WRC COVID-19 Town Newsletter v.1 – March 31, 2020

The following is a summary of relevant news and information related to the COVID-19 situation and response. Please let us know if you have any questions. Direct points of contact are provided for sources of information that are external to the WRC.

Why are we doing this? During Tropical Storm Irene response and recovery we consolidated information for towns to reduce the communications chaos they were experiencing. We cast a broad net because, in our experience, who is responsible for what in towns changes. Our hope is you’ll get this information to whoever needs to see it. To that end, please don’t hesitate to share it. We’ll develop these summaries as warranted, and send single-issue emails as necessary. Please let us know if you have any questions or suggestions.

COVID-19 Town Resource Page on WRC Website
We’re consolidating information for towns on a page on our website. The direct link is http://www.windhamregional.org/COVID-19. Much of the information from these summaries will be archived there. Information for the public at large can be found at a glance on our homepage. This includes how to volunteer and where to find free internet access.

Suspension of Physical Location Requirement in Open Meeting Law; Extension of Deadlines
The WRC and fellow regional planning commissions worked with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns to ask the legislature to suspend the physical location requirement in open meeting law to better enable municipal operations during the State of Emergency. We also asked that provisions be made for the extension of municipal deadlines past the end of the State of Emergency. These provisions were included in a bill passed by both houses. To see the bill language go to pages 12 and 13 here: https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/Docs/BILLS/H-0681/H-0681%20As%20Passed%20by%20Both%20House%20and%20Senate%20Official.pdf. You can also find information on the VLCT website (www.vlct.org).

Comprehensive COVID-19 Resource Catalog Being Developed
The WRC will host on our website (www.windhamregional.org) a catalog of an array of COVID-19 resources for the general public. We hope to have this up by the end of this week or early next week. The United Way of Windham County, Groundworks Collaborative, and Stephen Dotson with the Town of Brattleboro have volunteered to compile this resource. We may need to reach out to some of you in the western towns of the region to fill in any gaps. This will be a living catalog and will be updated regularly. We will invite relevant information to be added to it.

Weekly (Tuesdays @ 1 p.m. for 1 hour) Regional Call for EMDs and Town Officials with Local Vermont Emergency Management, Department of Health, and Agency of Human Services Staff
The WRC organized an initial Skype meeting/conference call, hosted by Vermont Emergency Management Regional Coordinator Rich Cogliano, to enable towns to check in with each other, and with Pam Corbett, local Department of Health district, and Sue Graff, local Agency of Human Services district. A summary of the call can be found on our COVID-19 Resource Page (http://www.windhamregional.org/COVID-19). Please contact Alyssa Sabetto at asabetto@windhamregional.org for more information. The call frequency may be changed depending upon need.

VTrans Suspending Construction Projects Until At Least April 15th – Possibly Longer
In response to Governor Scott’s “Stay Home, Stay Safe” directive, the Secretary of the Agency of Transportation ordered the safe and orderly shutdown of all construction projects that are not deemed critical to public health, safety, or national security as of last week. This applies to nearly all projects under construction or planned to begin with the start of the construction season. The shutdown will be in effect until April 15 and may be extended by a future addendum issued by Governor Scott. We do not yet know what this means for Grants-In-Aid deadlines, but will contact towns once we do know.

**Federal Emergency Declaration for COVID-19: Beware of Offers to Assist with Public Assistance Grant Paperwork (Costs May Not Be Covered)**

We previously sent you information explaining what the Federal Emergency Disaster Declaration means for towns, along with communication from Kim Canarecci, Vermont State Public Assistance Officer with Vermont Emergency Management. You can find this on our town resource page (http://www.windhamregional.org/COVID-19).

Kim sent out an alert Monday that companies are finding email addresses in the FEMA grants portal for those who have applied for COVID-19 grants funding, and are offering paid services to help with grant paperwork. These services cost money that FEMA may not reimburse. **If you need assistance, reach out to VEM and Kim first.** You can also contact Alyssa with any questions you might have (asabetto@windhamregional.org).

Kimberly Canarecci
Vermont State Public Assistance Officer
802-585-4209