

TOWN MANAGER UPDATE

April 3, 2020

From a 03/31/2020 e-mail to the Selectboard:

1. The town is formally “registered” with FEMA under the President’s National Disaster Declaration related to the coronavirus. So, we now have the ability to formally document and request reimbursements for eligible activities/supplies. This is disaster reference “EM-3437-VT (Norwich)”. *[Staff has been notified to continue to track time/materials, in the event reimbursement becomes available. This is being coordinated in tandem with the TM and the Finance Office.]*
2. Chief Frank and I have been discussing/deciding on definitions of “essential” and “non-essential” staff should such decisions need to be made. We understand you had a discussion about employee pay during your special meeting on 3/11/20. But, we are being cautionary planners in the event difficult decisions have to be made. Counter to that, I’m trying to assess where any designated “non-essential” staff could be shifted to “essential” functions (e.g., have the crossing guards in a safe method serve as Transfer Station traffic controllers and have the Planning/Zoning Assistant be the DPW office assistant). This would minimize the possibility of temporary loss of any employee, etc. *[This work is on-going.]*
3. The assessment of computer hardware and the like has been completed by SymQuest. Today, I had a teleconference with the individuals involved in the assessment. Suffice it to say that we are woefully out of date in many aspects of our system including vulnerability, expired licenses, non-supported operating systems, etc. However, there were other areas we are doing well; so, it’s not all bad. The next phase of assessment will be to propose a “roadmap” for updating our system that I’ll be able to use in preparing an Request for Proposals. This will include estimates of cost. Once I get that info, I’ll forward it to you for your review, and we can jointly talk about it. I assume Rob will be critical in reviewing/confirming SymQuest’s findings. *[The Assessment has been e-mailed confidentially to the board this week, due to the nature of some vulnerability identified in the report. The design “roadmap” is currently being worked on by SymQuest.]*
4. There seems to be some ever-changing rules/regulations affecting HR and Finance. Me, Miranda & Becky along with Cheryl, Cynthia Stoddard, and Bonnie Batchelder are trying to keep up with it all. But, it is difficult. We appreciate your continuing patience while we work to comprehend and carry out “normal” operations. *[Staff participated in a VT DOL 04/02/2020 webinar on unemployment and the changing nature of that state department.]*
5. Regarding March 2020 financial reports, I have given Becky “orders” to prepare those financials in time for this week’s meeting packet (for your meeting on Apr 8), but because your 1st meeting is April is so close to the end of March, the report may not be ready until next week. I will get it to you as soon as I can. *[As of 4/3/2020 a.m., Becky reported she’ll have the financials completed for the board’s 4/8/2020 packet.]*
6. I’m still working on a written report for you regarding your insurance payment concerns. I hope to have that in the meeting packet but, if not, I’ll have it as a handout during your Apr 8 meeting. Most of it is complete. I’m just double checking it and doing some research in the

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respective personnel files to see if there is additional information to report. [*This report is now complete and was e-mailed confidentially to the board on 04/02/2020.*]

Following is the latest version (04/02/2020) of the TMS’s COVID-19 Contingency Emergency Plan Press Release #3. Given the changing nature of what the TM is dealing with, the releases now indicate what has changed in red. This is a similar process to that being used by the State Emergency Operations Center.

Town of Norwich, VT COVID-19 Contingency Emergency Plans	
Date:	04/02/2020
Authorized by:	Herbert A. Durfee, III, Town Manager
Gen. Description:	Town of Norwich COVID-19 Contingency Plan – No 3 Report LATEST INFORMATION IS IN RED
Purpose:	The purpose of this contingency plan is to ensure continuity of operations for the town, maintain the highest level of normal operations possible, and support and respond to community needs to the best of our abilities.
<u>Town Hall / Tracy Hall:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Effective Thursday, 03/26/2020, the Norwich Town Hall – Tracy Hall, is <u>closed to the public at-large</u>. B. All non-essential meetings and program activities have been cancelled through 04/30/20. Those events scheduled in the building for the 30 days post 04/30, should be mindful of the fact that the temporary suspension may be extended, and plan accordingly. Note: with recent, temporary VT Legislative changes to the Open Meeting Law, some committees are now able to hold essential meetings via ZOOM. These meetings will be duly noticed, including the ZOOM connection link. For ZOOM connection information (computer and/or telephone), you may also contact the Town Manager’s Office. C. Any conduct of Town business needs to be conducted by phone, e-mail or other technological means (e.g., ZOOM), the US Postal Service, or other non-person contact means. Any essential direct person Town services shall be by appointment only. D. The physical building is closed. For any essential appointment made for Town business, the following protocol shall be adhered to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In building business activity will be limited to 15 minutes. 2. Building access will be restricted to entry through the main door facing Main Street. 	
<u>Town Manager’s Office:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The Town Manager’s Office remains open for business during regular hours but subject to the limitations outlined for Town Hall/Tracy Hall listed above. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Contact:</u> Herb Durfee, Town Manager, HDurfee@norwich.vt.us, 802-649-1419x1 2. <u>Contact:</u> Miranda Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager, MBergmeier@norwich.vt.us, 802-649-1419x1 	
<u>Town Clerk’s Office:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The Town Clerk’s Office will remain open for business during regular hours but subject to the limitations outlined for Town Hall/Tracy Hall listed above. For the below essential services, the following protocols are in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Dog Licensing:</u> The Rabies Clinic scheduled for March 21st has been cancelled. Late 	

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<p>fees for dog licenses have been waived through May 1, 2020. Canines can still be registered by mailing in an updated rabies certificate (if required) and payment to: Town of Norwich, 300 Main St, Norwich, VT 05055.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. <u>Land Records Research</u>: Land records research needs to be started by first using Record Hub: https://www.cottsystems.com/recordhub-search-gateway. Once a research has the info they seek, they need to call or e-mail the Town Clerk.3. <u>Voting registration</u>: Can be completed online at http://olvr.sec.state.vt.us4. <u>Contact</u>: Bonnie Munday, Bmunday@norwich.vt.us 802-649-1419x2
<p><u>Fire Department:</u></p> <p>A. The Fire Department is closed to the public. All town fire business will be conducted by telephone or e-mail. No burn permits are being issued at this time. The Fire Warden will advise when permits resume.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Contact</u>: Chief Alex Northern, Anorthern@norwich.vt.us Office: 802-649-1133, Dispatch: 603-643-2222. Emergencies – call 9-1-1.
<p><u>Finance Office:</u></p> <p>A. The Finance Department is closed to the public. All town finance business will be conducted by telephone or e-mail.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Contact</u>: Becky Grammer, BGrammer@norwich.vt.us 802-649-1419x3
<p><u>Police Department:</u></p> <p>A. The Police Department will continue to take complaints and calls for service in-person and by telephone. However, we encourage citizens to call in their concerns when they are able. In-person complaints will be handled within the vestibule of the building. The secure interior portion of the department will be restricted to police personnel access only. All community programming has been suspended and some non-essential services may be unavailable.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Contact</u>: Chief Jennifer Frank, Jennifer.Frank@vermont.gov Office: 802-649-1460, Dispatch 802-295-9425. Emergencies – call 9-1-1
<p><u>Public Works / Town Highway:</u></p> <p>A. The Town Highway garage is closed to the public. All town highway business will be conducted by telephone or e-mail.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Contact</u>: Larry Wiggins, LWiggins@norwich.vt.us 802-649-2209
<p><u>Recreation Programs:</u></p> <p>A. All recreation programs have been cancelled through 04/20/2020. The Recreation Director is available by e-mail.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Contact</u>: Brie Swenson, BSwenson@norwich.vt.us 802-649-1419x5
<p><u>Planning & Zoning:</u></p> <p>A. The Planning & Zoning Office is closed. All planning and zoning needs will be conducted by telephone or e-mail. Rod Francis, Director of Planning & Zoning will be checking voicemail intermittently from an off-site location and will be available to return telephone calls and answer e-mail inquiries.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Contact</u>: Rod Francis, RFrancis@norwich.vt.us 802-649-1419x4
<p><u>Transfer Station:</u></p> <p>A. The Transfer Station will continue to operate with normal hours. However, residents are being asked to PLEASE ensure “social distancing” and to self-police themselves related to the number of vehicles/people in any given area. The “Plough Share” building is closed until further notice.</p> <p>B. Effective 04/08/2020, the Transfer Station until further notice will NOT be accepting bulky items (e.g., mattresses, furniture, sofas, chairs, etc.) Only true construction material will be accepted, and the Attendants have the right to refuse any items they deem “bulky”.</p> <p>C. Staff will be practicing social distancing and will not be able to provide assistance with the</p>

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removal of trash from private vehicles. The attendant shed is restricted to transfer station employees only. If you have a fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath, please do not use the Transfer Station, until you are well enough. The contingency emergency plan for the Transfer Station continues to evolve, so residents may experience changes to this plan on short to little notice. Thanks for your understanding.

Listers' Office:

- A. The Listers' office will keep office hours as posted, but subject to the limitations to Town Hall/Tracy Hall listed above. Please call or email the Listers (Listers@norwich.vt.us) and/or Masaki Schuette, Administrative Clerk (mschuette@norwich.vt.us) for any inquires.
- B. The contract assessor is working remotely on Wednesdays; hours are the same as posted. If you need to contact Spencer Potter, please send an email to Assessor@norwich.vt.us.
- C. The public can view property records by clicking on the following link:
<http://norwichvt.patriotproperties.com/default.asp>

IF YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

DO NOT ENTER ANY TOWN BUILDING/FACILITY

REMINDER: GOVERNOR SCOTT HAS ISSUED A "STAY HOME – STAY SAFE" ORDER

[End of release]

Other items, not listed above:

- Completed draft RFP for Browns Schoolhouse Rd bridge. Anticipate releasing it during the week of April 6th.
- Continued to hold project team meetings on Tracy Hall renovation project. Meeting notes are posted on the Town webpage: <http://norwich.vt.us/town-managers-office/>
- Proposals received for attorney services. Review will begin during the week of April 6th.
- Proposals received for Beaver Meadow Sidewalk Scoping project. The proposal review team will be meeting on April 10th.
- Update to the Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan is pending Board action at its April 8th meeting. So, far, the project remains on schedule, though it is starting later than expected.
- Proposals for Tigertown Rd Culverts Project are being reviewed.
- Any VTrans projects (grants) that their Municipal Assistance Bureau oversees have been put on hold. Thus, several of our grant projects have been put on hold. Review of any proposals will continue to move forward to have consultants/vendors in place, so when the MAB resumes its work, the Town will be able to expeditiously initiate work on the respective projects.

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- Continuing to try to finish up collective bargaining. There's an upcoming session on April 9. That session is intended to be the meeting to address "last, best" proposals.
- Clarifications and decisions have been made concerning OML, ZOOM, etc. for staff persons as well as the Town's various committee and officials. Hopefully, the process will become more streamlined as individuals/entities become more familiar with temporary changes and procedures. In addition, the TM asked VLCT for some OML insight. Here is the reply from general counsel at VLCT. The info is probably good to know for any citizen during this temporary situation:

Good morning Herb,

...In response to your questions, here is the direct link to our recently updated Open Meeting Law FAQs Related to COVID-19 in response to the signing of Act 92 into law:

https://www.vlct.org/sites/default/files/documents/Resource/Open%20Meeting%20Law%20Covid-19%20FAQs_1.pdf

These and other COVID-19 themed resources can be found on our website here:

<https://www.vlct.org/coronavirus#FAQs>

With respect to dealing with e-mails tied to business of the Selectboard, we don't have a guidance document on point. Generally, direct members of public bodies to our Open Meeting Law resources: <https://www.vlct.org/municipal-assistance/municipal-topics/vermonts-open-meeting-law> and advise them, from a best practices standpoint, that e-mail is best used for distribution of information and not for discussion. This topic is covered in greater detail in our Open Meeting Law FAQs under the question, "When does the law apply?":

https://www.vlct.org/sites/default/files/documents/Resource/Open%20Meeting%20Law%20FAQs_0.pdf

Beyond that, we also inform members that any record they create or receive in the course of agency business is considered a "public record" under VT's Public Records Act and is not only open to public inspection and copying, but is also subject to retention standards established by the State. Here is a link to our Public Records Act FAQs: <https://www.vlct.org/resource/public-records-act-faq>. All questions regarding the retention and disposition of public records can be directed to Records and Information Management (RIM) Specialist Megan Wheaton-Book at megan.wheaton-book@vermont.gov who can provide targeted assistance and guidance with respect to records management matters.

And as always, please feel free to invite your new member to contact our office directly at info@vlct.org with any questions.

I hope this helps. All the best!

Garrett A. Baxter, Esq.
Senior Staff Attorney, Municipal Assistance Center
Vermont League of Cities and Towns

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- The Transfer Station continues to be a concern of the TM, related to the provision of the “essential” service and the grouping of people in one location twice weekly, including the possible exposure to at least 3 part-time employees. This will continue to be monitored.
- Based on some observation and feedback, it seems many residents (and non-residents!) are not fully practicing “social distancing” when using Town parks/trails. As such, the Rec Director was assigned with the task of printing and posting some appropriate signage. Those should be posted no later than early next week, subject to the printing.
- As an FYI, the TM is continuing to collaborate with the Conservation Committee on the Woody Adams Forest Conservation Project. Following is the legal/meeting notice coming out soon:

Public Notice to the Citizens of Norwich, VT

On 13 May 2020, the Norwich Select Board will vote on three items regarding the Woody Adams Forest Conservation Project. The project presents a critical opportunity for the Town to protect part of an ecologically-important, contiguous, ridgeline forest by connecting the Town Forest Parcel to the Gile Parcel. The project is a partnership between the Town, the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT), and the owner of a key property located between the Town Forest and Gile Parcel (Adams). The owner has offered to sell the property to the Town at a bargain rate and will hold the property off the market long enough to allow the Town and UVLT to pursue a grant from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB). The purchase would be made possible through a combination of donations from citizens solicited and designated for land conservation (Conservation Trust Fund), a grant from VHCB, and the generous bargain sale gift of the landowner. The use of the Conservation Trust Fund is advised by the Conservation Commission but requires Select Board approval. The Conservation Commission voted to advise the use of Fund toward the project on 21 January 2020. A successful VHCB grant will require both town financial match and leverage. The Conservation Trust Fund will provide financial match and the permanent protection of the purchased parcel, together with the adjacent Town Forest and Gile Parcels, will provide the necessary leverage. The Select Board will take up the following votes at the May meeting: (1) a vote to approve the Conservation Commission recommendation to use \$130,000 of the Conservation Trust Fund to provide match for a pending VHCB grant application; (2) a vote to accept the Woody Adams Parcel as town land; and (3) a vote to protect the Woody Adams parcel and adjacent Town lands under a single conservation easement to be held jointly by UVLT and VHCB.

Anytime during the period of public notice and beyond, questions about the project can be directed to the Norwich Conservation Commission (NCC):
norwich.conservation.commission@gmail.com

Also, during the period of public notice there will be three evening Zoom Meetings, open to all and led by the NCC, intended to answer all questions and provide further information about the project. The dates and times of the Zoom Meetings, as well as the details for joining, are as follows:

Thursday, 23 April, 6-7 pm,
Wednesday, 29 April, 6-7 pm,
Tuesday, 5 May, 6-7 pm

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- Soon the water fountain at Huntley-Meadow will be replaced, including the provision of a water bottle filling station. Importantly, the Town is working with Lydia Bos to ensure the memory of her husband remains intact. The fountain originally was given and designed in his memory with some decorative elements. Those elements will be retained and incorporated into the replaced fountain or adjacent to the fountain in a form yet to be decided in collaboration with Lydia and her family.
- Work is on-going with the annual update to the Local Emergency Management Plan. A draft of the plan for review by the TM is pending.
- Have provided and offered “advice” to the Town Clerk, at her request, concerning the impending petitioned reconsideration vote of Article 8 (Tracy Hall). TM expects TC will need on-going election support between now and the state Primary and the General Elections.
- TM/Finance addressing employee questions on work status, sick leave, certifications, and some other day-to-day issues. They are being addressed, as necessary, though some information/reply is still being researched
- A 2020 VLCT-PACIF Equipment Grant application is being prepared for generally “go ahead” approval by the Board. Such grants are 50/50 grants.
- By the way, here is the VLCT frequently updated webpage on COVID-19 related issues relevant to municipalities: <https://www.vlct.org/coronavirus>
- Finally, thanks to Jason Yehle, Hazen Hill Construction for the donated lateral file cabinets, conference room chairs, and other office equipment. Very much appreciated!