

City Manager's Weekly Report

Department:

Administration - City Manager

Notable Notes:

We have a larger than normal number of directors on vacation the last two weeks of this year, using vacation time that they were unable to use earlier in the year, either due to COVID or workload. Accordingly, we skipped last week's weekly report and this weeks' will just be my summary. Regular reports will begin again next week, the first full week in January.

The biggest news of some time now is that our police officers have begun receiving COVID vaccinations from the state. The first 11 officers were vaccinated on Tuesday the 29th, and we anticipate more will be vaccinated on Wednesday and next week. We expect that all officers who want a vaccine will have an opportunity to be vaccinated within the next two weeks or so. Also, the state has release updated information on the prioritization of vaccine distribution beyond front line healthcare workers and seniors in congregate living facilities (known as phase 1a) this week which can be found here: <https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/vaccine/>. From this, it looks like our 911 dispatchers will be in the second part of phase 1 (1b) and most other civilian City employees who are unable to work from home will likely fall into the third part of phase 1 due to our roles supporting critical infrastructure (utilities) and the building trades. This would mean we would begin to receive vaccinations around late February or March. Widespread vaccine availability looks to be around May or June, which aligns with the assumptions we included in our revenue forecast used to develop the 2021 budget, which is good to see. The City has had 21 positive cases across all our employee groups to date with four in the last week.

In other COVID news, NPD broke up a large party this week and issued 36 citations under our social gathering ordinance. The party was well above both the City and Governor's limits on gathering size and was also violating our noise ordinances, which they were also cited for. Things had been quiet for a while, so hopefully this isn't the start of more partying and with it accelerated viral spread like we saw in the fall. COVID numbers in Newark and its associated zip codes have been trending down, more in 19711 than 19713. Comparing recent numbers to Newark's peak back in mid-November, our COVID prevalence has decreased by nearly 67%, really impressive.

As a reminder, you can find Newark specific COVID data here:

<https://newarkde.gov/1144/Coronavirus> and here:

<https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/locations/newark>.

We have continued working on CARES Act reimbursement requests and at this point have submitted requests in the amount of over \$4 million for 2020 to New Castle County. The County has allocated at least \$2.3 million to the City but we are hopeful that they will consider providing us with funding beyond that level to help cover expenses. We were originally allocated \$1.15 million which was increased this month to \$2.3 by County Executive Meyer, which was very much appreciated. The submission process ended up being easier than initially anticipated but the holidays have delayed processing on the County's side. They have indicated that we should hear back next week on the status of our submissions. Staff has also continued negotiations with AFSCME 3919 to further reduce accrual of state of emergency related comp time and hope to have a MOU for Council to review in early January.

Staff took the holiday break to work on a few outstanding initiatives that were delayed due to

COVID and the budget process. We have finalized a draft ordinance that will create a 100% renewable power option for Newark's electric customers and provided the draft to the CAC for review. I will be attending their meeting on January 12th to review the ordinance and receive feedback ahead of the January 25th Council meeting where it is set to be considered. I am very excited about this program and the potential it has to reduce Newark's carbon footprint. As written, if approved by Council we will have the program in place in time for student move-out/in at the end of the spring semester. This program aligns with the goals outlined in the Newark Sustainability Plan adopted by Council in 2019 and also with ongoing initiatives at the State level to increase the adoption of renewable power.

Staff is also working on a change to implement escalating fines for repeat property maintenance offenses to address nuisance properties. We have been discussing this for some time and received direction from Council to prepare an ordinance for consideration earlier this fall. Our current draft only includes escalating fines and penalties and is relatively simple. We have a full review and update of the property maintenance code planned for later in 2021 so our thought was that it made sense to do a quick and simple ordinance now to hold us over until we have time to perform the full review and prepare a comprehensive nuisance property ordinance like what we have seen in other jurisdictions. This will also allow us time to find issues and challenges ahead of the larger effort and may result in a better final bill. We are planning to bring this to Council on March 1st.

Parking and Parks staff are also preparing an analysis of the potential for adding parking meters to select parks parking lots, specifically the reservoir, as directed by Council earlier this year. We are planning to bring this to Council on March 15th.

I wish everyone a happy and healthy New Year.

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