

From the Desk of the Mayor – April 19, 2020

With the constantly changing landscape of today's times, I wanted to give some details on how the City of Carterville has responded to the changes brought about by the pandemic. This is a long update and I don't expect everyone will want to read it. So first, I will start with a timeline on how the City responded through the Executive Orders and then overview each department.

Timeline:

March 13, 2020: Governor Pritzker announced all Illinois public and private K-12 schools were closing through March 30, 2020. After the release of this Executive Order, Carterville City Hall started implementing considerations for social distancing while City Hall remained open.

March 16, 2020: Governor Pritzker announced the mandatory closing of restaurants and bars through March 30, 2020. Another part of this Executive Order was barring public gatherings of 50 or more. Because of this order, the City cancelled all reservations at the Carterville Community Center during the timeframe ordered by the Governor.

March 19, 2020: Governor Pritzker announced a sales tax deferment program for bars and restaurants affected by the mandated closure. When this occurred, I met with the management personnel of City Hall, Water and Sewer Office, Public Works, Fire Department, and Police Department. Each manager was directed to limit/eliminate overtime and have all purchases approved through the Mayor's Office. The cost saving procedures and a full-time hiring freeze were implemented because of the City's reliance on sales tax revenue for operational funding. With the projected drop in sales of those restaurants remaining open and their ability to defer sales tax payments, I expected these factors to decrease future City sales tax revenues. Another cost saving piece of work that began on March 19th was reevaluating the 10 hour shifts of the Police Department.

March 20, 2020: Governor Pritzker announced the stay at home Executive Order, which also mandated the closure of non-essential businesses. After the release of this order, Carterville City Hall, Carterville Water and Sewer Office, Police Department, and Fire Department all closed to the public. Access to the offices was by appointment only and very limited. In the following days, the City implemented screening processes to further protect the City employees. Screenings consist of questions about recent travel, specific health symptoms, and taking a temperature. Another component of the Executive Order from March 20th was the mandated closure of playground equipment. In response, the City closed the playground equipment at Cannon Park and James Street Park. At this time, we also cancelled the reservations at the Cannon Park Pavilion and Gazebo.

Departments:

POLICE: The Chief and Officers of the Carterville Police Department have worked very closely and positively with the Mayor's Office since my no overtime order on March 19th. Because the 10 hour shift schedule caused the need for overtime, the officers created a 12 hour shift schedule model that eliminated overtime and cut down on part-time officer hours. The 12 hour schedule began on April 1, 2020 and has been working well. The officers are also being issued PPE and the corresponding training to increase their level of safety during direct interactions with the public.

FIRE: Our Fire Department also provides Paramedic Ambulance coverage as well as fire and rescue services. The ambulances have been busy and the staff have been very cautious with screening all patients for risk factors of COVID-19 and appropriately using PPE. With our Fire Department only having 5 full-time staff and limited part-time personnel, the safety of our FD/EMS staff is paramount to maintain emergency medical coverage during the pandemic.

Since the PD and FD are 24/7 operations, any time off will generate overtime. Both Police and Fire are not currently being granted benefit time off work, which is requiring the staff be very flexible and covering each other for necessary time away from work. This is a sacrifice for our emergency personnel and I greatly appreciate it!

PARKS: Mowing has begun and the parks remain open with the exceptions of the playground equipment, skate park, and gatherings at the pavilions or gazebo. When using/recreating at the parks, please exercise social distancing by staying at least 6 feet away from others.

STREETS: The Street Department continues working on road and drainage issues. Please notify City Hall of any issues but be patient with us during these difficult times. The Street Dept. currently has two full-time staff and we are trying to meet all the needs. The 2020 Motor Fuel Tax (MFT) program was approved in the April Council Meeting. MFT funds are federal and are earmarked for specific roadwork, so the expected decrease in sales tax revenue has no impact on continuing the MFT program.

WATER: The Water Department and the contractors have completed the construction phase of the Ward 1 Waterline Project. The contractors are currently making the concrete repairs from the road, curb, and sidewalk cuts made to facilitate the waterline installations. After the concrete repairs are complete, they will transition over to the dirt work and yard restorations.

SEWER: Over the past year and a half, the Sewer Department employees have made great strides to improve our aging wastewater treatment plant and this work continues during the pandemic. We will participate in a teleconference with the Illinois EPA in early May to discuss our aging plant's deficiencies and how to best proceed on our plans to build a new wastewater treatment plant in the future.

WATER AND SEWER OFFICE: The office staff continue the daily operations of the Carterville Water and Sewer Department. The office is closed to the public but they are available through the website, phone, email, or the outside dropbox. The Governor directed the Illinois Commerce Commission to ban all Illinois utilities from disconnecting services or charging late fees during the term of the Executive Order. Since we are a utility provider, this directive applies to the Water and Sewer Department. There are exceptions like theft of services and a few other circumstances. If there are any questions about disconnections, late fees, or any other billing or service issues, please contact the Water and Sewer Office at 618-985-2011. I have also received questions about waiving the convenience fee attached to online water and sewer bill payments. Unfortunately, we have no control over the online convenience fee. This fee is placed on all the transactions by the vendor used to provide the online payments.

The Carterville Water and Sewer Department is not governed by the City Council. They have a separate Water and Sewer Board. The Water and Sewer Board consists of three appointed members and they make all operational and strategic decisions for those departments. The Water and Sewer Board members are John Gieselman (chairperson), Mark Bollmann, and Carl Sisk.

CITY HALL: The office staff of City Hall are also maintaining continuity of operations. We did cancel the Council Committee Meetings back on April 1, 2020 but held our City Council Meeting on April 14th by teleconference. The City Hall staff are also encouraging phone, email, website, or the dropbox to do business with the staff. We also encourage the use of the Carterville 311 smartphone application to communicate with your elected officials and to report problems. Anytime there are changes in operations from COVID-19 or any other reason, we will update the public by using the City's website, Nixle text notifications, the Carterville 311 app, and the City of Carterville Facebook page. City Hall is also coordinating with the Carterville United Food Pantry and other groups to assist those in need during these difficult times. Anyone that has a need for food or baby supplies, please feel free to contact City Hall.

I also wanted to elaborate on the recent vote about the Independence Day Fireworks Display for 2020. The display and associated costs were previously approved in the March City Council meeting. I placed the item back on the agenda for reconsideration because the deferment of sales tax and closure of "non-essential" businesses all occurred after the March Council meeting. With the 50% down payment pending on the \$9000 fireworks bill, the time to reconsider was upon us. Since the state pays the local units of government their share of sales taxes about three months behind, we will just begin to know the economic damage caused by the pandemic in June and July. With all of the unknowns, including a possible extension of the stay at home order, I did not want to be in a position to furlough or layoff employees while shooting off thousands of dollars in fireworks. Also, the Mayor only votes during Council Meetings in order to break tie votes, which has only happened three times in my seven years as Mayor. My tie-breaking vote on April 14th was purely a financial decision based on the fiscal unknowns for the City in the coming months.

I want to stress how difficult it was for me to cast the deciding vote to cancel the fireworks display. I have been a part of the fireworks display, minus a few years, since 1992. Even as Mayor, I continue to help the Fire Department set up and shoot the display and I wanted to be out there on the Fourth of July!

Finally, I cannot explain how grateful and appreciative I am of the citizens of Carterville. I have received many more positive messages than negative. The generosity and willingness to help others displayed in Carterville, especially during times of crisis, never ceases to amaze me! I am also very proud of the employees of the City of Carterville. It would all fall apart without them, and I hope they know how much I appreciate them.

If anyone has any questions for me, feel free to call the Mayor's Office at 618-985-2700 or send an email to brobinson@visitcarterville.com.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bradley Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end.