



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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October 2, 2020

To: Residents of Washtenaw County
All Washtenaw County Staff
Community Partners

From: Gregory Dill
Washtenaw County Administrator

Re: Q4 Operational Update
Coronavirus/Continuity of Operations

Hello everyone,

Over the past 6 months, COVID-19 has consumed a significant amount of our time and energy. This virus has forced us to reassess the way we live and work, and for Washtenaw County government, the way we deliver services to our residents. As we enter the 4th quarter of 2020, I'd like to offer you an organizational update, not just on our COVID related activities, but a brief recap of the year, in general; our successes, our goals and those challenges we're still working to overcome.

COVID Response:

Although it may have temporarily shifted our focus, COVID has not deterred county operations. Like so many other organizations, it only added to our already full schedules. While hundreds of us have spent the past 6 months working to address the needs of our fellow employees and community members, many more have been continuing to do the activities required to maintain our day to day operations. Throughout this crisis, staff are paying bills, processing payroll, performing bank transactions, processing contracts, hiring new employees, managing our budgets, and so on. These behind the scenes staff members have continued to 'just do their jobs' and keep us moving forward. Thank you.

We also have our front line and first responders. Your jobs have always been to work directly with the public, no matter the circumstances. Despite the added risk of COVID, you have continued to respond to the needs of our community

members, and for that, we are all grateful. I'm also thankful for our Health Officer, Jimena Loveluck and her team for helping us to navigate through these unprecedented times. They work closely with our state and local leaders to help make decisions that are steeped in science and serve to save lives. Her office has been excellent with their internal and external communication, providing directives and guidance, and often updating their website daily. Health Department staff have coordinated countless pop-up testing sites, and continue to perform contact tracing, all to stop the spread of this virus. As we enter cold & flu season, Jimena's team is offering flu vaccine clinics while continuing their COVID efforts. You can help them (and us) by getting a flu shot, remembering to wear face covering when in public settings, washing your hands often and avoiding unnecessary travel.

Human Resources continues to provide guidance to employees as they navigate COVID, through working with departmental leadership and IT to identify opportunities for a flexible work environment, counseling on options afforded through the CARES Act and to assist with childcare challenges. If you have any questions regarding COVID benefits, please don't hesitate to reach out to Monica and her team.

Keeping all our 1400 employees safe and healthy is an ongoing priority for all of us, and Risk Management has worked in earnest to secure appropriate personal protective equipment. Departmental leadership have provided a list of the PPE that are necessary to maintain their service delivery, and Facilities Management is delivering those supplies so departments can provide a safe environment for our customers and our staff.

Our COVID response will continue for as long as necessary. The focus of our efforts extends beyond our employees and our customers, because as the safety net for the most disadvantaged in our community, we're here to save lives.

Our collective work to remediate COVID is ongoing. I thank you, for all you've done to help.

Budget Update

We are in the 8th year of our quadrennial budget, and our budget/finance teams are working to identify needs and prepare our overall general fund budget for 2021-2024. Due to the uncertainty of the full impact of COVID on the economy and county finances, departmental operational budgets are being held flat. The recommended departmental budgets are being modified to align with updated salary projections with current full-time equivalent positions, the 2019 cost allocation plan and fleet services for current vehicle inventory and planned replacement. The recommended budget will be submitted to the Board of Commissioners on October 21, 2020. In November, the Commissioners will review, offer any modifications they feel necessary, and then approve by 12/31/20. 2021 will then be formalized, 2022-2024 will be projected. I will say,

planning for 4 years of operations helps us to better project and 'smooth' any unanticipated expenses, like COVID.

Many of you have asked about the impact of COVID on our general fund budget. To date, our response to this pandemic has exceeded \$5 million dollars and it is inclusive of overtime for our essential and front line workers, personal protective equipment for the organization and some of our community partners, outreach for our disproportionately affected populations, like our homeless residents. This group of individuals is at an elevated risk of contracting COVID, and as the safety net in our county, we immediately arranged for housing that provided reduced contact, we provided testing and education, all in an effort to keep the population safe and reduce the spread of the virus. FEMA and the CARES Act have promised some financial relief, but when considering the magnitude of this pandemic, and that literally every local government in the country is also expending general fund dollars on their COVID efforts, my expectations for meaningful reimbursement are very low.

So, what does this mean for us? Due to COVID, and its effect on the economy, we are budgeting conservatively. The uncertainty of reimbursement from the federal government makes it difficult to project. I'm looking forward to working in collaboration with The Board of Commissioners as they begin their budget conversations this month, I encourage you to watch the [livestream](#) of their meetings through our public website.

I'm interested to hear your thoughts on our budget, and how we can adapt to our funding challenges. Are there efficiencies or reductions in your departmental expenditures that could be identified and enacted in order to save money? Please email me and we can talk.

Commissioner Priorities

As our policy body, at the beginning of each term, our Board of Commissioners establishes a 'Calendar of Deliverables', a repository for their collective priorities to improve the services of county government. This work is done in conjunction with my office, and support to accomplish these goals oftentimes expands to include the input of each of you. Achieving this year's goals was compounded by the challenges of our COVID response, but I'm proud to report we have put several in the 'out box', Chair Jason Morgan says, *"The first priority of the commissioners has been to ensure the health and safety of our community and our hardworking county employees. This has been no small task and we sincerely appreciate your dedication and service to the residents of Washtenaw County while managing the challenges of caring for your own family, with children at home, loved ones who may need financial or medical support, and the many uncertainties of these difficult times. In addition to navigating the pandemic, commissioners have been very busy making sure that we accomplish the priorities that we set as a Board at the beginning of this term. Some of them have been brought to successful conclusions, others are on-going works in progress:*

- *Community Mental Health now has a solid debt elimination strategy and are in a much better place than they were a year ago.*
- *The county road commission has welcomed two new commissioners and is now majority female and more representative of the make-up of our county.*
- *We've taken bold action in our environmental goals, moving the county's carbon neutral goal from 2035 to 2030.*
- *In July, amidst national unrest, we Declared Racism as Public Health emergency. Our resolution included concrete actions. Our COVID-19 emergency response was swift and is evolving as we prepare for a possible resurgence of the virus.*
- *Looking ahead, we will be working to ensure public health and human services are prioritized in the budget, along with you, our dedicated employees. We know the financial uncertainties of CMH and then COVID-19 both set back implementation of the salary study but our commitment to beginning implementation remains. We appreciate your patience and will be working to incorporate some level of implementation into the budget this year.*

We will continue to make decisions that keep the most vulnerable in our community in mind. We would not be able to do the work that we do without the hardworking staff and leadership of the county. We thank you for your service as we all work towards making Washtenaw county a place where all are welcome to live, work, and grow."

Establish Roadmap to get to Carbon Neutral County Government

Working Session Chair Sue Shink led the charge on this initiative, and here's what she had to say: *"As a board, we recognize that climate change is an immediate and very real threat. Our vulnerable populations, like those without a home, bear the brunt of it. We need to be doing everything we can, as quickly as we can to try and preserve this lovely place where we live. Commissioner Morgan and I cosponsored the resolution moving up the county's Carbon Neutral goal to 2030. It's ambitious but we know that we can do it with your help. The LED lighting project is a conservative way to make a big impact in a short amount of time, while the carbon neutrality plan is a way to mitigate climate change in the long term. It's aggressive but achievable."*

On Advancing Racial Equity, Vice-Chair Commissioner Ricky Jefferson had this to say, *"During this time, we have had to deal with quite a few issues that relate to racial equity in Washtenaw County. For example, with the help of residents from several communities, the AAATA restored service to the historic "Southside" of Ypsilanti. We've also worked with OCED and the trial courts to make sure all residents are aware of the resources available to them to avoid evictions. With the help of our Racial Equity Officer, Alize Asberry Payne, we're identifying areas in every department where we can create systemic change. COVID-19 has shined a concerned, truthful light on government supported policies and*

practices that have created racial, social and economic inequity in our county. Changing the culture is uncomfortable. It sometimes hurts and the intended goal can be misconstrued. We still have a lot of work to do but in this phase, we're committed to raising up our common interest of the eradication of discrimination. If we keep equity in mind in every decision that we make as a board, then when it's all said and done, we'll have a county and a culture that ensures that all residents receive humane treatment and have access to opportunities and essential resources needed to thrive. "

Monitoring and Managing our Budgets

Ways and Means Chair Katie Scott states: *"Budget work is always challenging, and I am mindful of how the budget will be impacted by the ongoing pandemic. We've gotten best- and worst-case scenarios and are working diligently to plan accordingly. The next few years will be challenging but I am confident that the right people are serving in and working for Washtenaw County. Although we have difficult decisions to make, I'm always aware that the budget is a moral document and plan on steering us forward with that ethos. My number one priorities are to safeguard services our residents depend upon and to protect those who work for Washtenaw County. A creative budget process will be necessary in the coming years in order to achieve these primary goals."*

Of course, there are many other priorities in the queue, and we continue to work collaboratively with our Commissioners to help them achieve their goals to improve services to our community. For example, July marked the beginning of the 2nd cohort for the Washtenaw County Youth Commission. The group is comprised of high school students, two (2) representatives from each commissioner district. The group meets monthly to community build and strategize around priorities they pull from the Board of Commissioner's list of priorities. You may have heard a few of their voices during public comment of BOC meetings as they advocate for the resolutions that are important to them. These young people are our future and are incredibly motivated to start making a difference, right now.

The Washtenaw My Brother's Keeper initiative was an integral part of our COVID-19 emergency response. Partnering with the Washtenaw County Sheriff's office, they distributed supplies and PPE to over 1,200 households from Ypsilanti to Manchester. They also partnered with the Health Department to develop messaging that encouraged young people to wear masks and follow social distancing guidelines. I am certain that their service and the swiftness with which they mobilized, helped to lessen the spread of COVID-19. As we prepare for the possibility of a second wave, they stand at the ready to mobilize, partner, and engage the residents of Washtenaw county.

Our Future

Service Delivery: COVID forced all of us to evaluate our service delivery, and through your leadership, we identified some efficiencies once believed to be impossible. Virtual meetings, trainings and appointments served to keep everyone safe, but also proved we can be just as effective on this platform. A

partially remote workforce has eased parking and space issues; and provides our staff a greater opportunity for work/life balance. I'd welcome your ideas on this matter as I continue to work with our elected officials and departmental leadership to identify or formalize other, long term possibilities for change.

Public Health: The Health Department has been at the forefront of COVID-19 response in Washtenaw County since our first cases were confirmed in March. This work has included the following: communication and messaging in multiple languages and in partnership with trusted community messengers to share resources and prevention tools; ongoing surveillance and data collection; facilitating and supporting expanded COVID-19 testing efforts, particularly in the 48197 and 48198 zip codes that have been most impacted; robust case investigation and contact tracing efforts that have resulted in our staff contacting an estimated 12,000 residents about their illness or exposure; distributing PPE to facilities and community organizations; and providing guidance and technical assistance to businesses, restaurants, K-12 schools and local universities to ensure they resume operations safely.

We have had to adapt by pivoting several of our team members away from their 'traditional' work to address COVID response. This ends up impacting overall operations because we are limited in what we can do. COVID-19 has brought increased work and expectations, but also an environment of widespread distrust and questioning of public health recommendations that are based in science and evidence. Health Department staff have had little respite since March. In many areas, we are behind due to the shutdown and still working to catch up (restaurant inspections, for example). We had to delay the implementation of the Title X family program to this month and have also had to turn down grants because we do not have the capacity to do the work and meet those requirements. In addition, other areas require our response that also must be addressed moving into Quarter 4 and 2021, including Gelman, vapor intrusion investigations, PFAS and Eastern Equine Encephalitis.

COVID-19 will be with us for the foreseeable future. Quarter 4 will be filled with ongoing COVID-19 response as we work to get other services back online. We are focusing on those services that are most critical during this time to help people maintain health and manage chronic conditions. That includes flu vaccination and other immunizations; WIC and other services that provide access to healthy foods; Maternal Infant Health services to keep pregnant women and infants healthy; family planning, tobacco/vaping education and cessation; and access to healthcare through insurance enrollment, telehealth and community health workers. These are priority areas as we move into 2021 in addition to our continued focus on health equity, community engagement, and addressing racism as a public health crisis in our county.

Residents can contact the Health Department with questions at 734-544-6700 or by email at l-wchdcontact@washtenaw.org. Resources can also be found on the Health Department's website at washtenaw.org/health.

Mental Health: Washtenaw County Community Mental Health (WCCMH) is an essential health care provider of behavioral health services for Washtenaw County. As such, we have been open and operating to provide needed mental health care services to the community despite the Governors 'Stay Home' order. To ensure the health and safety of the community, individuals we serve, and our dedicated staff, program delivery and overall operations were shifted and enhanced to meet the unprecedented landscape of the times. Seemingly overnight, WCCMH began to provide telehealth (virtual) services. Psychiatry, therapy and overall clinical care management are facilitated via video or telephone to continue to meet the needs of individuals in our care. Our Access/Crisis team, ACT teams and PATH team continued dispatching to the community while also utilizing technology. Care that still needed to be delivered face to face, such as injections by our nurses, were administered in office with strict protocols of staff donning personal protective equipment (PPE) and instituting screening protocols with temperature scans and asking personal health questions. In addition, staff that are reporting on site are smaller in number and wearing PPE and maintaining social distance while in shared space. Our dedicated and committed provider network continued to provide direct care in the community throughout, adapting in real time to the needs of those they serve.

Overall, WCCMH adapted quickly and efficiently to continue providing essential services. The following programs are open and ready to serve:

- Access/Crisis Services
- CARES
- Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)
- Intellectual/Developmental Disability
- Youth and Family
- Adults with Mental Illness
- Jail Mental Health
- Health and Wellness
- Nursing
- Psychiatry

Unfortunately, at this time WCCMH is unable to open and fully operate our internal vocational program. We are monitoring this program closely in alignment with the Governors planned phase approach to opening.

As always, if you or someone you know is in need of community mental health services, please call 734-544-3050.

K-12 Education-Remote Learning: A subcommittee formed by the Board of Commissioners, our Broadband Task Force, continues their work to achieve broadband equity throughout the county. COVID has certainly demonstrated the desperate need of our rural residents and has helped with bringing awareness to this issue. The Task Force is working with local, state and federal officials to keep the momentum going, but in the meantime, they've worked to ensure our

rural township halls have wireless hotspots so residents can access the internet in order for children to do homework from the convenience of the family vehicle.

Our Financial Health: Fiscal responsibility is an ongoing priority, we must be good stewards of the resources we are entrusted with. The needs of our community will always far outweigh our available budget. We must carefully consider our resources and how we can provide services that offer the greatest value to the largest population. As we evaluate the impact of COVID, we're also reviewing efficiencies that will help us to provide better and more effective services to the public. A remote workforce and expanding our online customer service platform are just two efficiencies that promise to help us reallocate precious financial resources to those issues that are important to our residents.

Community Partners: Speaking of fiscal stability, many of our local, small businesses and community anchor organizations were deeply affected by COVID, and like us, their recovery will be slow. Please continue to support these folks through your patronage or donations. If we all help just a little, we can make a big difference. Our own Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED) works very closely with many of our community partners, and they've worked to help convey information regarding services related to COVID. Their efforts include:

- Financial Navigators – a partnership between United Way and OCED - provides one-on-one telephone assistance (at no cost) navigating critical financial issues and making referrals to other social services and resources. Please help us promote this program by sharing the webpage: <https://www.washtenaw.org/3197/Financial-Navigators>
- As the Community Action Agency for the County, the state has granted funds for new programs to support county residents:
 - Water Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security - This program will connect local water/sewer utilities to more than \$800,000 in funds for unpaid water and sewer bills, up to \$700.
 - Essential Plumbing repair program - This program will be administered through our rehab team. Low and moderate income households with water line or sewer line repair needs can call to get signed up: 734-544-3008. More information will be coming soon.
- Evictions and Rent Assistance - The CDC has placed a moratorium on evictions through the end of the year. There are a few important things of note:
 - Tenants are still required to pay rent. If there are challenges with paying rent, there is funding available through the Eviction Diversion Program. For residents in need of rental assistance – please direct them to **call HAWC at (734) 961-1999**
 - *Guidance is just now coming down to assist residents on the steps needed to qualify. One of the first is from the [State Supreme Court](#), please check back often for additional information.*

Newly Elected Officials: Beginning in 2021, the political landscape in Washtenaw County will look different than it does now. Brian Mackie, our Prosecuting Attorney for the past 28 years will begin to enjoy his much-deserved retirement, Eli Savit is running unopposed to fill that role. Commissioner Ruth Ann Jamnick, a representative of Ypsilanti Township will also be retiring, and Commissioner Felicia Brabec of Pittsfield Township has chosen to expand her representation and run for the D55 House Seat. These organizational leaders have served as our decision makers, their input has helped to form policy that guides the delivery of services to our residents. They have led by example, excelled at their jobs, and their presence will be missed. Their expectations are that we welcome their replacements with open arms and an open mind, support and help them to grow into their new roles so they too can achieve success for our residents. While I will miss Brian, Felicia and Ruth Ann, both personally and professionally, I also look forward to welcoming our new elected officials into the Washtenaw County family; and will be relying on departmental leadership to help me orient them so they may be successful in their roles.

In Conclusion:

Washtenaw County is an organization that simultaneously focuses on today, tomorrow and our future. Working together to identify best practices and succession planning is an ongoing effort in many of our departments. We do these things because we are all committed to leave this organization better than we found it, and because we care about making a positive difference in our communities. This organization could not achieve our level of success without YOU!

2020 has been both challenging and rewarding. While I've always been in awe of the work you do, my feelings have been reinforced throughout this pandemic. I'm privileged to witness your commitment to our residents and one another. Your professionalism continues to set the standard for public service and I'm proud of how we've come together and adapted to the quickly changing landscape. Our service delivery may look a bit different, but it continues to be world class.

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and myself, thank you, for all you do.

My best,

Greg

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