March 18, 2020

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I just wanted to keep you all updated on some of the things that have been going on in the borough over the past several days (which already seems like several weeks).

Last week we issued an emergency declaration that altered some of the way government will function during this period. It mainly addressed and suspended some of the governmental requirements in the need to advertise meetings, gave the borough manager some additional flexibility in purchasing supplies and materials related to the virus, and made some other adjustments in operational procedures that made it easier to respond to needs that might arise.

As you know, Borough Hall is temporarily closed and the building will remain locked at all times. Borough staff is continuing to fulfill all critical municipal functions. Borough Council is in frequent contact by phone and email to stay ahead of this situation. If you need to contact the borough, please call 610-543-4599 or e-mail swarthmore2@comcast.net. Police and fire services have been uninterrupted. First responders are doing their jobs, as usual, while taking special precautions to keep themselves safe and healthy. In an emergency, as always, call 911.

Trash, recycling, and yard waste pick-up is continuing on schedule. We are happy to report that, at this time, the Public Works Department is able to continue the annual spring tradition of leaf mulch delivery. Order by telephone (610-543-4599 - leave a message if necessary) or on-line (go to “On-Line Bill Pay” on the Borough website - www.swarthmorepa.org). A day or two after the initial declaration was issued, at the urging of the governor, we notified our local business that all “non-essential” businesses were being asked to close until further notice. This was, by far, the most difficult thing I have been asked to do. These are not only merchants and their employees; they are also members of our community. For most, this radically affects their lives and livelihood. Restaurants have been ordered to limit their operations to take-out only. Even with the ability to provide take-out, they have already experienced dramatic reductions in business. As has been suggested by many of our neighbors, perhaps you can contact some of the stores by email and offer to buy gift cards if they are available. Rather than cooking in, consider ordering out two or three times each week. Many of our restaurants are providing delivery service.

The COOP has responded remarkably well during this period, making adjustments as needs arise. Staff and volunteers have been working hard to keep shelves stocked and grocery ordered delivered. As you might imagine, their food distributors have faced major challenges keeping up with demand so there may be shortages of some items. Considering the pandemonium at many grocery markets, the COOP has remained a haven of relative sanity. As many of you might know, Store Manager Mike Litka had just returned to work after major surgery, hoping, I’m sure, to be able to ease back into his job. No such luck. He has displayed admirable leadership.
Many of you have commented on the closure of the college grounds. At the conclusion of spring break, students were told not to return to campus. However, there were still several hundred students who could not go home during the break. Many are still living on campus and the college felt it necessary to issue rather stringent restrictions until they had a better idea as to how to respond to the virus. This included closing off the entire campus to all but authorized individuals. They are very aware of the community response to this closure and they are now in the process of trying to place more students off-campus. Once this has been accomplished, they will be re-evaluating the restrictions. We will try to keep you all informed as this situation changes.

Most of our local places of worship have begun to provide religious services by video. They are also trying to make sure that their more vulnerable members are kept safe and healthy. Yesterday, there was a video meeting of the leaders of our local Swarthmore churches to discuss how they might respond to the needs of the greater community. The Nether-Swarthmore Time Bank is also looking at ways they can be of assistance. We will keep you informed as to their plans as they develop.

In short, we just thank you all for doing your part. We will keep seeking ways to ensure that life is kept as “normal” as possible during this ever-changing period. In the meantime, please stay safe and healthy. We thank all the volunteers who have stepped in to help. As needs arise, we may be reaching out for more volunteer assistance. Please remember to look in on your neighbors who may need help and assistance and let us know if there are things we can do. You can contact the Borough Office at 610-543-4599 or email any of your local elected officials with comments or suggestions. Email addresses are all available on the Borough website at www.swarthmorepa.org.

We look forward to the day when this is all over and we can return to life as usual in our amazing community.

In good health,

Mayor Marty Spiegel