

TOWN OF LUNENBURG MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER



Heather R. Lemieux
Town Manager

COVID-19 Update
April 21, 2020

UPDATES FROM THE TOWN MANAGER

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:

The Board of Health is issuing weekly updates. The update received Sunday is dated April 17th and has been put on the COVID-19 Information Center page on the town website and new updates are on the home page under News & Announcements. As of today, there are twenty-four confirmed positive cases in Lunenburg and one death.

The COVID-19 Information Center page can be found [here](#).

Information and Resources for Businesses due to COVID-19:

Relevant information and resources for our local businesses is posted on the COVID-19 Information Center page on the town website.

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

Today Governor Baker announced that all schools would be closed for the remainder of the school year.

No decisions have been made yet as to the extension of school fields and playgrounds beyond May 4th yet but the school will be evaluating closures as restrictions are lifted.

All town facilities and town playgrounds are currently closed until May 4th. To clarify, previous public service announcements identified Marshall Park, Wallis Park, and Kids Kingdom that have town playgrounds that are closed. The open spaces at Marshall Park and Wallis Park can still be used as well as other town open spaces

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but any use must abide by the Governor's Order Prohibiting Gatherings of 10 or more people and by social distancing protocols.

Based on a weekly briefing today, the Lieutenant Governor said that they will be announcing further decisions about the May 4th date later this week and addressing re-openings. Re-openings will be triggered by data to which activities and places can re-open safely and they will move away from essential and non-essential designations.

Communications with Town Departments:

Most staff is working remotely but continues to monitor their phone lines and e-mail. 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:

Please check the town website calendar for the schedule of meetings at <https://www.lunenburgma.gov.>

Senior Center Updates:

As with other town facilities, the Eagle House will be closed to the public until May 4th and this includes all activities at the Senior Center and off-site. All large events that had been planned during the month of May have been cancelled.

Eagle House staff is rotating between working at the Senior Center and working remotely and is still be performing outreach, delivery of Meals on Wheels, and other vital services to our seniors. The COA Director has a variety of programs and updates that she has been sharing through the Eagle House Facebook Page.

Van Transportation Service has been cancelled until further notice.

The Eagle House staff is delivering the Meals on Wheels to households. Deliveries are made on Mondays and Wednesdays only, with meals for multiple days. Clients are being asked to put a cooler outside their door to place meals in so there is no contact when the delivery is made.

There is also another meal delivery service called Heart to Home Meals for Seniors aged 60 and older. Their contact information is hearttohomesmeals.com or call 508-658-3000.

Since March 13, 2020, the staff has made 385 wellness/telephone reassurance calls to check on seniors.

The COA has distributed 34 boxes and have 21 food boxes left that have food from the Salvation Army, Lions Club and toilet paper from the Senior Center.

The COA has also received 22 donated facemasks from Lydia Gravell of the Library and 14 from a Lunenburg resident, Carole Redden. Please contact the COA Director Sue Doherty at (978) 582-4166 or sdoherty@lunenburgonline.com to inquire about receiving a food box, a facemask, or Meals on Wheels.

Salvation Army Food Pantry:

The Salvation Army Food Pantry is also operating at their 739 Water Street in Fitchburg by appointment only. To make an appointment call 978-342-3300. Pickups are scheduled Monday thru Friday 9-11 a.m.

Public Safety Department Request for PPE Donations:

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The Police and Fire Departments are accepting donations of personal protective equipment that can be delivered to the Public Safety Building lobby. This includes gloves, disposable gowns, masks and goggles.

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 Special State Election will be held on Tuesday, June 2, 2020.
- The Annual Town Meeting will be held on Saturday, June 13th beginning at 9 a.m.
- The Town Caucus has been rescheduled until May 13th at 7 p.m. to be held at the Turkey Hill Elementary School. The Annual Town Election will be held starting at 7 a.m. on Saturday, June 20th at the TC Passios. Due to the Court Order that was filed on Thursday, April 2nd to extend the deadline for the submittal of nomination papers and was granted by the judge on Friday, April 3rd, the deadline for the submittal of nomination papers to the Board of Registrars is now 5 p.m. on May 1st.
- Absentee and Early Voting: Chapter 45 of the Acts of 2020, the special legislation that allowed the Town to postpone the 2020 election and increase voting options in response to the declaration of emergency to respond to COVID-19, expands the reasoning for voting absentee because of a physical disability to include that any person taking precaution related to COVID-19 in response to a declared state of emergency or from guidance from a medical professional, local or state health official, or any civil authority shall be deemed to be unable by reason of physical disability to cast their vote in person at a polling location.

According to the Secretary of State's Office, a person may qualify for an absentee ballot due to physical disability if:

- You are ill;
- You are confined to your home because you may transmit infection; or
- You cannot leave your home because you are a member of a population vulnerable to illness;
- You are staying in your home or avoiding your polling place as a precautionary measure in response to COVID-19.

The law has also been updated to allow early voting by mail for any election held on or before June 30th. Early voting by mail is similar to absentee voting, but unlike absentee voting, no excuse is required.

Applications for absentee ballots are available to be downloaded and printed, but you may also request an absentee ballot by writing a letter to your clerk's office, if you do not have access to a printer. Be sure to include your name and address, the election(s) for which you are requesting a ballot, and your signature. If you need the ballot mailed somewhere other than your home, be sure to provide that address.

Early ballot applications are available for upcoming local and special elections now. As with absentee ballot applications, any written request is acceptable.

Completed absentee and early ballot applications must be submitted to the Town Clerk. If you are emailing your application, you must be able to send an image of the application as an attachment, either by scanning it or by taking a picture of it. A hand-written signature must be visible.

All mail-in ballots must be back to the Town Clerk by the close of polls on the day of the election – a postmark is not sufficient. Absentee ballots may be mailed by a family member. Please be sure to allow enough time for the mailing of your application and your ballot.

Update on Municipal Relief Bill signed into Law

After weeks of deliberation and multiple versions through the legislature, “Act to Address Challenges Faced by Municipalities and State Authorities Resulting from COVID-19,” was signed into law by the Governor on Friday, April 3rd. The Act is now known as Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020. Note that an earlier provision allowing a waiver of town meeting quorum requirements was not included in the final law. Here is a summary of the Act:

- **Town Meeting Delay Beyond June 30.** Allows Town Meetings to be delayed beyond June 30 if Governor has declared a state of emergency related to public health or safety. (Section 1).
- **Recess and Continuance of Town Meeting.** Allows the Moderator to recess and continue an already-called Town Meeting during (and until 5 days after) a public health, safety or weather emergency for up to 30 days, renewable for up to 30 days at time during the emergency, but not to a date more than 30 days following the rescission of the state of emergency. If a town does not have a moderator, the Select Board may recess and continue Town Meeting accordingly. A public safety or public health official designated by the Select Board shall submit a report to the Attorney General providing justification for the recess and continuance. These changes are effective as of March 10, 2020. (Sections 2, 3 and 4).
- **Adoption of Temporary Fiscal 2021 Budgets.** If Town Meeting is unable to adopt an annual budget by June 30 due to a declared emergency, the Select Board shall notify the Director of Accounts at DLS, and the Director may approve expenditures from any appropriate fund or account of an amount sufficient for the operations of the Town during the month of July of not less than 1/12 of the total budget approved in the most recent fiscal year, pursuant to a plan approved by the Select Board, with such authority continuing for each successive month that the emergency prevents the adoption of a budget by Town Meeting. (Section 5).
- **Use of Free Cash and Undesignated Fund Balances.** If a Town is delayed from adopting an annual budget due to the COVID-19 emergency, the Director of Accounts may authorize the Town to appropriate (for use in fiscal 2021) from the available undesignated fund balance or free cash certified by DLS as of July 1, 2019, including undesignated fund balances in enterprise funds or special revenue accounts. (Section 6).
- **Amortization of Fiscal 2020 Deficits.** Allows cities and towns to amortize its fiscal 2020 deficit resulting from the COVID-19 emergency over fiscal years 2021 to 2023, to be funded in equal or more rapid installments, such amortization to be adopted prior to setting the fiscal 2021 tax rate. (Section 7).
- **Use of Revolving Funds.** Allows cities and towns that are unable to adopt their fiscal 2021 annual budget due to the COVID-19 emergency to expend amounts from revolving funds not to exceed the authorized expenditure in fiscal 2020. The legislative body shall vote on the total amount to be expended from each revolving fund when the annual budget is adopted. (Section 8).
- **Tolling Required Action on “Chapter” Lands.** Suspends the time period that municipalities are required to act, respond, effectuate or exercise an option to purchase Chapter 61 forest land, Chapter 61A agricultural land, or Chapter 61B recreational land until 90 days after the governor’s March 10, 2020 emergency declaration is terminated. (Section 9).
- **Option to Delay Property Tax Due Date to June 1.** Allows the municipal chief executive to delay the due date for municipal property tax bills to June 1. (Section 10).

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- **Option to Waive Interest and Penalties for Late Payments.** Allows the municipal chief executive to waive the payment of interest and other penalties on late payments that were due after March 10, 2020 and paid before June 30, 2020, for any excise, tax, betterment assessment, water or sewer bill, or other charge added to a tax. (Section 11).
- **Non-termination of Services to Residents Due to Late Payment.** Cities and towns shall not terminate an essential service of a resident, including water, trash collection or electricity, for nonpayment of taxes or fees due on or after March 10, 2020 and paid after the due date but before June 30, 2020, if the nonpayment resulted from a demonstrated inability to pay due to the COVID-19 outbreak or the March 10, 2020 emergency declaration by the governor, provided that the inability to pay shall include a demonstrated financial hardship of a resident, including but not limited to loss of employment, serious illness or death of someone within the home. (Section 11).
- **State Income Tax Deadline Delayed.** Postpones the deadline for filing Massachusetts state income tax returns and payments from April 15, 2020 to July 15, 2020. (Section 12).
- **Sale of Alcohol by Take-Out Restaurants.** Allows restaurants licensed to sell alcoholic beverages on-premises may sell sealed containers of alcoholic beverages for off-premises consumption as part of take-out food transactions. (Section 13).
- **Facilitating Return to Service by Retirees.** Allows state and municipal employees to return to work for the state or a municipality regardless of mandatory retirement ages or a statutory limit on hours worked and earnings received, to help with workforce needs. Those on disability retirement are not eligible. (Section 14).
- **Remote Meetings for Shareholder Corporations.** Allows public corporations (private shareholder entities) to hold annual or special meetings of shareholders remotely for up to 60 days after the termination of the March 10, 2020 state of emergency. (Section 15).
- **Provisions for Nonprofit Corporations.** Allows nonprofit entities (incorporated under Chapter 180) to conduct or postpone necessary business and meet remotely for up to 60 days after the termination of the March 10, 2020 state of emergency. (Section 16).
- **Tolling Municipal Requirements on Permits and Quasi-Judicial Public Meetings and Hearings** (the “constructive approval” issue). Tolls required municipal actions on permits until 45 days after the termination of the COVID-19 emergency, and no permit shall be considered granted, approved or denied, constructively or otherwise due to the failure of a permit granting authority to act within timelines that would otherwise be in effect. This section also clarifies that permit granting authorities may conduct meetings and public hearings remotely during the COVID-19 emergency, consistent with the Governor’s March 12 Executive Order regarding the Open Meeting Law. This section also applies to the conduct of public meetings, public hearings or other actions taken in a quasi-judicial capacity by all local boards and commissions during the emergency declaration by the governor. (Section 17).

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

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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 Unitil:

Unitil'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.

Unitil Customer Assistance and Recovery Effort (U-Care) Fund:

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Unitil announced the creation of the Unitil Customer Assistance and Recovery Fund (U-CARE) by working with the local Community Action Program (CAP) agencies to create a fund in an effort to aid Unitil customers who have been economically impacted by COVID-19. Unitil has committed \$150,000 to this fund, plus an additional \$75,000 to COVID-19 related programs at the United Way and other local agencies. Customers with financial challenges should reach out to their local CAP Agency or Unitil's representative at 1-888-301-7700.

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>

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 AND FEDERAL GOVERNEMENT:

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 at [mass.gov/covid19](https://www.mass.gov/covid19) (click [here](#)).

COVID-19 in Massachusetts (as of 4/20/20):

As of April 20th there are 39,643 COVID-19 cases and 1,809 deaths. 169,398 patients have been tested to date by the MA State Public Health Laboratory, hospitals and commercial laboratories.

This information is now posted on the Department of Public Health COVID-19 website, with a breakdown of coronavirus cases by city and town. The page can be accessed by going to: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting#covid-19-cases-by-city/town->. The Department of Public Health has created a dashboard as well with comprehensive, detailed COVID-19 data, including trend data, case rates, testing, and breakdowns by age, sex, race, ethnicity and geography. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/covid-19-dashboard->

Governor Baker's April 21st Announcement Closing Public, Private and Secondary Schools for Remainder of Year:

Today Governor Baker announced that all schools would be closed for the remainder of the school year.

Governor Baker's April 21st Announcement Extending Closure of Non-Emergency Childcare Programs until June 29th:

Today Governor Baker announced that all non-emergency childcare programs would remain closed until June 29th.

Governor Baker signs Act suspending MCAS Testing Requirements:

On Friday, April 10th Governor Baker signed Chapter 56 of the Acts of 2020 that suspends MCAS testing requirements for the school year, pushes back due dates for school district improvement plans required by the Student Opportunity Act, and allows the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to modify or waive graduation requirements for students set to complete high school this summer. The federal government allowed states to cancel testing requirements if they filed waivers, which Massachusetts did, along with the vast majority of other states.

Governor Baker's March 31st Order Extending the Closure of all Non-Essential Businesses, Stay at Home Advisory and Prohibition of Gatherings of more than 10 People:

The Governor extended the closure of all non-essential businesses, stay at home advisory and prohibition of gatherings of more than 10 people until May 4th. A list of FAQs that addresses issues that needed clarity and further guidance on construction activities and an updated list of essential businesses is available at <https://www.mass.gov/covid19>.

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

The DPH issued a new order on March 25th 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.

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- 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.](#)

A further order regarding limiting grocery stores to 40% of their maximum occupancy level, including customers and employees, was issued today. The state is asking the local Boards of Health to address complaints and that they should try to resolve them with the local stores instead of punitive measures.

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 RMV has implemented further extensions for expiring motor vehicle inspection stickers, passenger plate registrations, professional credentials, and licenses and permits, including Commercial Driver's Licenses and Permits (CDLs / CLPs).

While 60-day extensions had already been implemented for most credentials, passenger plate registrations, and inspection stickers expired or expiring in March and April, this new action will apply the same 60-day extension to those expiring in May. Additionally, credentials expiring in March 2020 that previously were extended by 60 days will have an additional 60-day extension applied.

More information from the RMV 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:

The Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) has released helpful new resources and guidance to support individuals seeking to claim unemployment benefits.

- Individuals can access information that will walk them through the process and minimize any mistakes that would delay payment at <https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-unemployment-and-coronavirus-covid-19>.
- The best way to apply for unemployment benefits is through the online portal at <https://uionline.detma.org/Claimant/Core/Login.ASPX>. Claimants can now call (877) 626-6800 for additional support.
- There is now [a Spanish translation application available](#), compatible with both desktop and mobile interfaces. Applications will be available in other languages in the near future.
- The [Pandemic Unemployment Assistance](#) program is now accepting applications; this program provides up to 39 weeks of unemployment benefits to individuals who are unable to work because of a COVID-19 related reason, but are not eligible for regular or extended unemployment benefits. This includes the self-employed, independent contractors, workers with limited work history, and others. Individuals can review [eligibility scenarios here](#) and [apply for PUA here](#).
- Please visit the Department of Unemployment Assistance's website to learn more about [Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation](#), [Pandemic Unemployment Assistance](#), and [Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation](#). You can also consult the [FAQ](#) for additional information.

COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Businesses:

There are a number of resources and guidance documents for businesses in response to COVID-19.

Below is information from the North Central Chamber of Commerce for local information on resources and information for businesses:

- **Emergency Loans:** Unfortunately, we have seen very strong interest in our Emergency Loan Program. Our team has been working hard to keep up with the requests and move them through the process quickly. To assist businesses, we have reduced our interest rate and have eliminated the closing fee on these emergency loans. We are also structuring the loans with favorable terms. If you need a small loan to get you through this period until stimulus money kicks in, then please contact Sandie Cataldo at scataldo@northcentralmass.com or Brendan Hannen at bhannen@northcentralmass.com. We are in the process of recapitalizing our fund to ensure that we can continue to meet the needs of local businesses. Also, for those of you that may require a larger loan, the SBA Disaster Loan Program can now provide up to \$10 million dollars;
- **Video Message:** If you have not seen it, then I would encourage you to view a special video we premiered on March 22 on the Chamber's Facebook page. You can [click here](#) to view it. This short video with its message of hope, community and resiliency was developed by our team in an effort to inspire people and raise spirits. The video has already been shared over 330 times and has had over 37,000 views and growing on Facebook! That doesn't include the video views on our other social media platforms (YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn) and the Chamber website. Special thanks to member and motivational speaker Maria Milagros for narrating the video;
- **Chamber Office:** The Chamber is deemed an essential business under the guidelines announced by Governor Baker last week. However, as a safety precaution, we have closed the office temporarily and will limit access to the public. We will be available by appointment at the office to provide services that need to be made in person, such as certificates of export for our manufacturers and insurance related matters. We will also be performing loan closings at the office related to our Emergency Loan Program. Except for these instances, staff will work remotely per the protocols that we have in place. Please contact us if you need to schedule an appointment;
- **Equipment Donations:** All four of our hospital systems - Health Alliance, Heywood, Nashoba Medical and Emerson – reached out to us and requested help securing additional personal protective equipment (PPE). We have been proactive in our outreach to businesses to secure donations and we have also reached out to most of the region's manufacturers to inquire if they can modify their production to assist with producing these products. We have received a tremendous response. Thank you to all of you that reached out. It has been very inspiring to see our members rally together to offer any help they could during this time of crisis. Please contact us for more information on how to donate items or if your company is interested in producing PPE items. The state also just established an online portal for PPE donations and procurement that can be found [here](#);
- **Webinars:** We have already conducted several webinars to help businesses, with several more in the works. The webinars were recorded and are available on our [website](#) to view. We also have a webinar this week that will review the CARES Act and another scheduled for next week on applying for the new Payroll Protection Program and other grants/loans through the SBA. I encourage you to check out our website and social media for updates;
- **Coronavirus Information & Resources:** Our [Coronavirus Information Page](#) is continuously updated with the latest guidance from local, state and federal authorities. We are committed to keeping our members and the public informed and will continue posting throughout this crisis on our various social media platforms as information becomes available. If you have not done so yet, please follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#);

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- **Jobs Board:** We have been updating our WorkNorthCentral.com online jobs board to help recently displaced workers find new jobs opportunities, as well as help those employers that need immediate help because their needs have changed due to the crisis;
- **Advocacy & Support:** We have been in regular communication with our local, state and federal officials to help with efforts and stay updated on the government's response. We also continue to collect [survey](#) responses from businesses on the impact to their operations. This input from members will be helpful as we communicate with policy leaders, and will help set the stage for recovery efforts;

The programs and initiatives in the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* passed by the U.S. Congress were intended to assist business owners but the funding through the Small Business Administration has run out of funding and the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), and the EIDL Loan Advance are not accepting new applications. While the PPP is not actively accepting applications, businesses should consider working with their SBA lender and preparing a loan application in the event that additional funding is made available.

Other Information and Resources for Businesses:

- The Small Business Administration's Boston District Office connects small business owners to information and technical assistance through [SBA Resource Partners](#). These partners can provide remote counseling, workshops, and other support to businesses navigating the impacts of COVID-19 and include:
 - Small Business Development Centers ([SBDCs](#)): A network of centers that provide counseling and training to help small business owners start, grow and expand their business. [Find an SBDC here.](#)
 - SCORE: Volunteer business counselors, advisors, and mentors who offer individual free to low cost counseling throughout the U.S. and its territories. [Find a SCORE mentor here.](#)
 - Women's Business Centers: WBCs provide free to low cost counseling and training and focus on women who want to start, grow and expand their small business. [Find a WBC here.](#)
 - Veterans Business Outreach Centers: Designed to provide entrepreneurial development services and referrals for eligible veterans owning or considering starting a small business. [Find a VBOC here.](#)
- Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC) also has dedicated tools to support companies managing the impacts of COVID-19 on their businesses.
 - The COVID-19 Small Business Stabilization Network consists of MGCC Small Business Technical Assistance grantees, nonprofit organizations offering small business supports, including lending, financial education, and business coaching. [Read about the COVID-19 Small Business Stabilization Network here.](#) You can also consult a [list](#) of technical assistance providers participating in the Network.
 - Translation Services for Paycheck Protection Program applications are available through MGCC's partners across the state. This service will be available in 19 languages. [Access Translation Services here.](#) Again, businesses should consider preparing an application in the event that additional funding becomes available.
- **Small Business Tax Provisions:**

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- Employee Retention Credit for Employers Subject to Closure or Experiencing Economic Hardship: This provision would provide a refundable payroll tax credit for 50 percent of wages paid by eligible employers to certain employees during the COVID-19 crisis. The credit is available to employers, including non-profits, whose operations have been fully or partially suspended as a result of a government order limiting commerce, travel or group meetings. The credit is also provided to employers who have experienced a greater than 50 percent reduction in quarterly receipts, measured on a year-over-year basis. Wages of employees who are furloughed or face reduced hours as a result of their employer’s closure or economic hardship are eligible for the credit. For employers with 100 or fewer full-time employees, all employee wages are eligible, regardless of whether an employee is furloughed. The credit is provided for wages and compensation, including health benefits, and is provided for the first \$10,000 in wages and compensation paid by the employer to an eligible employee. Wages do not include those taken into account for purposes of the payroll credits for required paid sick leave or required paid family leave, nor for wages taken into account for the employer credit for paid family and medical leave (IRC sec. 45S). The credit is not available to employers receiving assistance through the Paycheck Protection Program. The credit is provided through December 31, 2020.
- Delay of Payment of Employer Payroll Taxes: This provision would allow taxpayers to defer paying the employer portion of certain payroll taxes through the end of 2020, with all 2020 deferred amounts due in two equal installments, one at the end of 2021, the other at the end of 2022. Payroll taxes that can be deferred include the employer portion of FICA taxes, the employer and employee representative portion of Railroad Retirement taxes (that are attributable to the employer FICA rate), and half of SECA tax liability. Deferral is not provided to employers receiving assistance through the Paycheck Protection Program.

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 Red Cross is facing a [critical shortage of blood products](#) due to cancellations of blood drives across the Commonwealth because of implementation of necessary prevention and mitigation actions during COVID-19 outbreak. The Governor has deemed “Blood and plasma donors and the employees of the organizations that operate and manage related activities” as an essential service.

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

2020 Federal Census Update:

Based on continuing assessments of guidance from federal, state and local health authorities, the U.S. Census Bureau is suspending 2020 Census field operations for two additional weeks to April 15, 2020. The Census Bureau is taking this step to help protect the health and safety of the American public, Census Bureau employees, and everyone who will go through the hiring process for temporary census taker positions.

The Census Bureau continues to evaluate all 2020 Census field operations, and will communicate any further updates as soon as possible.

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The 2020 Census is open for self-response online at [2020Census.gov](https://www.2020Census.gov), over the [phone](https://www.2020Census.gov), and by paper through the mail. The phone number for English speaking persons is 844-330-2020 and for Spanish speaking persons it is 844-468-2020. For a list of numbers that provide support in 12 other languages go to [2020Census.gov](https://www.2020Census.gov).

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 888-777 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:

- DPH Flyer/Infographic on [reducing stress & coping](#) with fear of COVID-19
- DMH resources on [maintaining Emotional Health & Well-Being](#)
- 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.
- MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) [visual tool](#) for communicating with hard of hearing and Deaf individuals.

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>

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