or can be paid online. The online bill payment link is <https://www.lunenburgma.gov/departments/resident-services/online-services> and the lockbox address is:

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

Motor Vehicle Taxes were due on March 23rd; there will be a 30 day grace period and any demand and interest fees will be waived during this grace period. For any questions, please contact the Treasurer/Collector Myleen Mallari at (978) 582-4130 x 135 or 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 6th and May 9th 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 for the most updated information.

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 – They have temporarily suspended all non-payment service disconnections and collection activities. If you are having trouble paying your bill, know that their 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. They are aware many individuals are working from home and children are home from school, and they want to accommodate your needs.
- Energy efficiency on-premise services – They are temporarily suspending all energy efficiency service activities that require home or business visits, such as energy audits. They believe these programs have great value for their customers and they continue to explore alternatives where possible.

Services Continuing:

- Electricity and gas service – Their pandemic task force is working diligently to find creative means of ensuring their core services remain uninterrupted, ensuring they continue to meet your energy needs in this difficult time.

- Customer-requested service – Their techs are still responding to service requests as needed for our customers, including turn offs, turn-ons, and relocation services. Their customer service team is now working entirely remotely and is still taking calls and service requests.
- Regular billing and ability to make payments – They continue to offer our full suite of payment and billing options for customers, and their team is standing by to provide assistance through payment plans and other options. They encourage all customers to take advantage of [MyUnitil](#) to manage accounts online.
- Emergency response – Their priority, as always, remains public safety. Contact them immediately for all gas and electricity-related emergencies and they will be there.

The situation we face is unprecedented and rapidly evolving. As program status changes, they will continue to update you with the latest information available. In the interim, visit unitil.com/COVID-19 for the latest information regarding their efforts to provide service to you while working to suppress COVID 19.

Update from Verizon:

Verizon is taking the following steps to protect consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic and protect consumers against the hardships they are currently facing:

- Waiving overage charges and late fees to support customers who may be financially affected by the COVID-19 crisis.
- Adding 15GB of high speed data for wireless consumer and small business customers to be automatically applied with no customer action necessary.
- Providing a new discount internet option for low-income households.
- Waiving two months internet and voice service charges for current Lifeline customers.

These actions build upon their previous pledges to not terminate service and to prioritize first responders so they can continue to respond to the needs of the communities. Their goal is to ensure their customers have the tools they need to stay connected. More details:

<https://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-helps-eliminate-worry>

Verizon continues to closely monitor developments related to COVID-19. As the situation evolves, they are working closely with their employees, partners and suppliers to support ongoing business operations and serve our customers' needs. For regular updates, please visit: <https://www.verizon.com/about/news/our-response-coronavirus>

Update on Walmart and Hannaford hours:

On March 19th 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 March 21st, 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

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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.

Updates from the Police Department: The Police Chief provided an in-depth update on March 16th 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 3/25/20):

As of March 25th there are 1,883 COVID-19 cases and 15 deaths. 19,794 patients have been tested to date by the MA State Public Health Laboratory, hospitals and commercial laboratories.

Governor Baker's March 25th Order Extending Closure of Public, Private and Secondary Schools:

Today Governor Baker extended the closure of public, private and non-emergency child care programs until May 4th. Find a copy of the order [here](#).

Governor Baker's March 25th Order Extending Closure of Non-Emergency Childcare Programs:

Today Governor Baker extended the closure of non-emergency childcare programs. Find a copy of the order [here](#).

Department of Public Health March 25th Order for Pharmacies and Grocery Stores:

Today, DPH issued a new order to support pharmacies and grocery stores and their employees during the COVID-19 public health emergency. This order will require grocery stores and pharmacies to:

- Provide at least one hour per day of shopping for adults over 60-years-old.
- Offer sanitation options, such as hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes, as available, to clean shopping carts and points of frequent contact.
- Appropriate social distancing policies, including a marked "Social Distancing Line," beginning six feet away from all checkout counters.
- Close any self-serve food stations.
- Instruct store employees who are ill to stay home, and for stores to accommodate employees who fall in the high-risk category with alternative assignments to limit exposure.
- Reusable bags cannot be used and may not assess a charge for recyclable paper bags, compostable plastic bags or single-use plastic bags.

[Read the Order Here](#).

Governor Baker's March 23rd Revised Order Prohibiting Gatherings of Over 10 People:

On March 23rd Governor Baker issued an amended emergency order prohibiting gatherings of over 10 people and prohibiting on-premises consumption of food and beverages to take effect at noontime on March 24th and be in effect until noontime on April 7th. The Order rescinded and revoked the Governor's earlier issued March 15th, 2020 order prohibiting gatherings of more than 25 people. The Order does not apply to the operations or activities of any business or organization in its provision of "COVID-19 Essential Services" identified in the Order and listed [here](#). The Order prohibits on-premises consumption of food or drink at bars and restaurants, beginning Tuesday, March 24th at noon and effective until Tuesday, April 7th at noontime. Food service establishments may have more than 10 employees on premises to provide take-out and delivery services provided they follow social distancing protocols. Find a copy of the full order [here](#).

The Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development has produced FAQs around essential/non-essential businesses which will be updated regularly.

The direct link to the FAQ is:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-essential-services-faqs>

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](#).

RMV Updates:

The Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles has created a page with updates about Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDLs), Commercial Learner's Permits (CLPs), Class D, Class M, and Class DM driver's license, ID cards, and Learner's Permits extensions, as well as RMV service centers, and hearing information. More information is available [here](#).

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.

Housing Stability for Vulnerable Populations:

The Baker-Polito Administration announced steps to keep vulnerable families in their homes, preserve the health and safety of low-income renters and homeowners, and prevent homelessness due to reduced or lost income. These steps include the following:

- DHCD is moving to temporarily suspend terminations of federal and state rental vouchers under their purview.
- MassHousing is transferring \$5 million to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for a COVID-19 Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) fund to assist families facing rent insecurity.
- The Division of Banks (DOB) has issued new guidance to Massachusetts financial institutions and lenders urging them to provide relief for borrowers and will advocate for a 60-day stay on behalf of all homeowners facing imminent foreclosure on their homes.

- DHCD is issuing guidance recommending that all owners of state aided low-income housing, including Local Housing Authorities and private owners, suspend both pending non-essential evictions and the filing of any new non-essential evictions.
- Affordable housing operators are urged to suspend non-essential evictions for loss of income or employment circumstances resulting in a tenant's inability to make rent.
- This guidance urges operators to establish reasonable payment plans, notify Section 8 or public housing residents about interim income recertification to adjust rent payments, and to consider offering relief funding for residents ineligible for income reassessment.

Read the DHCD Guidance Here:

[Guidance to owners of state aided low-income housing](#) [Guidance to affordable housing operators](#)

Notices and guidance regarding federal and state rental assistance programs:

- [Guidance for Administering MRVP](#)
- [Guidance for Administering ARVP](#)
- [Initial policies and procedures for federal rental assistance administered by DHCD](#)
- [Read the DOB Guidance Here.](#)

Unemployment Assistance:

In order to better meet the needs of customers whose employment has been affected by the coronavirus, DUA will be hosting daily town hall meetings where they will take constituents through a step by step process of achieving a successful unemployment claim and taking questions from claimants across the Commonwealth. A web link to the daily visual presentation can be viewed [here](#). You can also download the step by step presentation by going [here](#).

More information on unemployment can be found [here](#).

COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Businesses:

There are a number of resources and guidance documents for businesses in response to COVID-19. More information can be found [here](#).

MBTA Reduced Schedule:

More information on the MBTA's schedule is available at <https://www.mbta.com/covid19>

American Red Cross Facing Severe Blood Shortage

The COVID-19 virus has caused the cancellation of blood drives across the Commonwealth. There is an urgent need *now* for patients with chronic conditions and trauma, as well as ensuring an adequate blood and blood product supply *going forward*. The Governor has deemed "Blood and plasma donors and the employees of the

organizations that operate and manage related activities" as an essential service. Support is needed to communicate to your residents that the need is urgent, and donating is a necessity to supply the hospitals with the blood our neighbors require. Donating blood is safe and people should not hesitate to give. In addition, there is a need for community blood drive sites in the eastern part of the state. Identifying donation sites is vital to meet the demand as we go forward. Local knowledge, suggestions of sites, and potential partners are crucial to meeting the needs of our neighbors who need blood and blood products.

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To schedule a new blood drive contact Bill Forsyth at (617) 699-3808 or at email William.Forsyth@redcross.org.

Those who are healthy, feeling well and eligible to give blood or platelets, are urged to make an appointment to donate as soon as possible by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting RedCrossBlood.org or calling 1- 800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767).

Stay Informed

- Get information from trusted sources. Visit <https://www.mass.gov/covid19> for the latest news, case counts, and lab testing results.
- Call 2-1-1 with questions
- Text COVIDMA to 888-111 to receive notifications to your phone
- 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.
 - Samaritans is continuing operations 24/7, as always. During this unprecedented time, it can feel overwhelming to receive constant messages about COVID-19. Call or text their 24/7 helpline any time at 877-870-4673.
 - The Disaster Distress Helpline, 1-800-985-5990, is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster, including disease outbreaks like COVID-19. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available to all residents in the United States and its territories.

Communications Resources:

- New DPH Flyer/Infographic on [reducing stress & coping](#) with fear of COVID-19
- New DMH on [maintaining Emotional Health & Well-Being](#)
- New Social Distancing ([youth](#) and [general](#)) infographic released on website.
- Social Distancing messages are now on billboards and will soon be available on public transit. They are also now translated into multiple languages.
- There is [a new video on Social Distancing](#) specifically targeted specifically at youth.

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.