

Moving On . . .

Friends,

As I write this, it's early April. Our lives have been profoundly upended by the coronavirus. The hard question to answer is, "How did this transformative change happen so completely?" I can identify a forty-eight hour period between March 11 and Friday, March 13. Those two days were filled with new, jarring revelations and self-awareness that my family's life was changing dramatically. The disruption to my life flowed just as easily throughout Manchester, too. Our wonderful neighborhoods, streets, churches, and schools were suddenly different. All before our very eyes!

From that transformation, City government and City programs have morphed into empty buildings, courts and playgrounds. In spite of the new emptiness, City life and work has moved on with skill and smarts. Today, many staff work from home, remotely answering cell phones and working on City laptops. The new outcome of isolation and distancing seems demoralizing, but offers opportunities for creative approaches and new ideas. The power of disruption can often be positive.

As I read the newspapers and watch local news, there is a constant fixation on failure or a new, greater crisis level. The tone is shrill. It seems there are few things that local governments, communities, or active neighborhoods, are doing to bring positive affirmation, much less recognition. "Doing good things" doesn't attract much attention.

This column is my way of telling you that communities and their governments are doing good things. Their staffs are doing good things, too. In spite of a myriad of restrictions and closures, Manchester's response to a "Stay Home Order" continues to show strength and resolve in how we approach governing 18,000+ residents. City programming and activities have changed in positive, often-loving ways and in spite of the virus' stifling impact on local life, forward progress, creativity and inventive energy abound. We are Moving On!

I received e-mail from our City Parks Director on Friday evening, March 13. She requested a meeting with the City Administrator and me for early Monday morning. She wanted to seek our consensus to close down all City Parks programming. Manchester has a huge program of activities for most all age groups. This time of year, though, we host a lot of senior adult fitness,

leisure, games and arts activities. Activities for seniors are critical to that population's mental, physical and social well-being. I'm in that demographic. Thinking of our loss made, for me, an anxious weekend.

At Monday morning's meeting, we decided to opt for safety and shut down all programming. But, we also decided to embark on a unique approach to announce the programs' closure. What did we do? Parks staff talked individually with each of the day's participants. As seniors came in for their card games or fitness classes, staff shared the sad, closure news, explaining honestly why the City was eliminating their programs. The intent was to insure each class participant was respected and felt informed as their time together was ending. Staff assured all that they would be missed and committed to calling each participant regularly. That dialogue between class members and staff continues today. Out of closure, a host of new Parks programs have evolved through new, online activities. Some seniors have learned to use Facebook, just to take online classes, working out in their homes!

This story of staff interacting in an extraordinary way makes me very, very proud of their respect for those they serve. Big hearts were on view that day and throughout that week. I see those same hearts working today, too. Thank-you Parks staff.

Moving On means connecting in new ways. It means delivering expected critical services, as well as imagining new programs and activities for all ages. It also means maintaining the relationships, even when physical classes are closed. The day will come soon when our restrictions are lifted, our class participants will return to their beloved activities with Parks staff. Their hugs will be strong!

City government, while some days managed by minimal staff, continues to push forward all those critical community needs that make Manchester a special City:

- Our Police Officers are out on the streets every day. There has been no disruption in their patrolling. Greater care is now taken to eliminate physical crossover between shifts. They wear protective garb and masks when needed. They still share kindness, are busy, and will still save us!
- Public Works (PW) men are working on streets and sidewalks needs. They spend more time these days cleaning, disinfecting buildings and

facilities. The City has broken PW staff into two shifts, eliminating shift overlap. Our (Prop S) street repairs have begun going maximum pace. We have lots of streets and sidewalks to be fixed this year. It will all get done.

- Code Enforcement is out on our streets monitoring properties, yards and businesses. The aesthetics of Manchester need to be maintained. Staff's role today tilts toward providing assistance and information. They avoid contact with us, but communicate using door hangers, phone calls and e-mails. Let's maintain our properties.
- Our Finance and Administration teams, while keeping different hours and working from different sites, pay bills, monitor monthly financials, host outside auditors and will soon begin prepping for the task of building the 2021 budget.

I could talk so much more about what's going on in Manchester. From this short, but significant list, trust that City government, while disbursed and restricted is responding in new and creative ways. While the virus is here, the work is getting done. The City has found ways to keep Moving On! Never doubt it!

Thank-you City staff for being awesome in this time of the coronavirus!

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