

## **Town Administrator Report to Select Board – April 7, 2020**

### **COVID-19 UPDATES & TOWN OPERATIONS UNDER STATE OF EMERGENCY**

The Emergency Operations Command Team continues to meet as needed and standing meetings remotely on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays to discuss the ongoing COVID Emergency Response actions by the Town, as well as review both Federal and State directives and Orders that are issued daily.

Currently as of April 7, 2020 - there are 383 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Barnstable County, 16 of which are in the Town of Dennis. It's important to remember that most people who are confirmed to have COVID-19 recover. For more state data, visit [www.mass.gov/coronavirus](http://www.mass.gov/coronavirus)

#### **1. Public Information**

As you know information regarding COVID updates is updated daily on our Facebook page and Town of Dennis website and publicly released each week. To find the most recent information please visit, [www.town.dennis.ma.us/home/news/coronavirus-covid-19-information](http://www.town.dennis.ma.us/home/news/coronavirus-covid-19-information)

I am pleased to report, this week in an effort to keep giving up to date information to our residents and general public we have created an FAQ on questions the Town has been receiving. The link is updated daily with popular questions and answers. Thank you to the MIS department for overseeing this effort. <https://www.town.dennis.ma.us/gis-department/faq/covid-19-faqs>

#### **2. Annual Town Reports**

The Annual Town Report has been completed. Unfortunately, given the current circumstances, we were notified the company the Town is under contract with is not accommodating printing at this time. Therefore, the Town will be making the Annual Town Report available on our website for viewing by anyone; additionally a media release will go out notifying it is available in this format. Once the Governor lifts the ban on non-essential work we will proceed with obtaining printed Town Reports as scheduled.

#### **3. Meals on Wheels Program**

The Meals on Wheels Program in Dennis is a program that operates through Elder Services of Cape Cod and the Islands. In Dennis approximately 430 meals are delivered per week. Meals on Wheels depends on volunteer drivers to deliver meals.

To date, this service has been provided without interruption. There is an extensive amount of hands-on work that must be done to ensure this program occurs. This includes the preparation work, which volunteers do at the COA/Senior Center, to organize the meals, and then the actual delivery of the meals to the residents. Delivery was previously done by volunteers and is now being done by staff; meals are dropped at doorsteps with no interaction/contact to the resident.

In speaking with COA Director Brenda Vazquez, we are trying our best to keep the program going with volunteers and the limited staff at the COA. We are following social distancing protocols and separating them to the greatest extent possible. However, providing staff/volunteers with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) would be beneficial to ensure further safety measures. The program is extremely important to our most vulnerable population; however, the supplies and limited shipments of PPE that we may receive are going to be dedicated to police/fire/EMS. We would love to continue

this program; however, we must maintain the safety of the employees and volunteers as a top priority. Although we are not ending the program at this point, I want to let the public know that we are doing everything within our power to make it sustainable; however, that may not be possible. I will keep you informed.

#### **4. Municipal Governance and Budgeting during COVID Emergency – Important Updates**

Last Thursday night, the House and Senate enacted a key bill to assist cities and towns with a broad range of governance and budgeting issues during the COVID-19 emergency. This act has an emergency preamble, and took effect immediately when signed by the Governor, on Friday afternoon April 3, 2020.

The Division of Local Services will have a major role in implementing the finance provisions in the bill, and will be issuing a Bulletin to cities and towns with further details within the coming days. DLS has been a key source of information and guidance during the emergency.

Please click here to download the text of the bill:

<https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/H4617.pdf>

Please note the Finance Director and I will be providing recommendations on many of these items for the Boards further consideration as we move forward and continue municipal operations under the COVID Emergency. There will be many challenging decisions that local government leaders will face in both our response and recovery efforts.

The following summary of key sections was provided by the Massachusetts Municipal Association:

The following is MMA's summary of the key sections of An Act to Address Challenges Faced by Municipalities and State Authorities Resulting from COVID-19:

- 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).
- 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).

Administration and Finance will have further information for the Boards consideration on implementing these critical reliefs for the Dennis Community.

**5. Municipal Vulnerability Program**

Pleased to share - the Municipal Vulnerability Program is to be wrapped up with a public listening session. Given the current Covid-19 situation, staff has reached out to the State on how to safely do this with Social Distancing and limits on public gatherings. Kara Runsten, Carrieanne Petrik (our two state liaisons), Chloe Schaefer (Cape Cod Commission) have agreed that a publicly available video presentation and survey for feedback will serve this purpose. The Commission is putting the finishing touches on the video and survey, we hope to have this available later this week.

**6. Guidance for Hotels, Motels, Inns, B&Bs, and Other Short-Term Residential Rentals**

The Department of Public Health also issued new guidance for hotels, motels, inns, beds and breakfasts and other short-term residential rentals. Based on this new guidance, hotels, motels, and short-term rentals may only be used for efforts related to fighting COVID-19, like front line health workers or individuals, or for Massachusetts residents who have been otherwise displaced from their residences. The Health Department has sent letters to all that this applies to.

**7. The Governor has also extended a stay at home advisory until May 4th**

Only leave your home to address essential needs, get some fresh air and exercise, and if you do, avoid unnecessary contact with other individuals.

**8. Emergency Order requiring all coastal beach reservation parking areas managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to close**

Effective 12:00 PM on Friday, April 3, 2020 to reduce large concentrations of people at beaches during the COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, effective 12:00 PM on Friday, April 3, 2020, DCR will open select seasonal state parks early and expand access at other parks to provide additional open space

opportunities for residents to enjoy and alternatives to popular state parks throughout the Commonwealth.

Coastal parkways that provide access to state beaches will also be closed **to both parking and dropping off passengers**. State beaches will remain open and available to pedestrians for transitory use only (walking, jogging, biking, solitary fishing, etc.). A link to find specific parking and traffic restrictions can be found [here](#).

State parks and associated parking areas remain open at this time; however, the public is asked to visit state parks and other open space properties that are located near their homes to ensure social distancing to limit the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, DCR's agency-owned ice rinks, visitor centers, campgrounds, playgrounds, fitness areas, athletic fields, athletic courts, golf courses, and bathroom facilities will remain closed until Monday, May 4, 2020.

### **Governor Asks People to Avoid Traveling to MA, Self-Quarantine for 14 Days if Coming**

Governor Baker today asked that people avoid traveling to Massachusetts if possible and urged those that must come into the state to self-quarantine for 14 days. The order does not apply to essential workers and emergency personnel. Starting last Friday, staff at Logan International Airport, South Station and other transportation hubs commenced handing out flyers with guidance about the quarantines. Electronic road signs have been placed along the Massachusetts Turnpike, Interstate 84 and other major highways.

**State Pushes Tax Filing Deadline to July 15** Governor Baker announced last week that the state tax filing deadline will be postponed to July 15th. Individuals with questions or concerns regarding taxes can contact the Massachusetts Department of Revenue at (617) 887-6367 or send a secure e-message through MassTaxConnect. Read more here: <https://www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-announces-state-income-tax-filing-deadline-being-extended-to-july-15>

### **9. Reminders with updates-**

Please be advised, that while the beaches within the Town remain open, if social distancing is not practiced, and more than 10 are gathering, stricter measures will be taken. **This has been a topic of great concern with the EOC Team. Kristen is having conversations with BOH, as the weather gets better enforcement of social distancing is of great concern; we do not have the resources to be enforcing this at this time. We have had lots of problems with voluntary compliance. I will keep you informed.**

The Town of Dennis Golf Courses remain closed to the public. **Signs and barricades have gone up because we have had lots of problems with people adhering to this closure.**

Town owned playgrounds, basketball, pickleball and tennis courts are closed for play. **Signs are in place, and areas are monitored daily.**

Town Hall is closed to the public;

I continue to hold weekly Department Head meeting via conference call which all Departments are taking part. There are a limited number of employees working from Town Hall conducting essential work and most staff is working remotely. All Town Staff are updated on important updates critical to operations.

- Town buildings were closed to the public on Monday March 16<sup>th</sup> at 430PM.
- On Monday, March 23, offices were closed completely with staff staying home and working remotely, where possible. Only department heads whose duties are critical to on-going, limited Town operations will be working from Town buildings. Other staff should only work from Town buildings when required by your department head, as some essential services will need to continue.
- I had stressed and am reiterating - that these temporary staffing policies may change as the public health situation changes and additional directives are received from the federal and state governments, therefore, as has been the case this is subject to changes as necessitates.
- On that note, following the directive of the Governor, while his hope was to be able to reopen all offices to the public on Monday, April 6, that Order has been updated by the Governor with a new Order issued on 3/31/20 extending the timeframe until May 4th. This means that our current temporary procedures regarding building closures and staffing will remain; all Town buildings will remain closed completely with staff staying home and working remotely, where possible. Only department heads whose duties are critical to on-going, limited Town operations will be working from Town buildings. Other staff should only work from Town buildings when required by your department head, as some essential services will need to continue. This is in place until further notice.  
<https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-extends-non-essential-business-closures-and-executive-branch>

The Council on Aging staff is abiding by social and physical distancing protocols while providing essential services to meet the needs of vulnerable residents navigating through this global health crisis. Please see our website for more information on services provided; including Meals on Wheels and social support. **(See above).**

Department of Public Works Headquarters and the Transfer Station Gatehouse are closed to the public. The Transfer Station is open for household trash, grass and leaves only. Recycling area is closed and fee-based items are not being accepted, including brush, construction demolition and white goods. **Unfortunately the recycling area is only one sidewalk wide and narrows in some areas to less than that. The mandated social distancing is not possible at the recycling area with the staff and the public.**

The Dennis Fire Department buildings are closed to the public.

The Dennis Police Department is reminding everyone to use 911 for emergencies. They have asked that citizens avoid coming into the Police Department lobby for non-emergencies.

The Town of Dennis is doing all that we can to protect our residents, staff, and Community. There is hope, and together we will get through this.

I know there is a lot of information shared each week, and it is hard to keep track of all when we are doing everything else that is making the difference in keeping people safe and saving lives. Thank you to each of you for your understanding, support and dedicated service to the Community during these difficult times.

I hope you and your families are all staying home as much as possible and staying safe.

Elizabeth C. Sullivan  
Town Administrator  
Town of Dennis