



Inclusion Through Diversity

Dominick Recckio, Communications Director
drecckio@tompkins-co.org
315-730-1189, Cell
4/8/2020
3 PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **April 7th, 2020** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Discusses COVID-19 and Hears Update from County Staff

Legislature Chair Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (D-Ithaca) started Tuesday night's meeting, held virtually via Zoom software, by reflecting on the differences and patience required while operating a remote meeting. No public comments were received via email. The meeting was shown live over Government Access TV and live streamed on the Tompkins County website.

McBean-Clairborne's Chair's report encouraged people to stay home, wear a mask when in public places, follow Health Department guidance, check in with neighbors virtually or via phone, and call 211 with questions about COVID-19. McBean-Clairborne reported receiving positive feedback from her recent recorded message encouraging social distancing sent via the County's SwiftReach system.

Legislators expressed gratitude for essential workers throughout Tompkins County including healthcare workers, Public Health Department employees, volunteers making masks and contributing to wider community efforts, and our local residents taking this crisis seriously.

County Administrator Jason Molino and Public Health Director Frank Kruppa provided an update on the COVID-19 crisis and a [timeline](#) of the County's response from the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

Molino shared a list of EOC objectives, the number of hours worked by EOC members, and further details on EOC responses to community needs including food security, childcare, and homelessness. Data was also shared from the Workforce Development board showing that 1,200 calls were received by the career center during the week of March 30th, far surpassing previous peaks of around 50 per week seen during the 2008 financial crisis.

County officials are working with community partners on a solution for transporting individuals to the drive-thru sampling site who lack transportation and are seeking a COVID-19 test. There is also continued work on messaging and Molino encouraged legislators to assist in recommending that people stay home and refer to guidance from the Tompkins County Health Department.

Molino added that today Tompkins County responded to a request for assistance by Steuben County to share test kits for a nursing home facility where multiple fatalities have occurred. The Health Department worked with Cayuga Medical Center to prepare 200 test kits for pickup by a Steuben County Sheriff's Deputy who arrived this afternoon. Legislators praised this effort as part of Tompkins County showing leadership and compassion to our neighboring counties.

Frank Kruppa, Public Health Director answered questions from legislators and provided an update on operations. He began by reiterating the importance of staying home, washing your hands often, and seeking testing if you are symptomatic or may have come in contact with an infected individual. Frank also shared that the County Health Department is not providing a demographic breakdown of positive cases stating that we are respecting the privacy of the individuals first and foremost and that additionally, because Tompkins County is a

small community and there are a relatively small number of cases we don't want to create a perception that one part of the community is safer than others. The guidance continues to be for individuals to stay home unless they are an essential worker or in medical distress.

On Monday April 6th, 455 individuals were tested at the sampling site, a notable increase from past weeks, in part due to the shifting criteria for testing after the Wegmans coffee shop employee tested positive. Even if someone is not symptomatic they may test positive at a later date due to the 2-14 day incubation period of the virus. This is why it is recommended that everyone who may have come in contact with an infected individual self-quarantine for 14 days and monitor their symptoms.

Kruppa praised the staff of Cayuga Health Systems who has been helping to lift the burden on County Health Department nurses. "They have gone above and beyond" remarked Kruppa. Tomorrow Cayuga Health System will send a team of 60 staff downstate to New York Presbyterian Hospital for 30 days to assist with the crisis.

Kruppa, together with Cayuga Health Systems, convened a meeting of Public Health Directors from the 6 contiguous counties last Friday to encourage an increase in referrals for testing in Tompkins County. Tompkins County is able to do multiple tests by centralizing the intricate process at the single site and working seamlessly to get the samples to labs off-site. Kruppa remarked that sampling sites are difficult to set up, making it more effective to operate in a centralized place to increase efficiency and preserve Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

In the next week the Health Department will be providing guidance to essential businesses on usage of PPE, cleaning and sanitizing, and protocols for infected individuals returning to work after quarantine. Many essential businesses have been working to procure PPE for their employees, yet there is still a limited supply distributed to the County by New York State that is prioritized for healthcare workers and first responders.

County Administrator Jason Molino ended the update by sharing that County departments have done a remarkable job adjusting to this new normal by shifting to teleconferencing, telemedicine, and reduction in in-person workforce as necessary.

McBean-Clairborne remarked that Tompkins County continues to be a leader to our neighboring counties and that others are looking to us as a model and adopting our messaging. She added that she was proud that our County was able to share our resources and expertise.

Contact: Jason Molino, County Administrator, 607-274-5551; Frank Kruppa, Public Health Director, 607-274-6674; Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Legislature Chair, 607-277-5104

Legislators Pass Resolution Urging New York State to Conduct June 23rd Primary by Mail

The Legislature voted 13-1 (with Legislator Mike Sigler voting no) in favor of a resolution urging the New York State Governor and Legislature to quickly enact provisions to conduct the June 23rd primary election by mail.

A friendly amendment proposed by Legislator Anna Kelles (D-Ithaca) was passed to include language asking that the State include return postage with the absentee ballots.

Legislator Sigler (R-Lansing) shared concerns that early voting may make it harder for candidates by cutting short their time to campaign.

Contact: Amanda Champion, Chair Government Operations Committee, 607-351-2828; Jason Molino, County Administrator, 607-274-5551

Among other business:

Legislator Mike Lane (D – Dryden), Chair of the Census Complete Count Committee, reported that Tompkins County's response rate is at 42.9%, which is below the national average but above the New York State average. It was also shared that local census reps have been working closely with the local colleges so that Tompkins County achieves an accurate count of the student population.

- END -