



# Town of Brunswick

Planning for Coronavirus (COVID-19)

March 16, 2020

**This document will be amended as events warrant.**

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## **Background**

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. On March 13, the United States declared the COVID-19 outbreak a national emergency. Towards the end of the week, organizations were cancelling events and taking steps to minimize public interaction, all aimed at “flattening the curve” of the spread of infection. In Maine, the Maine Center for Disease Control (Maine CDC) increased its efforts to develop guidance and recommendations.

The Town Manager convened department heads, staff, and others to develop and document recommendations, and to communicate those to the Town Council, employees, and the public. This report is the result of those efforts. It is expected to be an evolving document, updated frequently as circumstances and information warrant. To understand how quickly things are changing, the first draft of this report was printed less than twenty-four hours ago. Since then, scores of public schools, organizations, and facilities have announced additional closures and cancellations.

## **Communications and Updates**

We will be increasing communication through the website and social media for those departments that use it. In conjunction with People Plus we plan to produce frequent updates on programs and services. Those updates will air on TV3 at 3:00 PM and will be posted on YouTube.

## **Communications with Other Institutions**

We have several institutions and groups with which we need to stay in communication. Mid Coast Hospital will be providing a liaison officer to the Town as a point of contact to get updates, ask questions, etc. The Fire Chief, as Emergency Management Director, will be the primary point of contact for the Town. The Fire Chief will also be monitoring the state and county emergency management agencies. The Deputy Fire Chief, as Health Officer, will assist and be responsible for monitoring the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Maine CDC websites and news releases. Others will be assigned as the point of contact, and be responsible for communications, with other organizations including Bowdoin College, School Department, Curtis Library, People Plus, and the Housing Authority.

## **Public Meetings**

Although other legislative bodies and their standing committees are prohibiting public attendance at meetings, municipal meetings cannot prohibit public attendance.<sup>1</sup> The Town has many boards and committees with citizen representation and staff support. We are recommending that public meetings be limited to the Town Council and Planning Board, and only if necessary. Other committees will be permitted to meet only if there is an emergency or deadline that requires a public meeting, and only after the meeting has been approved by the Town Manager.

For meetings that will be held, we will rearrange seating to increase the physical distance between attendees. Assuming we can get them, we will install hand sanitizing dispensers and wipes in the

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<sup>1</sup> As of March 15<sup>th</sup>, word is circulating that the Governor or Legislature may declare an emergency that would allow meetings to be conducted remotely.

meeting rooms. We will encourage the public to watch the meetings via TV3 or Live Stream. We are exploring how we might allow the public to comment via telephone or e-mail during meetings.

## **Public Business and Transactions**

Town Hall will remain open but may be closed to the public, as events unfold. Should the Town Hall remain open to the public, a number of procedures will be instituted. We plan to post entrances to the Town Hall and other buildings, prohibiting those exhibiting flu-like symptoms from entering the building. Areas where public transactions occur will have protective plexiglass screening installed to separate employees from the public. The waiting areas will also be marked to encourage physical separation between patrons. Assuming they are available, we will install hand sanitizing dispensers and wipes for employee and public use. Through the website, social media, and announcements, we will encourage the public to conduct business on-line. We plan to regularly wipe down public areas, counters, and door handles. Employees who work at public counters will be offered nitrile gloves. We are exploring how we might suspend credit and debit card transaction fees to encourage the use of on-line services. Alternative processing locations are also being investigated.

### *Tax Office and Vehicle Registration*

Payments may be mailed or paid on-line. For payments that are mailed, the Town recognizes those postmarked by the due date as paid on time. Credit card payments are recognized as of the transaction date.

All vehicle re-registrations can be processed on-line by following the "Online Payments" link on the Town's website. Alternatively, re-registrations may be processed through the mail by calling the Tax Office and obtaining the amount due and the instructions for payment. The public is encouraged to use the on-line or mail-in options.

New registrations require a visit to the Tax Office in order to pick up license plates. The first and last week of each month are typically the busiest times in the Tax Office. To the extent possible, the public should avoid those weeks.

### *Town Clerk's Office*

With the exception of marriage and shellfish licenses, most business with the Town Clerk's Office can be completed without visiting the office. The Town Clerk's website has forms, information, and links. We are requesting an emergency amendment to the Town's shellfish regulations to allow a waiver of the in-person application requirement.

There is no State guidance regarding voting day on June 9th. If the School Department restricts our use of the Junior High, or prefers that we use another site for voting, we will request a venue change with the Secretary of State. Voters will be encouraged to use absentee ballots. Absentee ballots can be obtained on-line or via telephone.

### *Planning and Codes Enforcement*

While some applications may be downloaded from the website, most applications and permits require personal interaction. We will implement the same precautions that we are using in other public offices.

The codes officer spends a large amount of time out of the office at inspections. For the employee's and the public's safety, we will seek to delay inspections where we can.

### *Assessing Office*

All information relating to valuations and sales can be found on-line. Similarly, exemption and abatement information and forms can be found on-line and submitted electronically. Of course, those forms can also be sent through the mail. Employees in the Assessing office spend considerable time in the field. Out of concerns for our employees and the public, we are concerned about visiting properties which is necessary to produce accurate assessments.

## **Programs**

### *Recreation Department*

Recreation Center. On Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, the School Department announced it is cancelling classes for the next two weeks. Other recreation and community centers are closing while public schools are closed. The Recreation Center will be closed concurrently with the closure of Brunswick Public Schools. However, administrative and building staff will report to maintain a presence in the building and to field questions via e-mail and telephone.

Pre-School. There are approximately 30 children enrolled in pre-school. Pre-School has always followed the School Department's lead, meaning that pre-school will be cancelled when the School Department cancels the school day. Pre-School is cancelled concurrently with the School Department's cancellation of classes.

Travel Teams and Tournaments. All activities, travel teams, and tournaments are being cancelled until further notice. Fortunately, we are in the midst of the change in sports seasons, so most of the basketball activities are coming to an end.

Welcome Center. The Center will be closed while Brunswick schools are closed.

### *Curtis Memorial Library*

Due to the high volume of daily visitors (700-900), the Library will be closed to the public through March 31<sup>st</sup>. There will be no public services or programs, nor will the Library be available for private events. Staff will still report to ensure that the building is properly maintained while it is closed to the public. Patrons are asked to hold on to any library item sat home.

### *People Plus*

The People Plus Center will be closed until further notice. All group activities which include programs, events, clubs and classes at the Center are cancelled. People Plus will remain open to meals on wheels services, taxes, and one on one meetings. Spectrum Generations, aging and disability resource meetings, will be held by phone for the time being. Stacy Frizzle, Executive Director, will be producing a weekday video update to chat with members and the community about what's happening at the Center.

The Teen Center, housed at People Plus, will also be closed.

### *Visitors Center*

The Visitors Center will be closed for the next two weeks. Travelers will be encouraged to purchase tickets on-line. We will re-evaluate prior to re-opening.

## **Public Safety Services**

Fire/EMS and Police have been instructed to implement blood borne pathogen protocols for interactions with patients and others with whom they come in close contact. Essentially, they will be treating those contacts as if they are infected with the virus, meaning that they will take precautions to minimize human airborne and droplet transmission. That can include the use of gloves, masks and other personal protective equipment.

### *Fire/EMS*

Public access to both fire stations will be limited to reduce exposure to employees and the public. A four to six (4-6) foot separation will be maintained whenever possible.

Regarding Emergency Medical Services (EMS) operations, personnel will be following the protocol described above. The department will also take extra precautions in cleaning and sanitizing equipment following the transport of patients with symptoms of COVID-19.

Should increasing service calls, or employees becoming sick, make it necessary, personnel will be held over for extended shifts, or a temporary change in the shift schedule will be instituted in order to ensure adequate shift coverage.

### *Police Department and Communications*

Staff will implement methods to reduce close contact with the public. These methods will include, but are not limited to:

- Triaging of calls for service and handling more calls by phone whenever possible;
- Dispatch will temporarily assume the responsibilities of the "Good Morning" program so that People Plus volunteers do not need to come into the department;
- Adding a fillable form to the department website for records requests (to reduce in-person clerk contact with requestor);
- Concealed weapons permits will be accepted and processed, but the actual issuance will be suspended for the next thirty (30) days (to avoid a permit holder having to be brought into

the interior of the building to use the computer which photographs and produces the permit).

- Lobby complaints will be handled through the dispatch window if possible.
- No new interns will be accepted for the immediate future.
- Citizen Police Academy in planning stages will be postponed
- Officers have been asked to maintain a distance of 4-6 feet whenever possible when meeting with complainants, victims, and witnesses.

In an effort to preserve staff and readiness for emergencies, the following methods are among those being implemented:

- Increased cleaning of frequently touched surfaces – door handles, railings, etc.
- Disposable pens provided that can be used for subjects to sign paperwork, fill out statements, etc.
- Officers being provided with protective gear provided by the Fire Department to be used in situations where recommended by CDC.
- If due to sickness or quarantine, we cannot field enough patrol officers to fill minimum staffing, investigations will be suspended and detectives will cover patrol shifts. Administration will also cover patrol shifts if necessary.
- Implementation of CDC protocols for law enforcement.

## **Employees and Volunteers**

### *Employees and Volunteer Illness*

Employees who have flu-like symptoms and/or fever have been directed not to report to work. They should be symptom free for at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to returning to work. Anyone who tests positive for the coronavirus, or who may have been exposed to someone who tested positive will be required to self-quarantine for at least fourteen (14) days prior to returning to work.

### *Training and Travel*

Unless an exception is requested and granted by the Town Manager, employees will not be permitted to:

- travel out of state on business;
- attend business-related events where fifty (50) or more attendees are expected.

Employees will be encouraged to curtail personal travel.

## **Additional Information**

Brunswick Housing Authority will be restricting visitor access to its housing facilities.

Assisted living and long-term care facilities are being encouraged to restrict visitation and curtail programming.