Q. What is the status of the assistance offered to residents and small business in Framingham?

A. Kevin Shea, Development Director, City of Framingham provided updates for both programs: small business grant program and emergency housing assistance. 26 Framingham businesses have received assistance with an increase in applications over the past week. 39 Framingham residents received emergency housing assistance to help pay for rent and utilities with an increase of applications being submitted. An additional $319,000 of funding through the CaresAct is expected to continue to fund these programs.

Q. What is the status of the PPP loans?

A. Bruce Miccile, Senior Vice President Commercial Banking, Middlesex Savings Bank, provided updates on the PPP loans. SBA stopped taking application on August 8th. Although many banks had stopped taking them before that date. He also said they was a little money left over but was not exactly sure how much.

Q. Some employers who brought people back onto the payroll utilizing PPP funds are now finding they need to layoff again because their business levels are not where they expected. What advice do you have for them? Furlough vs, layoff? Process to avoid legal issues?

A. Employers are certainly entitled to make decisions based on the legitimate business conditions they are currently facing as a result of the pandemic. When a business does not have sufficient work to keep its employees busy, it may decide to conduct a layoff. When a layoff occurs, the employment relationship between the company and the employee is terminated. Generally, when an individual’s employment ends, neither the laid off employee nor the company expect the laid off employee to later return to his/her employment with the company. A furlough is similar to a layoff in that it is implemented when a business does not have sufficient work for its employees. However, unlike a layoff, when an employee is furloughed, his/her employment with the company is not terminated. Rather, when furloughed, the company places the employee on a temporary leave of absence with the expectation that it will recall the employee at a date in the foreseeable future to resume his/her duties.

I would encourage members to refer to a prior blog post I wrote on the topic which outlines certain considerations when deciding whether to furlough or lay off employees.

Q. What updates are there for schools reopening and new guidance from the Baker Administration?
A. Sam Wong, Health Director, City of Framingham responded. The Baker Administration has provided more guidance and metrics with regards to cases per town/city across Massachusetts. Those numbers can help schools and municipalities plan for different schooling scenarios. Remote, Hybrid (remote and in-person), and in-person options were discussed. Mr. Wong stressed the importance of following the guidelines and evaluating what plan to put in place. The color-coded map provided by the administration shows different schooling options depending on case count. The challenge continues to be providing support for those underserved populations that depend on assistance for food, technology, emotional support, and child care. Mr. Wong encourages communities to use the time to implement proper safety plans while reviewing metrics and case counts.

Mr. Wong commented on the definition of gathering and capacity at venues. Outdoor gatherings have been reduced to 50 and indoor gatherings to 25. Private gatherings are subject to the same guidelines and can be enforced. There will be a response to complaints received by the authorities to make sure guidance is followed. Masks are now required for any gathering of over 10, regardless of social distancing.

Mr. Wong also mentioned the stakeholders meetings will take place in Framingham to review the our collective experience of the pandemic during the past few months to learn from mistakes and what to do differently if a second wave hits in the fall with flu season and colder weather approaching. Mr. Wong stressed the importance of adequate PPE to have for hospitals/caretakers that was severely lacking at the beginning of the pandemic.