

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Town Commission
FROM: Tom Harmer, Town Manager
REPORT DATE: October 12, 2020
MEETING DATE: October 19, 2020
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Update

Recommended Action

None, informational only

Background

The Town continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and monitors trends and Department of Health data to formulate our decisions to protect Longboat Key residents. In accordance with our Interlocal Agreement with Sarasota and Manatee Counties, we coordinate our response with Sarasota County Emergency Management, and Department of Health.

Daily updates are provided to the Commission and public through various means, including website postings, local news outlets, and social media. We have enforced the Governor's Orders, CDC guidelines, as well as the Town's Emergency Orders.

On Friday afternoon, September 25th, The Governor issued Executive Order (EO) 20-244, effective immediately, moving the State into Phase 3 Recovery. On September 30, 2020 EO 20-246, was issued which calls for local government meetings to return to in-person quorum and public participation for local government bodies effective November 1, 2020. Based on the Governor's Order, the Town Attorney has advised that all Commission meetings after October 31st will require at least 4 Commissioners physically attending, and opined that Commissioners virtually participating in the meeting will be able to vote, because we remain under a State of Emergency. The first in-person meeting will be on November 2, 2020 and plans are for that meeting to be in a hybrid format still providing for a virtual component.

The Town has already begun implementation of Phase 3 of the State's Recovery Plan, which lifts restrictions on restaurants, bars, fitness centers, vacation rentals, and all commercial enterprises, while stressing that social distancing, and sanitization practices need to remain in place.

Town staff is finalizing plans to re-open Town offices and facilities (with some restrictions) and transition back to providing in-person services in the safest manner possible. Effective November 2nd (coincides with the first in-person Town Commission Meeting) Town offices will re-open although the public is encouraged to conduct business on-line, by e-mail or phone when possible. Employees who have been working remotely will return to Town offices, except some e-work considered on a case-by-case basis. Patrons will be allowed entry to Town offices but are required to follow protocols including, but not limited to, answering a series of questions before entering, social distancing, wearing masks, along with the ability to provide for contact tracing. The health of our staff, and the public, is foremost in our plan to safely re-open facilities to the public.

The Commission adopted an emergency mandatory mask Ordinance on July 2, 2020 and adopted Ordinance 2020-13 at the August 31, 2020 Emergency Special Meeting which continues mandatory mask wearing for an additional 90 days (through November 30, 2020). The Governor's Executive Order removes the capability to collect fines from individuals but does not limit the authority of municipalities to invoke ordinances for mandatory mask wearing. We have experienced excellent compliance within the community and have not issued any citations or penalties. If someone is not complying with our Ordinance, does not meet one of the exemptions, and is not social distancing, businesses can request that person to leave the premises. Likewise, the Town continues to require staff and visitors to Town Hall to wear masks to enter the building, while in the common areas, and in cases where social distance cannot be achieved.

Test data continues to indicate a trend of lower, new positive test results, including very few positive cases on Longboat Key. I believe that is at least partly related to the Town's actions, and the precautions taken by our residents. As of Tuesday, October 13, there is one reported positive case in the Sarasota portion of Longboat Key (less than 5 cumulative cases), and 1 positive case on the Manatee County side (34 cumulative cases). We continue to monitor the potential for a spike in positives due to Phase 3 re-openings provided for in the Governor DeSantis EO-244.

At the October 5, 2020 Regular Meeting, there were questions about how the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) reports on seasonal residents that may test positive. I reached out to Charles Henry from the Sarasota County office of FDOH and discussed how those are reported. He said the State reports data based on the individual's designation of their permanent residency. He also noted that, separately, his office does attempt to capture visitors and seasonal residents through the County Heat Map. He explained the Heat Map process was developed for planning purposes to help understand the active virus in the area, and is why those numbers may not directly correlate to the State website data. He also highlighted that the Heat Map process may not always capture every positive test in the area as it is a staff intensive task, but in terms of a planning document it provides general trending information about the level of activity in our area. I also asked again, that the Manatee and Sarasota County zip code data be included on the Sarasota County Heat Map. He said that requires a manual process that they have not been able to commit to but he said he would discuss with the staff again.

We also discussed how the current Phase 3 actions relate to public gatherings. He said that there are currently no specific number thresholds, but in terms of event size, he stated just be aware that as events get larger, the risk of COVID-19 spread increases. Less than 10, low risk; less than 50, moderate risk; 250 or more, high risk. He also shared some general guidance listed below from the FDOH website:

Considerations for Postponing or Cancelling a Mass Gathering

There are a number of factors to consider when determining the need to postpone or cancel a large gathering. These include:

- **The overall number of attendees.** Larger gatherings (for example, more than 250 people) offer more opportunities for person-to-person contact and therefore pose greater risk of COVID-19 transmission.

- **The number of people attending who are at greater risk of more serious illness after contracting COVID-19.** Older adults and persons with severe pre-existing health conditions are thought to be at increased risk.
- **The density of attendees within a confined area.** Based on what is currently known about the virus, spread from person-to-person happens most frequently among close contacts (within 6 feet)
- **The potential economic impact to participants, attendees, staff, and the larger community.**
- **The level of transmission in your local community and the level of transmission in the areas from which your attendees will travel.** To better understand the level of community transmission in your community (and in the communities from which your attendees will be traveling), consult with your local and/or state public health department.
- **If there are ways in which to significantly reduce the number of attendees.** For example, for sporting events or school concerts, organizers could consider holding the event but significantly reduce the number of audience members.

At a minimal-to-moderate level of community transmission, it is recommended to:

- Cancel community-wide mass gatherings (for example, more than 250 people; the cutoff threshold is at the discretion of community leadership based on the [current circumstances the community is facing and the nature of the event](#) or move to smaller groupings.
- Cancel gatherings of more than 10 people for organizations that serve [higher-risk populations](#)

At a substantial level of community transmission, it is recommended to cancel mass gatherings of any size.

I have shared this information with our staff as they review planned and proposed events over the next 3-6 months.

We continue to evaluate the conditions and update the Town's actions every two weeks. We believe it is critical to carefully consider which actions to take, and align those based on data, input from public health officials, as well as the best interests of our residents' safety.

At the October 19, 2020 Regular Workshop Meeting, I will update the Commission on the current status of COVID-19 as it relates to Longboat Key. Chief Dezzi and I will be available to answer any questions.

Staff Recommendation

None, information only.

End of Agenda Item