

## March 19<sup>th</sup> Update from Mayor Rick Wolfe re COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Residents of East Amwell,

I'd like to update you on certain information the County provided today regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, and steps the Township is taking in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**1. Current Statistics.** Today, County Freeholder Shaun Van Doren held a conference call with all the Mayors in Hunterdon County to discuss certain matters regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. On that call, I learned the following.

Currently there are nine confirmed coronavirus cases in Hunterdon County, and 742 cases in the State. There have been nine deaths in the State from the coronavirus; none in Hunterdon County.

Test kits are in short supply in the County.

The County is working with the State on various types of aid to businesses and others, and will post updates regularly on its website.

The County has implemented various procedures to protect its employees and yet keep the County running. Information regarding these procedures is posted on the County's website.

**2. East Amwell Municipal Operations.** Thus far, and thankfully, we've been able to continue our essential municipal functions (keep our Township running), largely through the hard work and dedication of our office staff, headed by Krista Parsons, and our DPW, headed by Jason Silverthorn.

To help ensure the health and well-being of our office staff, we have "locked down" our municipal building. Only a few key members of our office staff have access to the building. There are no exceptions. In fact, even my entry fob has been deactivated.

To the greatest extent practicable, our office staff is handling Township matters from home. Several months ago, we upgraded our computer system to facilitate the ability of our staff to work remotely. That is proving to be money well spent.

At this time, no Township business is being conducted in person. Rather, all business is being done by phone, email, regular mail or through the drop box outside the main entrance to our municipal building. Although this procedure has only been in place since March 15<sup>th</sup>, it's working, in large part due to the understanding, patience and cooperation of our residents.

**3. Committee Meetings.** On the assumption that we're not going to be able to have in-person, public meetings any earlier than June, we're working on developing a process whereby our committees, particularly the Township Committee, the Planning Board and the

Board of Health, can conduct their monthly meetings by means of an online meeting platform, i.e., by phone and/or computer.

Alison Castellano, who chaired the committee that built our current website, is exploring online meeting alternatives. We plan to start testing these alternatives either later this week or early next week.

Our goal is to have an online meeting platform in place by the end of March, then promptly notify our residents of that platform and how to access it, and then use that platform for the Township Committee, Planning Board and Board of Health meetings in April. Other committees might use it as well in April.

We want to do the best we can to keep our Township running, and respond to the needs of our residents.

**4. Our DPW.** Our DPW continues to work on our roads and other projects and tasks. Our DPW employees are, to the greatest extent practicable, following recommended social distancing guidelines and other safety procedures.

**5. Clawson Park.** We've decided that, at least for now, Clawson Park will remain open, except for the playground area and the pavilion. This is consistent with what the County and neighboring municipalities are doing.

However, and this is important, those who utilize Clawson Park must follow the widely publicized "social distancing" and other safety guidelines, including not assembling in groups of ten or more.

**6. Township Events.** The Township's Easter Egg Hunt on April 4<sup>th</sup> and Township's Community Yard Sale on April 18-19, are cancelled.

At this time, we intend to continue our monthly recycling depot in the municipal building parking lot, subject to "social distancing" and other safety guidelines.

We also intend to have our Road Side Clean-Up Day on April 18<sup>th</sup>, and our Spring Clean Up Day on April 25<sup>th</sup>, again subject to "social distancing" and other safety guidelines.

It is likely that, in order to ensure the health and well-being of the volunteers who work at these events, the events will not function as efficiently as they have in the past. Thus, if you come to these events, please be patient.

Additionally, because the COVID-19 pandemic and the federal and state governments' reaction thereto is evolving on a daily basis, one or more of these events could be cancelled, perhaps on short notice, based on government mandates or on our own conclusions regarding the safety of the volunteers who work these events. Accordingly, please check the Township's website regularly for updates.

7. **Questions.** If you have questions, comments or concerns, feel free to call or email our Acting Clerk, Krista Parsons, or me. Our contact information is available on the Township's website.

Additionally, if you have questions or concerns about COVID-19, here are two useful contact numbers:

New Jersey Health Department 24-Hour Public Hotline: 1-800-222-1222.

Hunterdon Healthcare COVID-19 Hotline (daily, 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM): 908-788-6440.

You should also check the Hunterdon County Health Department website, which is regularly updated, at: <https://www.co.hunterdon.nj.us/coronavirus.html>

Finally, **it is important that you check the Township's website regularly.** It is and will continue to be the key source of accurate information in the Township.

8. **Final Thoughts.** The past few days have been exhausting. It's hard to imagine how many local issues must be addressed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. And because in many respects we're in uncharted waters, often there is no clear right or wrong answer with respect to an issue. However, the consequences of getting it wrong can be live threatening. Thus, I ask for your indulgence as we make our way through this difficult time.

Before concluding, I want to commend Krista Parsons and her staff, Jason Silverthorn and our DPW employees and Alison Castellano for their extraordinary efforts in helping us get through this difficult time. Without exception, each of them is going above and beyond the call of duty to keep our Township running and help our residents. They do this with a smile on their face and a pleasant demeanor. They exemplify why East Amwell is such a great place to live. For that, I am eternally grateful.

Stay healthy, stay safe and help your neighbor if you can.

Your Mayor and Friend,

Rick Wolfe