



MAYOR'S OFFICE



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May 1, 2020

To the Citizens & Businesses of Westbrook,

We hope everyone is healthy and well. As we approach our 7th week of this State of Emergency, many are experiencing frustration and impatience in complying with the various rules & recommendations. We can now be encouraged by some light on the horizon with scheduled plans for reopening. We encourage everyone to hang in there as best they can in these final days of spring as things will be looking up for summer. Weather is improving and as things open up more, we can begin to enjoy more of the outdoors and our community. We applaud all for the great job complying with all current and previous rules & recommendations.

We remain in close communication with appropriate officials on developments related to this situation and would like to provide additional updates on the City's response, plans, and handling of issues that arise due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency and today, will be outlining our plan for reopening. There have been many confirmed cases & deaths in Maine including some City residents & employees. Our thoughts and prayers are with those families who have been affected.

Ensuring the safety of our employees and the general public, while also continuing to provide the critical services necessary to run the City, is of paramount importance to us. Police, Fire & Rescue and Public Services have been operational and we thank those dedicated employees serving us during this crisis. **In order to minimize the rise of exposure to employees, volunteers and the general public, we have done the following:**

- Declared a State of Emergency remains in effect until further notice. All actions are reported to the City Council on a weekly basis and previous actions can be reviewed on the City's website.
- Follow Governor Mills' Executive Order as of April 29th mandating a series of continued & new restrictions through May 31st, including a Stay Safer at Home directive, Economic & Community Development Restarting Plan, and a requirement for cloth face coverings in public settings where physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain. Visit <http://www.maine.gov/covid19/restartingmaine> for the detailed plan.
- Using economic development TIF funds, we created the Small Business Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance Program in partnership with the Westbrook Environmental Improvement Corporation (WEIC), to establish a fund to award up to \$1,500 grants to help businesses in need and retain them in our community. This program should be approved next week and we will begin accepting applications soon with details available on our website.
- Begun to finalize the FY 2021 Budget which will result in no increase in the tax rate to help residents and business during this challenging time. Difficult decisions were made that we do not take lightly and we appreciate everyone's understanding to achieve this goal. This budget will be presented to the City Council on May 18th and the Finance Committee will complete its review process for the remainder of the month.
- Begun to collaborate with area leaders to advocate Congress to give states more flexibility for the use of CARES Act Funds to meet the needs of communities and address the collateral damage and financial hardship caused by this crisis. We need to advocate for increased assistance and allow these additional funds to make up for decreases in state revenue resulting from this pandemic. Until then, we are committed to making sure our fiscal house remains in order.
- Recently announced the cancelation of our annual Memorial Day Parade & Ceremonies and replaced this with a Memorial Day Tribute. Visit our Facebook Page for information.

- Recently announced with the Westbrook-Gorham Community Chamber of Commerce the cancelation of our annual Westbrook Together Days events. Thank to this group for your efforts in planning this event annually and commitment for a bigger & better celebration next year.
- We are starting preparations for the upcoming State Primary & School Budget Validation Referendum election which has been moved to July 14th. The time period which voters can request absentee ballots has been extended. We are encouraging everyone to vote absentee to help protect the health and safety of all. This is not a mandate, but an urgent request. Many of the people who work at elections are in the high-risk category, and while we don't know what the virus will look like on Election Day, making this commitment now to vote absentee will help keep the community healthy. You can request an absentee ballot online, by mail or by phone and the City Clerk will mail your ballot to complete and mail back. We are developing a public service announcement for this effort and you can visit our website or contact our Election Hotline at 591-8116 for more information.
- Previously announced spending & hiring freezes and furlough program. These are very difficult times for everyone and we are blessed with an exceptional workforce. Decisions that can adversely impact our dedicated employees are not entered into lightly. However, the City has a legal obligation to maintain a balanced budget, even under these challenging conditions and we take this very seriously.
- Through a major donation, we previously launched the Westbrook-Warren Memorial Foundation Emergency Arts Fund and are still accepting applications for the remaining funds. Details are available on our website.
- We previously launched, Westbrook's Takeout & Delivery Support Effort & Contest to support our local businesses and win \$100 gift certificates. Thank to all who have participated and congratulations to the winners thus far. We thank everyone for supporting local businesses and don't forget to get your entries in!
- Superintendent Dr. Lancia also announced that the Westbrook School Department will continue distance learning and remote operations for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Details are on their website regarding their response. We have also been working with them for ways to honor the Westbrook High School Class of 2020 to include some special events and banners placed throughout downtown recognizing Seniors! We are proud of all the work everyone has done to support these efforts!
- Announcing the City of Westbrook Reopening Plan as follows:

Immediate (Following all CDC Guidelines)

- Phased increase of workforce at City Hall with existing staff as appropriate to continue critical operations and prepare for our phased reopening. This facility will remain closed to the public and we will continue to assist with transactions remotely.
- Planning & Code Enforcement will begin making appointments for one person at a time to meet with staff and obtain permits from their front counter. We will also continue to improve our inspection services and soon begin inspections for outstanding business licensing. The Planning Board will be meeting virtually this month to review and approve many pending projects. All this is being done in an effort to continue the momentum in growth we have been experiencing. Contact them for information & instructions.
- Public Services workforce will return to its normal schedule to continue all cleanup functions with focus on Downtown & Main Street to prepare for remaining businesses opening June 1st.
- The Westbrook Community Center, in an effort to provide a convenient and affordable option for parents to drop off their children and get back to work, will be offering a seven-week program, beginning May 5th, called Community Clubhouse. This will be open to Westbrook students currently in grades 1-4 only with a phased enrollment. Also Summer camp is tentatively scheduled to begin on June 22nd, with registration opening May 4th. Contact them for more details on these programs.
- Opening of closed parks and athletic fields. Play structures & courts where physical distancing is not possible will remain closed until June 1st.
- For those having difficulty to pay the May 15th tax payment, please contact the Tax Collector and we will work with all who need assistance for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- We are working with American Roots in the Dana Warp Mill to secure additional protective masks for staff returning to work and they have been a great partner for other personal protective equipment.
- Work with businesses & organizations allowed to reopen assisting to obtain COVID-19 prevention certification badges from the Maine DECD.

May 26th (Tentative & Following all CDC Guidelines)

- Return remaining furloughed employees to begin preparing for limited opening of municipal facilities.

June 1st (Tentative & Following all CDC Guidelines)

- Open City Hall, the Walker Memorial Library, & Community Center to the public with potential limitations. Plexiglass barriers have been installed in customer service settings.
- Limited public access to Public Safety Building by appointment only.
- Open remaining play structures & courts with posted guidelines.
- Updated Emergency Funeral Protocol.
- Ribbon Cutting & Grand Opening for the Frog & Turtle Expansion & Deck kicking off our reopening!
- Encourage and assist opening of restaurants & other businesses. We will explore eased restrictions in our downtown to allow outside sales.
- City Council to hold live in person meeting to include first approval of the FY 2021 Budget with hybrid options for public participation.

June 15th

- City Council to hold live in person meeting to include final approval of the FY 2021 Budget with hybrid options for public participation.

July & August (Tentative & Following all CDC Guidelines)

- Encourage and assist opening of remaining businesses & organizations.

July 14th (Tentative & Following all CDC Guidelines)

- State Primary Election & School Budget Validation Referendum as explained above.

This situation is a fluid and rapidly evolving situation that requires close monitoring and the need to adapt quickly. We continue to rely upon the Governor, Maine CDC, and our Coronavirus Task Force for guidance as we continue monitoring this public health situation. We modify all directives as appropriate and provide additional updates to everyone with changes. Under the continued advisement, we should minimize our public contact in order to reduce the spread and not set us back, so please continue to practice the rules & recommendations to protect us all. Remember these preventative actions are being taken out of an abundance of caution and concern for everyone. We apologize for any inconveniences you may experience as a result of these measures.

We encourage everyone to check on their neighbors, especially seniors, and help each other out if/when possible. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with all affected by this crisis. Let's remain strong right now to keep each other and ourselves healthy and protect our first responders & healthcare providers. Our community is strong, and we will come out stronger.

For more information on the City's response and the status of the pandemic, please visit www.westbrookmaine.com/639/Coronavirus with links to the CDC and Westbrook School Department.

Thank you and stay safe.



Mayor Michael T. Foley