

TOWN OF CLINTON

Adopting and Managing the Town Budget During COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions

As of April 1, 2020

This document has been put together to help inform the public of how Governor Lamont's Executive Orders have impacted the operation of municipal services and public meetings. The Governor's Executive Orders are not optional and required action by all cities and towns in the state. *As new Executive Orders are issued that impact municipal services, this document will be updated.*

The primary motivation in the Governor's Executive Orders has been to reduce the amount of face-to-face meetings and potential for contact that could spread the COVID-19 virus. Social distancing practices are being balanced against the traditional approach to governance in Connecticut's cities and towns.

As of this date, Governor Lamont has issued 18 Executive Orders. All of the Executive Orders can be found on the State of Connecticut's website.

<https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/Pages/Emergency-Orders-issued-by-the-Governor-and-State-Agencies>

Additionally, the Governor's Office has produced a Frequently Asked Questions on all of the State's actions (as of March 31, 2020), which can be found here:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Coronavirus/COVID-19-FAQs.pdf?la=en>

WHAT DO THE GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDERS MEAN FOR THE TOWN OF CLINTON AND THE FY 2020-2021 BUDGET?

1. PUBLIC MEETINGS AND TOWN BUDGET ADOPTION

The single largest change to town operations has come from a few Executive Orders which impact how local governments conduct in-person meetings and how the public can remain involved in the local decision-making process. Budget adoption is the most significant change, but it impacts all regular public meetings.

- a) **Executive Order 7B – Suspension of In-Person Meeting Requirements:** Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7B addressed the steps to be taken by local governments when social distancing practices result in suspending traditional "In-Person Open Meeting Requirements." Electronic or remote meetings (via conference call, videoconference or other technology) are allowed in lieu of in-person meetings. It is important to note that electronic meetings are meant to assure transparency and efforts to provide the public with information and opportunity participate remotely.
- b) **Executive Order 7C – Extension of Municipal Budget Adoption Deadlines:** Executive Order 7C extended all municipal budget deadlines "that fall on any date prior to and including May 15, 2020" for the preparation of the municipal budget by 30 days.
- c) **Executive Order 7I - Suspension of "In-Person" Budget Adoption Requirements for Municipalities:** Section 13 of Executive Order 7I suspends the "in-person" requirements for purposes of adopting the FY 2020-2021 municipal budget and setting the mill rate. As a result, the "in-person" voting requirements in Clinton's Charter such as annual town meeting and budget referendum are suspended for only for the FY 2020-2021 budget. The Town's "budget-making authority" or Town Council is authorized to adopt the budget and set the mill rate.

However, the Town Council is not to act in a vacuum. The Executive Order maintains a requirement for public participation. The Town Council is required to "...take all reasonable steps to publicize the draft municipal budget and to receive public comment." That requirement includes:

- Publication of draft budgets on the website.
- Providing an email address or other means where the public can submit timely comments on the proposed budget.
- The requirements of Executive Order 7B additionally require remote public budget meetings and hearings (by conference call, videoconference or other technology).

- d) **What is Clinton Doing?** In Clinton, the Town Council acted to extend the submission of

the budget to a public hearing by 30 days. The Budget Public Hearing was regularly scheduled for April 8, 2020, but moved to May 6, 2020. The Town's budget adoption calendar remains the same in as much as the Town Council will hold a public hearing on the Town Council's Proposed Budget. The Budget will be published in the local newspaper and made available on the Town's website. The hearing will be held electronically to allow for public participation and for the Council to receive the benefit of public input on the budget for FY 2020-2021.

Following the public hearing, the Town Council may amend the budget – as has been done previously. Under the Governor's Executive Order, the Town Council is required to adopt a budget and set the mill rate at a separate public meeting.

2. BOARD OF EDUCATION FUNDING AND PAYMENTS

One of the early steps at social distancing that was taken was to cancel classes at all public schools (Executive Order 7C). Boards of Education had an obligation to develop plans for alternate education of students or distance learning. Additionally, Clinton School, like others, maintained the school lunch program to distribute pick-up box lunches for students in need.

a) **Executive Order 7R – Continuation of Funding for Boards of Education/Continuation of Payment of Public School Staff/Preservation of Student Transportation Services and Special Education Providers:** Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7R addresses existing approved budgets for the balance of FY 2019-2020 that are supported by state and municipal funding. Specifically, this Order does the following:

- Continues State funding for schools under such grants as Education Cost Sharing (ECS) and payments for special education excess costs.
- Requires municipalities to continue providing funding to local boards of education as set forth in approved budgets.
- Requires school districts to continue to employ education staff or restore staff to employment if already laid off.
- Provides for the ability to amend transportation contracts and special education provider contracts to pay for actual costs incurred with active employees and sustaining services when school resumes.

In Clinton, as with other Boards of Education, there may be a reduction in budgeted spending levels for education that as a result of changing operations due to COVID-19. With Executive Order 7R, that reduction in spending would be determined at the end of the fiscal year and any excess would be returned to the Town.