



## **Message to the Auburn Community**

### **04-04-20 COVID-19 Update**

The Coronavirus, known as COVID-19, continues to sweep across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with the number of confirmed cases increasing as health experts have predicted. As of today, there are 18 confirmed cases in Auburn, up from 6 last week, and no reported cases one week earlier. This increase reflects both the increased frequency of testing and the reality that COVID-19 has now impacted most communities across the State as predicted. At this point, we are very sad to report that the Board of Health has been notified that there has been one reported death out of the eighteen confirmed cases.

Governor Baker stated that the peak in Massachusetts is expected to hit between April 10<sup>TH</sup> and April 20<sup>th</sup>, so we do anticipate the number of cases will continue to rise at an increased rate over the next three weeks or longer. We urge residents to stay vigilant as we continue to battle this global pandemic.

There has been much attention in the media – locally, statewide, nationally and globally – regarding the number of confirmed cases and the number of COVID-19 related deaths. We understand that these ongoing reports can cause angst and fear. We also believe that posting the number of confirmed cases in our community may be beneficial to residents to drive home the reality that COVID-19 will affect every community and residents must be diligent in implementing preventative measures. Therefore, the Auburn Board of Health and Town Administration made the decision to issue the number of confirmed cases weekly by posting updates on our website. The Board of Health is trying to balance the dissemination of important information to the public with the protection of the privacy of those infected. As a result, the Town of Auburn and its Board of Health posted a weekly Covid-19 update on Monday, March 30th that included the number of cases reported from the State to the Board of Health. Previous to posting this information, the State Department of Public Health (DPH) had advised all communities not to post case numbers specific to individual cities and towns to the public. DPH continues to provide guidance to communities not to post the number of confirmed cases or deaths by individual community and DPH continues to report publicly the case numbers and deaths by county, not by town. While many communities are not posting case numbers in their towns, we believe the public should be aware that there are cases in the Auburn community and it is critical to follow health guidelines to protect residents and their families. We are concerned, however, about posting the number of deaths in the Town and the timing of those postings as we do not want to violate the privacy of those families that are grieving the loss of a loved one. Therefore, we intend to release the number of confirmed cases as well as the number of deaths, if applicable, weekly only. We will post the number of confirmed cases and deaths each Monday on our web site.

It is important to note that the Town of Auburn has had a system in place for many years for identifying, reporting and monitoring confidential cases of infectious and transmittable diseases. The town contracts with a Public Health nurse who is charged with monitoring these cases and is overseen by the Board of Health. Monthly, the Board of Health receives a report from MAVEN (State reporting system) which reports out all the infectious diseases. Covid-19 is one of these diseases. This list is reviewed monthly and monitored by Board of Health office staff daily. We assure the public that the Board of Health is actively monitoring these confidential cases.

The Town of Auburn initiated its planning for Coronavirus on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and began implementing preventative measures back on March 10<sup>th</sup>. As new information and directives became available from State and Federal officials, the Town continued to adapt its preventative strategies to reduce community spread. Additional measures were put into place as it became apparent that many in the community and across the State were not taking the threat of COVID-19 seriously and were not practicing social distancing and safe sanitary practices. As of now, these measures will be in place until May 4<sup>th</sup> in accordance with Governor Baker's Orders, although that date may likely be extended. We continue to post these strategies and all relevant State Orders and guidelines on our website at <https://www.auburnguide.com/669/Coronavirus-Health-Alerts> as well as on our official social media pages and on Auburn Cable Television. When necessary, we will utilize CodeRED to provide critical and emergency information to our citizens.

Last week, the Governor announced that he would be extending the protective measures he ordered on March 23<sup>rd</sup> to remain in place until May 4<sup>th</sup>. Those orders include closing non-essential businesses and strongly advising that individuals and families essentially shelter in place except for food, pharmacy, medical, and exercise. In keeping with the Governor's Order, we urge residents to continue to do their part individually and as a community by practicing social distancing and family isolation and limiting exposure by only going out for the aforementioned reasons. Town administration will likewise do its part to reduce the spread of this virus. Like our schools, all municipal buildings will also remain closed to the public until May 4<sup>th</sup>. We have put staffing plans in place for town employees that reduce exposure yet enable us to provide critical emergency services and maintain continuity of essential operations to ensure that the needs of our vulnerable populations are met. Many of our employees are working reduced hours in municipal buildings and working from home the remainder of the time, as ordered by the Governor, completing work remotely. Town administration continues to meet, remotely whenever possible, with department heads and division heads to coordinate efforts and to develop new strategies to implement as we advance through this public health crisis. Those essential employees who must report to work in a municipal facility practice social distancing, frequent hand washing, and constant sanitizing of work spaces.

In the coming days, the Town will be discussing the potential and likely delay of the Annual Town Meeting in light of State legislation that the Governor signed into law on Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, which provides municipal relief for various deadlines, fees and fines, including more flexible laws regarding Town Meeting deadline. We will keep the public apprised of any new measures that the Town takes in accordance with this new law as we work with Town Counsel and our Board of Selectmen to implement its various provisions.

Last Monday the number of confirmed cases in Auburn was 6. A week earlier, there were no confirmed cases. Today there are 18. This rise in cases, while expected and predicted by experts and State

officials, highlights the severity of this pandemic and is a stark reminder that everyone needs to do their part to curb the spread of this virus. Regardless of the number of confirmed cases in Auburn, the public needs to remain vigilant in its efforts, stay at home unless for essential services, sanitize surfaces, wash hands frequently and practice social distancing,

As you know, the current state of affairs with the reporting of this disease and the impact it is having has caused great angst and anxiety amongst many in our communities and across the globe. We want to assure residents that the Town of Auburn has a robust system in place for monitoring Covid-19 and all infectious diseases and will continue to do so for this pandemic and all communicable diseases. The Board of Health is working hard, doing their job and will continue to do so. Again, we urge residents to take all precautions and stay vigilant.

Town administration and the Board of Health remain in daily communication with our local peers and state partners, including public health, emergency management, and the executive branch to stay apprised of developments, new data and new legislation and laws related to Covid-19. Our emergency and essential personnel will continue to work to provide critical services to this community.

We appreciate your cooperation with our actions and Orders to date, and we will continue to work closely with the State for guidance on when it is safe to resume normal operations. In the meantime, your local government officials are here to keep you informed and to help keep you and your families safe. Please keep our emergency responders and essential government employees in your thoughts as we collaboratively battle this pandemic.

Please visit the Town's website for our newly restructured Covid-19 web page at <https://www.auburnguide.com/669/Coronavirus-Health-Alerts>.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie A. Jacobson".

Julie A. Jacobson

Town Manager