



March 20, 2020 (3:40pm)

Dear Harding Resident,

We've reached the end of another week and our lives are still far from normal. We participate in three, four, or five conference calls every day with emergency management folks from the State and County, with County and State Administrators, and assorted other folks. We are keeping up with executive orders from Trenton and Morristown that reach into every aspect of town government operations and our daily life. We are doing our best to keep you informed. Please check the Township website, Harding Alerts, and Civic Association emails.

I am pleased to let you know our town continues to operate. We began over three weeks ago to sanitize town hall twice a day and that has kept our employees safe and our town hall usable. The building is closed but all departments are open and working. Five years ago we developed an extensive business interruption plan and began implementing it. As a result each employee can work from his or her home to do nearly all aspects of their jobs. At this time employees are rotating working in the building and working at home so each employee can be at home several days a week.

Our Construction Department continues to process permit applications, conduct inspections, and issue approvals. Some interior inspection are on hold but our construction official is working with homeowners and contractors to do as much as possible. Likewise we continue to process tax and other payments, public works personnel are continuing with their work, and other departments are getting their work done. Our Township Administrator, Bob Falzarano, continues to keep everything together and provide exceptional leadership.

The Township Committee is working. We have a budget to pass, the affordable housing deadline to meet with redevelopment, and other important things to do. We met in executive session yesterday to do a final review of the Hurstmont redevelopment agreement so we can complete that by the court ordered deadline.

Testing for the virus is ramping up as test kits become more available. Testing sites are being established in the county and more information will be forthcoming as those details are released. We are working closely with county dispatch, our volunteer rescue squad, our volunteer fire company and our police department to share information without violating the privacy and HIPPA rights of residents yet still provide first responders with the information they need to safely do their jobs.

Personal protection equipment for our first responders is still in very short supply and we are working hard to get more of that equipment on the ground here.

You previously received information about the Harding Neighbors Helping Neighbors program Elizabeth Sovolos, one of our residents, has organized to match volunteers with our high risk residents or those in quarantine to ensure they have groceries, medications, and supplies. I am very happy to report that many, many residents have come forward to support that effort. Please see the town website for more information about how you can volunteer or how you can request aid.

You've also received information about our local restaurants and their takeout and delivery options. This afternoon the Governor announced that all non-essential businesses will be closed as of the end of today. Please think about patronizing any Harding business that remains open. These are terribly challenging times for them.

For businesses, we have provided contact information for our representatives in Trenton and some information from the Small Business Administration. Please reach out to them and make them understand your needs.

All of this information is on the town website, www.hardingnj.org.

I know being house-bound can be trying on all members of the household. We are blessed with an early spring so take the time to get out on some of the open spaces in town and enjoy the awakening of springtime while you get some exercise. Just take precautions and keep plenty of space between yourself and others.

I want to express the deep gratitude of all of our residents for the work of our first responders. Our Police Department, Rescue Squad and Fire Company are working to keep us safe, even at risk to themselves. We can rest easier because these women and men are standing in the gap on our behalf. When you see them, please give them a salute.

On a personal note, it has been hard to not despair over what's happening to our friends and neighbors and the economy, worrying about a return to normalcy and what the new normal will be. But I know that day will come and I ask you to join me in earnest prayer for our deliverance from this time. I take comfort from the words of John Newton's great hymn: The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures. He will my shield and portion be, As long as life endures.

Stay safe,

Chris Yates
Mayor

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