



Civic Engagement in the Coronavirus Era

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Now, more than ever, we as public administrators need to be aware of the need to engage our residents, businesses, and elected officials. The coronavirus epidemic has taken our county hold and forced a temporary semi-shutdown of our schools, city halls, public buildings, restaurants, and other non-essential businesses. Who knows when things will go back to being “normal”?

In driving to work today down the backroads of Greenville, Brunswick, and Nottoway counties to primarily work on preparing the town’s FY21 budget, I thought more and more about the era we are living in and how civic engagement is paramount in these uncertain times. Citizens need timely, relevant, and accurate information to keep themselves, as well as their families, neighbors, and co-workers safe. Since many, if not most, of our local government buildings are now closed to the public, providing services and information to citizens through in-direct means is essential.

Being able to continue providing services when town hall doors are closed to the public requires a great deal of communication and engagement with our residents and businesses. Conducting business and providing information through social media and the internet is now a stone-cold reality and will continue to be into the future. In fact, many localities are conducting virtual meetings on-line in an effort to both provide transparency and comply with open meetings laws. The Virginia Municipal League has provided information to localities on how to conduct these virtual meetings through Facebook Live and YouTube. In addition, while most localities already communicate with residents via Facebook, Instagram, etc., doing so is even more important during these times.

I encourage you to use these communication and other social media resources in thinking through how to interact with your residents and businesses during these challenging times. Please be kind to each other and safe out there!