



## COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Update March 18, 2020

Friends,

I hope everyone is doing well. We are starting to "settle in" to a very unsettled situation. Things are changing very rapidly, and the County is using all of its available channels to share information as it becomes available. I've purposefully refrained from sending frequent emails and instead made more frequent updates on [Facebook](#) because the situation is evolving so quickly and I don't want you to be overwhelmed with email updates that could soon be out of date. But when we have significant new information, I will send email updates like this one.

The Board of Supervisors met last night and had a lengthy (3 hour long) discussion of the coronavirus situation in our community, so this email contains a lot of that information as well as a summary of the actions that have been taken so far.

Many of the issues we are dealing with fall into the jurisdiction of the Board's Finance, Government Operations and Economic Development Committee. In my capacity as committee Chairman I have been in very frequent contact with staff, medical providers and others. As I said last week, the County is in a situation

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in which we have made announcements first, and then planning on how to execute them, which is the opposite of how it usually works. That means we need our employees in particular to bear with us as the operational issues associated with many of these changes are worked out.

Before diving into specific topic areas, I do want to mention that last evening, the Board of Supervisors formally ratified the County Administrator's State of Local Emergency Declaration. This action allows the County to respond more quickly by waiving certain procurement requirements and also makes both the County government and entities within the County eligible for state and local funds. I have more information on that below.

The County has activated and is now staffing the Emergency Operations Center and Board members have access to those resources.

Consistent with the County's guidance on telework, my Dulles District office in the Government Center is closed. However, my staff are teleworking. They are checking voicemails (so you can call my County office and leave a VM) and we are responding to email. While I do make frequent updates on Facebook, [email](#) is a better method to communicate with me.

#### **Status of COVID-19 in Loudoun**

There are five presumptive positive cases in Loudoun County. This number has held steady for a few days and the Health Department has not classified Loudoun as having "community transmission." As far as I know, none of the patients are currently experiencing serious health problems, which is good news.

The reality however is that due to the shortage of testing (addressed below), very few of us believe that the number of positive cases is accurate. The County government has therefore taken steps that are consistent with community transmission as dictated by our pandemic response plan.

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## **Governor Northam's Executive Order**

Yesterday, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam issued a statewide executive order barring gatherings of 10 or more people. There are some questions about what this means for bars and restaurants in particular. The Governor's order gives the County Health Department the ability to suspend the license of any restaurant, fitness center or theater that is permitting more than 10 patrons to be present, and also allows us to prosecute as a misdemeanor those who are not in compliance. The County Attorney is currently working with law enforcement and the Health Department to formalize plans to enforce this executive order. Initially, the Health Department and staff are focused on education establishments. We should have more information on how exactly enforcement is going to work soon including guidance on what citizens should do if they see non-compliance, but I don't have that information yet.

## **Healthcare and Testing**

By now, hopefully everyone is familiar with the concept of "flattening the curve." This is necessary to avoid a major strain on our healthcare system. Healthcare is very tightly regulated in Virginia, but the Governor's emergency declaration provides some relief on that. Each hospital facility is normally approved for a specific number of beds (general and critical), but those requirements are now waived, which enables our providers to scale up if needed. Based on what we've heard directly from our two hospital providers, Inova and HCA (StoneSprings), both have done so and/or are planning for expanded capacity if/when needed.

At this time, there is no shortage of beds and our hospitals are not experiencing any major issues. (In fact, Inova reported last night that their patient numbers are actually down overall). The County is doing a patient census daily to help us track the situations at our hospitals and be ready to assist as

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requested. The hospitals in the County have plenty of equipment and PPE (protective gear for workers). We do have a concern about PPE for "regular" doctors offices - primary care, etc. While I have not heard of any offices running out, we understand that supplies are low at some of them. Most offices have ordered supplies and the County itself is working to try to obtain them for distribution if needed.

The biggest current issue is with testing. I have personally been most involved in dealing with this and I will tell you that it has been very frustrating. My goal since the early part of last week has been to have a "Drive Thru" Outpatient Testing Center set up in our County. I have been working directly with the two healthcare providers and County staff to make that happen but we have been unable due to the lack of test kits. Essentially, at the moment, we're in a position where hospitals and doctors' offices need every available kit to test their own patients. The criteria for testing remains very high because of the limited number of kits. While initially it was taking as many as five days to receive results, we are hearing reports that this is getting better. Very serious, critical patients have access to more immediate testing through the state lab, at least at some facilities. The CDC is recommending that health care workers, government workers and those with compromised immune systems be prioritized for testing when wider availability of test kits comes. I know that both our hospital providers are working to obtain more tests and our County staff remains very engaged on this issue. Some communities have been able to conduct drive through testing, and we think this may be because the CDC has directed more tests to providers in those areas due to higher clusters. When we have more information to share on this, we will let you know.

## **LCPS**

LCPS is monitoring the rapidly evolving situation with COVID-19 on a continual basis. They are taking measures to ensure the safety and health of staff who continue to work in school buildings. As of right now,

LCPS has announced that the school closure will continue until April 10. While schools may reopen on April 13, that seems unlikely at this time given current medical information. LCPS is currently preparing for the possibility of schools being closed for six to twelve weeks from now, although time will tell.

LCPS is providing optional learning experiences for parents [here](#). The tasks will not be graded and are designed to reinforce and go deeper with previously taught information. LCPS has ordered 15,000 additional Chromebook computers to help get each student in grades 3-12 a computer. About 2/3 of eligible students currently have the computers with more on the way. As early as the week of March 23, parents of students without a computer can begin to pick theirs up at an assigned school location. More information on that to follow.

Loudoun County School Nutrition Services has expanded the free meal service in school communities until at least April 10. School-based meal service is being provided at many schools from 8 AM - 1 PM. Students will be allowed to receive two meals daily (a breakfast and a lunch) and can choose to take both meals simultaneously. Students can receive the meals at the school of their choice, not just at the school they attend. For information on which schools have meals, visit this [webpage](#).

LCPS has also begun using our school bus fleet to increase the availability of meal service to students that rely on schools for meal support. Meals are being delivered to community locations between 10 AM and 1 PM on weekdays. An interactive map indicating the locations and scheduled times of "meal stops" is now posted [here](#). Please arrive at the meal stops early to ensure buses can remain on schedule.

Text START to 60680 or 54968 to begin receiving calls and text alerts from LCPS. Community members with questions are encouraged to review the responses to Frequently Asked Questions on the [FAQ page](#). You can also submit questions on the page.

The LCPS COVID-19 hotline is 571-252-6499 to inquire about school closures, operating schedules, and other important information. You can reach the hotline 8 AM - 5 PM, Monday through Friday. At this time, LCPS is not in a position to accept volunteers but appreciates the widespread support and offers to help.

### **Loudoun County Facilities**

Loudoun has announced significant closures and delays since my last email. As I reported on Facebook, the County's operating status remains very fluid with County Administration and department leadership evaluating the workforce constantly. Those that are able to telework are being instructed to do so, although there are many County employees who cannot telework. They are continuing to work hard to keep necessary County systems up and running.

All Loudoun County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) programs are canceled and facilities are closed through at least April 1, 2020. County parks will remain open for self-directed trail and leisure use during normal operating hours; however, all park offices and athletic complexes will be closed. Routine cleaning of playground equipment will be maintained. Meal service for our elderly in need will still be provided. More information on home-delivered meals to the elderly in Loudoun County can be found [here](#).

Loudoun County Public Library branches are currently closed. At this time there are no updates on the potential of curbside delivery - that is not currently occurring.

We are anticipating service interruptions from some other County departments such as Building and Development, Zoning Enforcement, Family Services, etc. as departments modify their work plans and implement social distancing protocols.

I want to mention some of the initiatives that local utility companies are undertaking to assist families struggling financially during this time.

- [NOVEC](#) is suspending all electric service disconnections and associated penalty fees for 60 days.
- [Dominion Energy](#) has suspended all service disconnection for nonpayment. Residential customers previously disconnected can contact the company at 866-366-4357 to be reconnected. The company is also waiving late fees and reconnection fees.
- [Washington Gas](#) has suspended all disconnections and late fees.
- [Loudoun Water](#) is suspending all disconnections and waiving late fees.

[Loudoun Hunger Relief](#), [Mobile Hope](#), and the [Dulles South Food Pantry](#) have announced community support for families who have been economically affected by the coronavirus. Please visit their websites for more information.

The Board of Supervisors' Monday budget work session was consolidated with Thursday's session to reduce the burden on staff. As of right now, the rest of our Board meetings are still ongoing. Virginia code does not permit us to not meet in person to conduct business, so we will soldier on! But, we are encouraging the public to view our meetings remotely and/or send input electronically. We are undertaking social distancing measures in the Board Room including limiting the number of people physically present. As always, Board items can be found [here](#).

### **Personal Property Tax Payment Delay**

At the request of County Treasurer Roger Zurn, the Board of Supervisors has approved a one month delay in payment of personal property taxes (such as the car tax). The tax deadline will now be June 5 instead of May 5. This is being done to allow residents more flexibility. In addition, Treasurer Zurn indicated that residents facing COVID-19 related economic hardships can contact his office and his collections

divisions will attempt to work out arrangements with those in need. Loudoun County Commissioner of the Revenue Bob Wertz has also extended the deadline for filing 2020 Tax Relief for the Elderly and Disabled renewal forms to June 1.

### **Dulles Airport**

Air travel has obviously been significantly impacted by COVID-19. Since my last report, all international travel has been suspended. While domestic travel is still running, the federal government has said that only necessary travel should restrict non-necessary flights. Medical professionals from the CDC are onsite at Dulles Airport and are observing and screening patients in real time. Protocols also exist for airlines and flight crews regarding notification of ill patients. We received an update from MWAA officials that the reports of crowding in the international arrivals building came before the CDC's most recent guidance, and is no longer the case. MWAA is using Mobile Lounges to help control congregation of passengers, among other things.

### **Metro/Transit**

As a Metro Board member, I have been part of many discussions over the last few days regarding the system's operations. Our desire is for the system to serve essential employees only. Right now, ridership is down over 70% as residents heed warnings. Metro's Pandemic Task Force has announced major service reductions to protect frontline employees while allowing for the continuation of essential trips. Metro is urging commuters to not travel unless absolutely necessary in order to allow for widespread disinfection measures and to allow travel for medical professionals, emergency responders, and government officials. Specifically, Metro is communicating not to travel via train into DC for the Cherry Blossom Festival. Subscription trips are cancelled until further notice. Metro trains will run 5 AM - 11 PM on weekdays and 8 AM - 11 PM on the weekend. Trains will run every 15 minutes on each line. All track work will be

cancelled except for emergency maintenance and inspections. Furthermore, Metro bus service will be reduced to support essential trips only.

Loudoun County Transit continues to operate on a normal schedule. That may change in the near future so stay tuned.

### **Economic Concerns**

Loudoun County's social service agencies are mobilizing to help address needs in the event of loss of income or other disruptions due to the virus. We are particularly focused on vulnerable populations who rely on our services (and the schools) for things like meals. There is the potential for various federal government programs to help those in need, and our staff is working with the federal government on those opportunities. We also have many wonderful community organizations that can help those in need. Should you need immediate assistance, call 703-777-0420.

Loudoun's Department of Economic Development is a world class agency that is normally devoted to business development and retention. Now, the focus of the organization has shifted to providing assistance for Loudoun businesses to help them make it through these tough times. DED has set up a webpage [here](#) with resources including financial resources for local small businesses affected by COVID-19. There is also a list of helpful webinars and local companies that are providing special opportunities for consumers during the crisis. I also encourage businesses to watch Executive Director Buddy Rizer's [message](#) to the business community.

There is an emergency response team within DED that is contacting businesses and addressing needs as they arise. DED is working with the Small Business Administration and the USDA on grant programs for affected businesses and will be assisting businesses with the application process. Right now, SBA COVID-19 grants are NOT available for Loudoun

County. Our staff are working closely with our federal delegation to change this. DED will continue monitoring grant programs and informing the public as information becomes available. If you are a small business owner, please take a moment and fill out this [survey](#) so that the state of Virginia can continue pursuing opportunities for federal disaster relief. DED has also established a data center liaison to work specifically on those issues in our largest industry.

### **My Thoughts/Advice**

It is everyone's responsibility to "flatten the curve." If you've made it this far in my newsletter, I'm sure you are taking this seriously - but please do so, and that includes young people. It is a fine line - we don't want everyone cooped up in their homes without any social interaction. But please be smart about it, and make sure your kids are being smart as well. Try to avoid large groups and indoor playdates, for instance.

I have received a lot of questions about things like grocery store supplies and hoarding. The County government has no ability to regulate any of this (those kinds of powers lie with the state). Many stores are being proactive about managing supply of in demand items, and some have set up "senior" hours for the older population to shop uninterrupted. These are happening on a store by store basis. Most stores have adjusted hours to help manage supplies and restocking. Please try to limit the trips that you take out. The store employees have to be there, but unless you need to be - don't be.

Many of our neighbors and friends are helping each other, and Loudoun has wonderful organizations like Mobile Hope and the Dulles South Food Pantry who are providing essential resources. If you need assistance, don't hesitate to email me and our office can get you in touch with those who can help.

The CDC's [website](#) is considered the official source of information regarding the virus' spread, symptoms of infection, prevention and treatment, the global

outbreak, frequently asked questions, and more. Loudoun has also set up a dedicated webpage [here](#). The LCPS coronavirus webpage can be accessed [here](#). From now until the outbreak is contained, we will have an information item at each Board of Supervisors Business Meeting to update us on the effects on the County and what measures are being taken to combat the virus.

I will remain actively engaged in the County's response. We are committed to being transparent and forward with information to the best of our ability. If you need anything, please don't hesitate to contact my office by [email](#) and we'll do our best to help.

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