Q. With PPP funds ending and businesses evaluating staffing levels, how should employers handle potential layoffs?

A. Answered by Brian Casaceli, Employment Attorney, Mirick O’Connell. Employers conducting layoffs might want to consider offering a severance package to employees in exchange for the employees’ agreement to release any and all claims they may have against the company. In order to be effective, a release of claims must comply with certain requirements under federal and state law so it is a good idea to involve employment counsel when preparing the agreement. A properly executed severance agreement can be a benefit to both the company and the employee. (Note: companies are not required to provide severance to departing employees.)

On the day of the employee’s termination of employment, the company must provide the employee with all wages the employee has earned, but which have not yet been paid. In addition, the employee must be paid all accrued, unused vacation time. The company must also provide the employee with information concerning how to file for unemployment benefits which can be found here. The company should further contact their health insurance broker to notify it of the employment termination(s). These rules apply to both exempt and non-exempt employees.

For companies with unions, ensure compliance with the applicable provisions of the collective bargaining agreement.

Q. What is the status of a safe vaccine?

A. Sam Wong, Health Director City of Framingham. Seven or eight manufacturers are in Phase 3 of clinical trials. Those companies are ensuring the safety of the vaccine. The public should feel confident that these companies are following all safety standards for a safe vaccine. There may be a segment of the population who can’t take the vaccine and it is important that the public feels that the vaccine is safe so that those who can take will help control the virus through herd immunity.

Q. Can fall sports be safe for children?

A. Answered by Sam Wong, Health Director City of Framingham. In those communities in the white, yellow, and green zones, some fall sports could be safe with precautions. Framingham is still a red community and could be remote until January, affecting fall sports.

Mr. Wong emphasized the importance of refraining from social gatherings at this time. Public officials are discouraging any gatherings in red communities due to the high numbers of positive cases. We will not know the affect of Labor Day weekend until 1 to 2 weeks from now.

Q. Are there any updates on air quality guidance?

A. Answered by Sam Wong, Health Director City of Framingham. Mr. Wong encourages businesses to consult with HVAC companies to evaluate current systems. If upgrades are too expensive,
other guidelines is just as important. Including social distancing, limiting customers inside a building, masks, and hand washing.

Q. What is the status of assistance in the City of Framingham?

A. Answered by Kevin Shea, Economic Development, City of Framingham. The City of Framingham continues to offer assistance to residents and small businesses. The goal is to provide immediate assistance, however long term assistance needs to be considered, from the federal level to help businesses. Local support could include permitting help, etc.