

# Township Officials of Illinois COVID-19 Pandemic Update



2020 transferred from a year of promise and expectations of success to a year of uncertainty and despair as well as uncharted areas in what we call normal. Illinois Townships are impacted directly by the COVID-19 virus and together efforts are underway to begin to work in the best way we can to ensure the work of townships continues across the state and that we slow the spread of the virus.

On **May 1, 2020**, Governor J. B. Pritzker issued a series of additional directives and executive orders outlining the states position on addressing the pandemic of COVID-19 and its impact on the state of Illinois. Township Government is required to comply and enforce these directives to the best of their ability.

These are new, trying, and innovative times for everyone. Life as we knew it prior to the pandemic is changed for a while. We are asking that townships embrace the recommendations and safety precautions provided by health care professionals and look at ways township government in your communities can respond in a positive way to assist everyone in understanding these new options for public gatherings and meetings to conduct business and perform the statutorily required services on all units of local government.

The Governor's 5 phase plan of opening the state back up includes a 28-day interval of compliance prior to moving through to phase 5 that is a full recovery.

[GUBERNATORIAL DISASTER PROCLAMATION](#)

[EXECUTIVE ORDERS AND RULES](#)

[RESTORE ILLINOIS INFORMATION](#)

The Township Officials of Illinois has provided an update on some common questions and topics we have discovered moving through these unpredictable times. We have dedicated a page on our website to COVID-19 updates. Additionally, we have provided email distributions to our

members and interested guests on topics related to local government and its response to the pandemic.

## **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM SPRINGFIELD**

This past week, the Illinois General Assembly returned to Springfield for what is being called a SPECIAL SESSION. The agenda was condensed, and the intention was to comply with social distancing requirements, the Illinois State Senate met in the House Chambers at the State Capital and the Members of the House of Representatives met in the BOS Conference center. In addition to security check points, temperatures were monitored and PPE was distributed where needed.

**HB 2096** Passed the Illinois General Assembly on May 22, 2020. This bill amends the Township Code. Provides that, if the Governor declares a disaster under the Illinois Emergency Management Agency Act and the disaster declaration is effective during the dates designated for a township's annual meeting, a township board may postpone the annual meeting to the third Tuesday, after 6 p.m., of the month following the end of the disaster declaration if circumstances related to the disaster declaration prevent a township from holding its annual meeting.

Additionally, makes any stimulus payment not subject to the earned income reported for General Assistance eligibility.

To view the bill language click here [HB2096](#)

**SB 2135** (House Amendment #5) adopted language that established rules for public meetings held by audio or video conference capability.

To view the language click here [SB2135](#)

Both bills are on the Governor's desk awaiting signature. Executive Director Bryan Smith issued a letter urging Governor Pritzker to support and sign the legislation as soon as possible.

## **STATUS ON THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

As we reported in April, the Annual Town meeting is required to be held (with exceptions for Passover) on the second Tuesday in April annually.

After working with legal representatives from the Governor's office we secured the official suspension (by executive order) of the meeting due to the compliance directives with social distancing. The meeting was not cancelled but suspended. This suspension in no way impacts regular township board meetings.

## **THE FUTURE PLANS THAT WE KNOW**

The ability of a local government (Township) to hold a regular monthly scheduled meeting has been left up to each individual local government entity. They may have in-person meetings if social distancing guidelines are enforced. Those guidelines require social distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals attending the meeting. The township may need to reduce the room capacity limit to ensure minimum distance can be maintained. The number of individuals able to attend is limited to 10. Remember that townships may NOT prohibit the public from attending a township board meeting. These are public meetings and even under social distancing guidelines are open to the public under the Open Meetings Act.

The Executive Order defines Essential Government Functions as all services provided by State or any municipal, TOWNSHIP, county, subdivision or agency of government and needed to ensure the continuing operation of government agencies or to provide for or support the health, safety, and welfare of the public, and including contractors, performing Essential Government Functions. Each government body shall determine its Essential Governmental Function and identify employees and / or contractors necessary to the performance of those functions.

We are entering PHASE 3 designated as the RECOVERY stage. The rate of infection among those tested, the number of patients admitted to the hospital, and the number of patients needing ICU beds is stable or declining. Manufacturing, offices, retail, barbershops and salons can reopen to the public with capacity and other limits and safety precautions. All gatherings are limited to 10 individuals or fewer. Face coverings and social distancing are the norm for the time being.

#### **ARE YOU REQUIRED TO POST MEETING AGENDAS?**

None of the meeting posting requirements have been suspended. You are still required to post meeting agendas to provide notice of your budget hearing and adoption of the budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

#### **HOLDING TOWNSHIP MEETINGS ELECTRONICALLY: RECOMMENDED SIMPLE STEPS**

*These are recommended practices and not governed by statute. These are TOI interpretative guidelines from working with elected township officials in various capacities through the pandemic to comply with the directives and Executive Orders issued by the Governor's office.*

1. The Supervisor should contact the board members to poll support for holding the meeting electronically. We recommend that boards do what works best for them.
2. The method of holding the meeting electronically should be determined. Some recommendations are ZOOM or ConferenceCall.com. You may also connect by phone if transfer capabilities are provided with your current phone service provider.
3. Determine the meeting agenda and post the agenda as required for regularly scheduled township meetings.
4. You are required to provide the agenda 48 hours in advance, and you may **not** exclude the public from attending a meeting.

5. Have the Clerk of the Township record the minutes and refer to the structure of the meeting that was adopted prior by the entire board. Remember that these minutes are your record of what transpired.

### **WHAT TO DO IF A MEETING ELECTRONICALLY IS NOT AN OPTION**

If your township determines that a meeting is just not an option, TOI recommends that you institute steps to make sure that bills are paid accordingly. The directives of the executive orders do not impact a townships ability to pay bills and allow a “business as usual” format to keep paperwork and services operational as best possible. The intent of the orders is to prevent the spread of the virus not halt the day to day operations of local government.

Our **best practice recommendation** is to adopt a plan that lets your township get the important functions at hand completed. Most likely this will involve payment of bills. Remember that this is all new and there are not previous experiences to assist in finding the best resolve. We must adapt and complete that task before us the best way possible. Remembering that you are a public entity and that the public must be involved by appropriate notice on the actions and activities of the township.

### **HAS YOUR TOWNSHIP ADOPTED A COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN?**

The Township Officials of Illinois recommends that you adopt a Response Plan to help not only the Township board but your residents as to what you are planning to do as we re-open the State of Illinois. The services provided vary from the different regions of the state. As we start to introduce larger gatherings of individuals there will be social distancing expectations that can be outlined in an effort to eliminate confusion.

TOI recommends that you look at ways to distance or provide clear screens in your public access areas as individuals come into the townships office seeking the services offered by the township. This may involve purchasing PPE supplies for individuals to use as they are in your offices seeking assistance or requesting services. We support listening to public health professionals and adopting their guided practices into our daily operations as suggested.

### **FUTURE AVAILABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY TOI**



**FREE EDUCATION EVENT on JUNE 17, 2020 (ZOOM MEETING)**

On June 17, 2020 TOI is providing a condensed version of the educational district meeting that was cancelled in March of this year. It is our hope that you will consider participating in this ZOOM meeting. We are anticipating that you will work with us to sample this new technology opportunity to determine how it works for you our members. The agenda for this program is below. Registration information and links will be provided below and on our website at [www.toi.org](http://www.toi.org).

[LINK TO VIRTUAL EVENT AGENDA JUNE 17, 2020](#)

[LINK TO REGISTER FOR EVENT](#)

Visit our website at [www.toi.org](http://www.toi.org) for updated information and a schedule of upcoming webinars. We continue to offer educational opportunities for our members and look forward to serving your program needs as we get through this new normal.

**Below is the list of guidelines and toolkits for businesses allowed to re-open in Phase 3:**

*These are provided by the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity*

- [Common Guidelines for all Phase 3 Businesses and Operations](#)
- [Toolkit for Manufacturing](#)
- [Toolkit for Health and Fitness Centers](#)
- [Toolkit for Offices](#)
- [Toolkit for Personal Care Services](#)
- [Toolkit for Retail Businesses](#)
- [Toolkit for Service Counters](#)
- [Toolkit for Youth Sports](#)
- [Toolkit for Restaurants & Bars](#)
- [Guidelines for Outdoor Recreation](#)
- [Guidelines for Day Camps](#)

DCEO is available to assist with inquiries regarding the new guidelines by phone at (800) 252-2923 or by email at [ceo.support@illinois.gov](mailto:ceo.support@illinois.gov).

