



## **Community Update from City Manager Timothy J. Baroody**

### **Status of COVID-19 Emergency Planning in the City of Fredericksburg**

**(Fredericksburg, VA) March 16, 2020** - I would like to update you on matters related to the City of Fredericksburg's local government and our continued emergency planning for the COVID-19 virus outbreak. First, I wish to inform you that this morning I issued a formal *Declaration of Local Emergency*. It takes effect today Monday, March 16, 2020, and will need to be affirmed by City Council. This Declaration allows the City to take emergency actions to protect the public health. We have also partially activated our Emergency Operations Center with partial staffing, and are ready to go to full staffing as the need may arise.

Dr. McDermott, President and CEO of Mary Washington Hospital stated today that, "The key to preventing the rapid spread of this disease is the phenomenon of "flattening the curve". If we can slow the spread of COVID-19 to months rather than weeks, we can lessen the impact on the healthcare system and give precious time to treat those with moderate and severe symptoms from the virus..." Dr. McDermott's full statement is attached.

You have heard it said that extraordinary times take extraordinary measures. The City of Fredericksburg is indeed taking extraordinary measures.

We have been acting for weeks on preparing for this virus, and since January 23<sup>rd</sup> have been asking for increased information from callers seeking emergency assistance from our 911 center. We have refreshed our continuity of operations plans, enhanced janitorial services and stepped up disinfecting efforts significantly in our public buildings. We have posted information to our workforce and asked them to be diligent in keeping their spaces clean and in using good hygiene practices.

Last Tuesday, after a brief to Council and our community by Deputy Fire Chief Mike Jones, City Council authorized the City Manager to implement a more liberal sick leave policy. This action allows for a city employee who is experiencing signs of COVID-19 (or it has been confirmed that they have been exposed and need to be quarantined) to not worry about leave balances and instead focus on seeking medical assistance – and NOT coming to work.

To prepare for many to call out sick, we have created a City Emergency Team. This team consists of roughly 25 professionals who have been authorized and approved to telework away from their offices to accomplish critical IT, communications, financial, and public health and

safety functions. Beyond this team, we have approximately two hundred additional City employees who handle “essential functions” and they will be focused on maintaining order, public health, tax assessment and collection, water and sewer infrastructure and trash pickup, among other critical responsibilities. Many other functions of government will soon be deemed less essential for the foreseeable future – and will be handled as our resources permit.

We will be asking Council to reserve \$2 million from the City’s Fund Balance in this current year to handle potential virus related matters. We will also likely be forced to reconsider our FY 2021 budget recommendations released last week.

Yesterday Governor Northam banned all gatherings of 50 or more, and we believe that he will take bolder actions soon. Guidance from Mary Washington Healthcare leadership and Virginia’s Department of Health, implores the City and other regional localities to lead by example by taking aggressive actions now. This starts with encouraging all to stay home – and the City of Fredericksburg is doing just that with this notice. I am also formally announcing that as of close of business today **City government buildings will be closed to the public**. This includes our downtown Visitor’s Center, City Hall, the Executive Plaza (partial building), and Dorothy Hart Community Center. We encourage all citizens to take advantage of pay online opportunities. For now, staff will be available by phone at the regular numbers you normally use. We have eliminated all late fees through the month of April in an attempt to get ahead of issues that most certainly will arise in this shift.

We ask residents, and businesses, to be patient with us as we work to continue our services. We also strongly encourage that you walk our trails, enjoy the spring blossoms and buy gift cards and order takeout meals from our great restaurants and local businesses! They need your support now more than ever.

Moving forward you can expect daily updates to be posted on the City website at [www.fredericksburgva.gov](http://www.fredericksburgva.gov). Please also sign up for Fredericksburg alerts also located on our website.

I realize that this is an unprecedented action and we are in unprecedented times. We will be outlining and publishing essential functions and non-essential functions that are affected in this plan of action as soon as possible. This leads to many questions, and we’re working to address them all as quickly as possible.

We appreciate our community’s understanding that our actions are in the best interest of our public health. More community government actions are forthcoming.

Thank you all.