

COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE – April 27, 2020

The following was read at the beginning of the April 27th Board of Selectmen meeting.

This update will provide updated COVID-19 case information, discuss an addition to the COVID-19 Task Force mission, and provide information regarding the Annual Town Meeting and the Annual Town Election.

As of 4:00 pm today there are 56,462 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Commonwealth (+16,819 over last week); 3,068 confirmed cases in Bristol County (+1289 over last week), and 31 confirmed cases in Rehoboth; up from 25 last week. Unfortunately, there have been 3,003 fatalities across the Commonwealth attributed to the virus (+1,194 over last week).

There is one additional number I will share today to drive home the seriousness of this virus and the need for all of us to remain vigilant in our actions to prevent the spread of the virus. The first US soldier to die in Vietnam was reported in June, 1956 and the last was in April 1975. During those 20-years the US military reported 58,200 casualties. By comparison, in only 8-weeks since the first US COVID-19 death there have been 55,943 COVID-19 deaths reported across the country. **Eight weeks.** *Please* continue to practice social distancing, wear face coverings when in public, and practice good personal hygiene. The actions you take will save lives.

When we launched the COVID-19 Task Force we recognized we were in a marathon and not a sprint. And like a marathon there is a beginning; middle and an end. In the beginning we moved quickly to develop and execute a continuity of operations plan to ensure essential services continued within the town while protecting residents and town employees. We also quickly learned how to source PPE to ensure our first responders have what they need; when they need it. And, we took action to provide immediate relief to those who needed it and to better prepare us for the middle phase of the marathon.

The middle promises to be the longest part of the COVID-19 race. During this phase we need to act strategically; to make informed decisions so we may continue to provide essential services safely today and position ourselves to finish

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strong once the COVID-19 threat is contained. However, unlike a traditional 26.2 mile marathon; we have no idea how long this marathon will last so we need to be prepared on a number of fronts.

Financial management is critical to successfully navigate in this phase. Monitoring expenditures to budget, actual revenue received versus projections and on-hand cash reserves are daily concerns. The full economic impact of the virus will not be realized for months; yet it is reasonable to expect a sizeable reduction in key revenue sources at the town level. To ensure we have a consistent and coordinated plan to address our financial future I am announcing the COVID-19 Task Force will be expanded to include a financial component. The COVID-19 Financial Task Force will include Mike Daignan, Chair of the Rehoboth Finance Committee, Cheryl Gouveia, Town Treasurer and Tax Collector, Roberta Oliveira, Town Accountant, Debbie Arruda, Interim Town Administrator and me. This group will monitor expenses and cash flow, and will prepare a plan to advise the Board of Selectmen on suggested financial strategies with an eye towards Annual Town Meeting and the FY21 budget. Although individual members of this group have been collaborating informally the significance of the potential impact to town services requires a more structured and integrated approach.

As you may remember, the Board of Selectmen voted to reschedule the Special and Annual Town Meeting to June 16th. Since then the Governor signed a Bill which empowers municipalities to move Annual Town Meeting beyond the June 30th deadline. There are two overriding reasons to consider moving the meeting. First, postponing the meeting will give us a more complete understanding of the financial picture which will enable us to make smarter budgeting recommendations for consideration at Town Meeting. Secondly, in order for a person's vote to be counted at Town Meeting they must be present. There are no absentee or early voting provisions for Town Meeting. It is my belief we have an obligation to schedule the meeting when the largest number of people who want to attend; can attend - safely. The legislation signed by the Governor provides mechanisms for both the Town and the School District to fund operations in the

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event Annual Town Meeting occurs after July 1st. The Board will be discussing this topic in more detail and exploring options at a future meeting.

I would now like to provide a brief update on the Annual Town Election. Pursuant to Section 1 of Chapter 45 of the Acts of 2020 and because of the State of Emergency declared by the Governor pursuant to executive order 591, the Rehoboth Annual Town Election has been postponed to Tuesday, June 30, 2020.

Also, in light of widespread practice of social distancing, the law provides for two alternatives to voting in person:

- First, the law allows any person taking precaution related to COVID-19 to vote by absentee ballot. All applications for an absentee ballot must be received by the Town Clerk before noon on **Monday, June 29, 2020**, the last business day before the election. Any person may apply for an absentee ballot by sending a signed request to the Town Clerk's office or filling out the absentee ballot application available on the town website, or by calling the Town Clerk's Office. The absentee voting ballot must be received by the Town Clerk before the polls close on Election Day.
- Second, the law provides for early voting by mail. All applications for early voting ballots must be received before noon on **Monday, June 29, 2020**, the last business day before the election. Any person may obtain an early voting ballot by sending a signed request to the Town Clerk's office or by filling out and returning the early voting application available on the town website, or by calling the Town Clerk's office. Again, the early voting ballot must be received by the Town Clerk before the polls close on Election Day.

The Town Clerk will provide additional information regarding which precincts will be open on June 30th and the hours the polls will be open as the election gets closer. To avoid lines and possible inconvenience on Election Day I encourage everyone take advantage of the Early Voting by Mail option and request a ballot from the Town Clerk's Office today. This option provides a safe and convenient alternative for both voters and election workers.

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I want to thank everyone who has been responsible and adhering to the social distancing and face covering guidance. Your actions make our community safer.