

**Hartford Ad Hoc Committee on Coronavirus Response
Preliminary Report
May 4, 2020
Respectfully Submitted to the Selectboard for Review**

INTRODUCTION

On April 3, 2020, the Hartford Ad Hoc Committee on Coronavirus Response convened for the first time. This committee consists of eight members who live or work within the Town of Hartford, two members of the Selectboard, the Town Manager and up to three staff members appointed by the Town Manager. Specifically:

Sue Buckholz, Town Resident
Becky Chollet, Town Resident
Kristi Clemens, Town Resident
Barbara Farnsworth, Town Resident
Martha McDaniel, Town Resident
Deborah Scribner, Town Resident
Becca White, Town Resident
Chuck Wooster, Town Resident
Simon Dennis, Selectboard Member
Dan Fraser, Selectboard Member
Brannon Godfrey, Town Manager
Scott Cooney, Town Employee
Brett Mayfield, Town Employee
Gail Ostrout, Town Employee

Kristi Clemens serves as Committee Chair, Sue Buckholz as Vice Chair, and Simon Dennis as Secretary.

The amended charge of this committee, revised on April 14, 2020, follows:

1. To work with area service providers, State officials and content experts to generate a broad list of strategies for advancing the following four goals:

1. to consider and recommend strategies for slowing the spread of COVID 19,
2. to consider and recommend strategies for supporting the medical professionals to treat the infected,
3. to consider and recommend strategies for preserving Hartford's economy and the businesses, families and individuals that make it up,
4. to consider and recommend strategies for ensuring consistent food supply to Hartford Residents.

2. To take actions to advance the four goal areas listed above that do not obligate staff

time or financial output from the Town, issue official town statements or necessitate or request a change of activities of Hartford Residents.

3. To collaborate with parallel committees and/or delegates from the Towns of Lebanon, Hanover, Norwich or other regional towns to discuss possibilities for regional collaboration.

4. To monitor Hartford's response to the Coronavirus outbreak with regards to the above-mentioned goals.

5. To submit a brief report to the Selectboard to explain recommendations no later than April 30th, 2020.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TAKEN

The Committee readily identified a number of actions and projects that could not wait until the completion of this report, considering the active impact of the pandemic on our community. The Committee as a whole recommended that the Town Manager send a letter to out of state homeowners reiterating the mandate from the State that they self-quarantine for 14 days if coming to Vermont to stay, and that letter was sent within the last two weeks. Additionally, the Committee has committed to create an email list for rapid dissemination of COVID-19 information to Hartford residents using existing Hartford organizations.

In addition, each of the Workgroups identified in the Committee Charge completed significant tasks in the past four weeks.

Workgroup 1: Stop the Spread

- Updated Town website, and infographic about Covid-19
- Created and distributed new poster, "Save Lives Now"
- Created and disseminated "Mask Makers Needed" information
- Solicited, collected, sanitized, packaged, and distributed facemasks (continuing)
- Drafted and commissioned letter to remind returning out-of-state homeowners about quarantine requirements, and provided quarantine resource list
- Recommended that Selectboard fill Deputy Health Officer position ASAP
- Identified volunteers to help with future phases
- Compiling a list of existing email groups of Hartford organizations and associations (in process)

Workgroup 2: Support Medical Professionals

- Considered finding housing for care providers, but found it was not needed at this time.

- Emergency Operations Center has been working tirelessly in this arena. They created a checklist with an additional 18 locations that were brought forward and are checked regularly.

Workgroup 3: Preserve the Economy

- Developed a concise survey to assess the basic needs of Hartford businesses, including: what public support programs are working/not working, how can the Town help your business recover, how long can you operate in this climate? The survey was issued via google forms to over 200 businesses. The subgroup is currently evaluating responses.

Workgroup 4: Food Supply

- Initiated discussion with Resilient Hartford on development of neighborhood captains and community gardens
- Convened partners around providing food to people on vouchers at five hotels in Hartford
- Identified coverage for food supply gaps

COMMITTEE PROPOSALS TO THE SELECTBOARD

Short Term Recommendations

Proposal 1: Designate a Volunteer COVID-19 Communications Officer to organize all pandemic related communications to the town.

Rationale: The Ad Hoc Committee gathered and reviewed the many communication outlets and resources available to community members during this pandemic, and found that the results were overwhelming. A central point of information, or a “hub” should be established to collect, analyze, and disseminate information to Hartford residents in a way that is clear, concise, accessible and timely.

Responsibilities for the COVID-19 Communications Officer include but are not limited to:

- A. Disseminate COVID-19 email update to Hartford residents at least weekly pertaining to:
 - Fed/VT COVID-19 orders/recommendations updates
 - Town/EOC/Town Health Officer updates of services provided to businesses and residents by the Town
 - Recognition of volunteer services provided
 - Financial/food/health resources available to residents
 - Financial resources available to businesses
 - Ways to help - donations, volunteer opportunities

Encourage joining Hartford listserv to stay connected
Encourage signing up for VT Alert
FAQs - ? open questions

- B. At least weekly update of Town website, Facebook, Twitter postings
- C. Propose Town Highway signage, when appropriate
- D. Ensure approval of messages by Town Manager and work collaboratively

Proposal 2. Add responsibilities around food security and continuity to the Town Wellness Coordinator position description to ensure coordination between town, school, and community/faith based resources, while involving local organizations that supply food as their mission.

Rationale: Coordination between these resources has been happening due to pre-existing relationships, but that is not a sustainable model. Attention must be paid to intentionally include the town in those conversations and ensure that resources are coordinated and readily available to Hartford residents in need.

Proposal 3: Encourage all town residents to wear masks in public, and continue to make masks available through volunteer supply.

Rationale: Wearing masks in public is a recommendation of the WHO and CDC, and is critical to stopping the spread of the virus from asymptomatic carriers. The Mask Distribution project started by this ad hoc committee supports this proposal, but as businesses reopen additional guidance and messaging is required about its importance, as well as additional volunteer resources to make masks available to those who may not have them.

Proposal 4: Support proposal to make \$1K-2K loans from its Hartford Business Revolving Loan Fund (HBRLF) and other private funding that are potentially forgivable.

Rationale: This would utilize an existing Hartford resource in an innovative way, based on the success of a similar program in Woodstock.

Long Term Recommendations

Proposal 5: In accordance with recommendations by public health officials, consider performing statistically relevant random COVID-19 antibody testing. Explore collaborations with the State, UVM, DHMC or Dartmouth College if available.

Rationale: Testing for antibodies has been a key consideration of a timeline to reopen parts of the country, including schools and businesses. If there are partners in the region working on this, the town should aggressively volunteer to take part.

Proposal 6: Create official email list for Hartford residents.

Rationale: While there are many different lists that Hartford residents can opt-in to, there is not a central database of all email addresses for town residents. We recognize that this is a large undertaking and will likely always have gaps, but a plan must be made by the town to take this project on.

Proposal 7: Support creation of neighborhood “hubs” with “captains”, collaborating with Resilient Hartford.

Rationale: This collaboration has already begun, and the project would be sustained by adding maintenance of this project to the Town Wellness Coordinator position. In addition to establishing community and a way to rapidly respond to local needs, these hubs could assist with development of “high needs” neighborhoods lists as well as add data to the official email list in Proposal 6.

Proposal 8: Establish communication for long-term recovery supports with business/property owner groups such as the Hartford Development Corporation.

Rationale: We recognize that the short-term business loans and grants may assist businesses now, but the economic impact of this pandemic will likely be felt in our community for a long time. Collaborating with town organizations already committed to this work is a smart partnership.

Proposal 9: Support work with Resilient Hartford or other entity on expanded food production with utilization of community gardens in Hartford parks or other options.

Rationale: It has become apparent over the past two months that the national food supply chain is easily disrupted by events such as a global pandemic. Vermont has a unique opportunity to leverage our agricultural history and culture by working with local groups and farmers to create community gardens throughout Hartford that can create a local food supply accessible to all.

Proposal 10: Monitor mask need and usage, and if necessary, consider funding mask production, preferably by local mask-makers, for distribution to all residents.

Rationale: As discussed in Proposal 3, mask wearing is a critical component to stopping the spread and it is likely to be a part of our lives for some time. The town should commit to having masks available for distribution at all times, as even the reusable masks will wear out over time.

Proposal 11: Develop creative fundraising for loan program and other economic first aid ideas.

Rationale: It is clear that these unusual times will require unusual and creative solutions. The Town should support innovation and creative problems solving for local businesses and residents whenever possible.

Proposal 12: Recommend Communications Director for the Town as a new staff position, or as additional responsibility to an existing staff position.

Rationale: Many of our suggestions and considerations came back to a central question- who is responsible for communicating to town residents and how do we ensure that message is clear and widely distributed? The current model of having each town director communicate about initiatives or resources known to their area is not a best practice. We believe having one person responsible for coordinating all town messaging is critical to community building and accessing resources. The volunteer COVID-19 communications director recommended in Proposal 1 is a short term solution to a broader problem that must be addressed by the town.

THE PATH FORWARD

The HADCCR is committed to continuing our work to support the Town of Hartford as the crisis evolves. As the economy reopens, we will begin to see new gaps in the fabric of our community such as needs for housing, finances, and food. We will also need to keep an eye to local and national forecasts on rates of spread and infection. The existing workgroups as well as the entire committee will be flexible to meet these needs to the best of our ability and continue to send proposals to the Selectboard as necessary.

We have identified a new workgroup to focus on the long-term impacts on individuals within our community, tentatively called the Family and Individual Economic Health subgroup. This group will focus on resident resilience in many facets- including financial, emotional, and social needs.