Q. **How are the vaccines and delivery going to affect consumer confidence during the pandemic?**

Answer by Sam Wong, Director of Public Health, City of Framingham.

First, Mr. Wong mentioned that 4 companies are in Phase 3 of trials. FDA is reportedly looking to require clinical trials to be performed on severely ill patients and seniors and possible reason is to boost confidence of the safety of the vaccines. The population needs to feel confident that the vaccines are safe. Good news is that the vaccine will be safe, the bad news is that the vaccine may take longer to get to the public. Without knowing the details, vaccines would probably not get to the general population until later next year. Cases will continue to occur and unfortunately an increase in cases is more likely. Flu vaccines are important to help medical professionals focus efforts on COVID patients. The entire community needs to work together to help mitigate the virus and increase testing. Contact tracing is still being performed throughout MetroWest. Social distancing needs to continue and wearing masks. Mr. Wong wanted to emphasize that the communities are diligently doing contact tracing and people should get tested for any symptoms. Testing is important.

Q. **What are some employment traps to be aware of?**

Answered by Brian Casaceli, Employment Attorney, Mirick O’Connell

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has advised that employers who are concerned about an employee’s health being jeopardized upon returning to the workplace are not permitted to involuntarily exclude the employee from the workplace simply because the individual has a disability that may make him/her more susceptible for a severe illness if the employee contracts COVID-19. This is true even if the employer is acting with a benevolent intent. There is a limited exception to this rule, but it can be difficult to satisfy. Similarly, employers cannot involuntarily exclude employees from the workplace to protect the employee based on the fact that the employee may be 65 or older and could be susceptible to a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act – which provides Earned Paid Sick Leave and Emergency Family and Medical Leave – applies to employers with fewer than 500 employees. This is a different threshold than the Family and Medical Leave Act, which only applies to employers with 50 or more employees within a 75-mile radius.”

Q. **Has current PPP Funding been spent?**

Answered by Bruce Miccile, VP Middlesex Savings Bank.

Current funding has been spent and no new funding has been passed through legislation. Six month deferment has been extended to 10 months for repaying the loan. Payback period extended to 5 years. PPP funding has ended for now but EIDL loans are still an option for businesses.

Q. **Clarification on funding at the local level?**

Answered by Kevin Shea, Development Director, City of Framingham

City of Framingham has been awarded second round of Cares Act funding. Receiving 2 to 3 applications a day. Emergency housing assistance still continuing for residents with help with rent and utilities. Small business assistance still available through the City.