

Lessons Learned

Preliminary Comments from Municipal Officials

VLCT Comments Received As Of May 11, 2020

General Thoughts:

The present crisis highlights the need for local governments to have flexibility to respond to emergencies. And the more we hear, it is evident that the present crisis will be with us for some time to come.

Institutionalize remote or mail in voting capacity for voters.

Assure that technology for remote work, teleconferencing, and highspeed internet is in place, robust and redundant.

Building reserve capacity is an important function of municipal fiscal responsibility.

Municipalities are being asked to pivot to providing services on a range of issues that have not been traditional functions of local government in Vermont.

Funding, training assistance and protections for front line workers -those upon whom we depend in a crisis, especially emergency medical services - must be acknowledged as a state responsibility, adequate and sustained.

The Education Property Tax system is broken.

Cambridge:

What do we need to do to make a transition from crisis mode to something a bit more normal:

We need state government to publicly say that no course of action is risk-free. Opening up brings the risk of more COVID-19 cases and deaths. Not opening up increases the risk of health issues and deaths from other causes – as well as a lack of money to address other risks and problems in society.

Direction as to what the new normal guidelines are as an outline. Start stepping back from managing the small details and move to the bigger picture. Put the broad over-arching guidelines in place that will help if a second wave happens as best practices will already be in place and also will allow public to make their own choices as to where and when they go out etc. Keeping the obvious things in place such as work from home if you can and open your business with these guidelines for public health etc.

2) what do we need to have in place in case we face this situation again, so we won't be caught doing so much scrambling.

Keep the provisions such as remote meetings in place, so that if a second wave comes these items are already in place – or at least can be easily applied again, such as with a declaration of a state of emergency.

3) what have we learned about the way we do things that could actually be changed permanently.

Public meetings should be able to be held via teleconference

People who can work from home, should work from home – good for the environment, our highway infrastructure will last longer, better for them.

It is very important to make sure everyone has reliable internet connection where they live – as in with other utilities.

-Vermont should work to make sure it can easily and readily rely on itself for manufacturing items and food etc. in times of crisis.

Swanton

1) what do we need to do to make a transition from crisis mode to something a bit more normal. Not sure what normal will look like until a vaccine is developed, but we've put together our Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Employees are all back to work except for the front office. We have 5 person crews and are able to work apart from one another.

The office staff are working split days with only two working each day apart from one another. This transition has worked well so far, but having a COOP is important.

2) what do we need to have in place in case we face this situation again so we won't be caught doing so much scrambling.

We need a stock of supplies! Masks, cleaners and wipes. We have installed plexiglass in the front office now, but looking ways to isolate our workers is key.

3) what have we learned about the way we do things that could actually be changed permanently.

We noticed we can function remotely for a time, but not everything can be done remotely. Our accounting system would have to be upgraded and that is expensive.

Trustees meetings are difficult to hold in order to ensure Open Meeting Laws are upheld. So we chose to not hold meetings. We have a management form of government, so I can get things done without having to ask/hold meetings to get approvals.

Newport City

1) Unless \$\$ reserves are in place, I do not know.

2) same as #1. Move into furloughs immediately and have a structure in place so the budgets aren't slammed if the Fed Gov't is going to come into play.

3) Ban in person meetings (unless local or extreme circumstances). Use the Technology.

Work out of homes more frequently, get rid of office rents. It's possibly safer for security issues anyway but who knows about that.

Wilmington

Most of the frustration centered around technology: VDOL/Unemployment Insurance technology sounds like it is out of date; statewide access to affordable broadband for telecommuting from home; technology for education (we can avoid winter make-up days, etc.); technology for local boards. While many Governors have said this is a priority, it has not reached rural Vermont communities in a big way. The state has left it up to local communities to find their own way – it should be as dependable as electricity in today's world.

Thetford

The key issue at the moment is deleting 19 VSA § 312, which is an anachronistic statute. Vermont is the only State in New England that treats DPW different than all other departments within the General Fund. Having worked in two other New England States, I can confirm that the Vermont's method of having DPW in a separate fund is not necessary and it creates unnecessary administrative burden while reducing flexibility at the Selectboard level.