

## **Community Meeting concerning Ordinance #2020-19 Civil Emergencies**

**September 10, 2020 4pm**

**EOC IC Karl Hagerman's presentation as requested by the Assembly:**

### **WHY DO WE NEED AN EMERGENCY ORDINANCE?**

As mentioned in the past, the basis of the need for an emergency ordinance is found in the Intent and Purpose of the proposed ordinance.

"3.72.010 It is the intent and purpose of this chapter to provide for the efficient utilization of the borough's personnel, facilities and equipment in the event of a civil emergency, including without limitation natural or man-made disasters and disasters resulting from enemy actions, and to provide for the coordination of disaster and emergency service functions of the borough with all other public agencies and affected private persons, corporations and organizations."

Simply put, if Petersburg is experiencing an emergency or disaster of such a magnitude that it may impact life or property within the Borough limits, the Borough government is responsible to assist the community and to access additional outside help if needed, which is quite common during a disaster. Petersburg needs to operate in a disaster by rules that are understood by other agencies, which includes the agencies that are capable of providing financial assistance and resources. An ordinance such as the one being considered formally prepares the Borough to respond and come to the aid of the population, but it also firmly places Petersburg on the same playing field, and using the same rules, (known as the National Incident Management System or NIMS) as other emergency management agencies. Namely, the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management at the state level and FEMA at the federal level.

The use of a local civil emergency ordinance is brought about by actual circumstances that meet the definition of a disaster in the community. The specific ordinance has no authority for action by the Manager or Incident Commander unless a civil emergency exists.

However, the state recognizes the need for municipalities to provide for organized, pre-planned responses to disasters or civil emergencies and expects Petersburg to be compliant with the National Incident Management System and ready to use the ICS system in the event of a disaster. The proposed ordinance lays out the basic structure of a response, but instead of codifying minute details regarding every possible disaster, which would be an enormous supplement to the code book, the ordinance appoints and authorizes an Incident Commander to oversee the response and refers to the Disaster Response Plan as the further guiding document that contains the details of a response. ICS is the language of emergency response and its use leads to organization, collaboration and cooperation between agencies in order to effectively address a disaster in a timely manner. In my view by assigning an Incident Commander, the civil emergency ordinance establishes the use of the Incident Command System in order to effectively respond to any local disaster emergency in a way that will address the problem quickly but also qualify Petersburg for resource and financial assistance from state and federal agencies.

### **HOW HAS THE EMERGENCY ORDINANCE HELPED WITH THE CURRENT HEALTH EMERGENCY?**

Standing up the EOC and speaking the language of the ICS has helped Petersburg during the pandemic. ICS is the basic rule book and playing field that all emergency response agencies understand and using it facilitates discussion, cooperation, collaboration and ultimately assistance with financial and resource needs during an emergency response. It is important to note that the Assembly is ultimately in control of all Borough actions, but it is impractical and inefficient to expect the elected body to convene and make decisions on a daily or hourly basis during an emergency. Since only a majority vote of the Assembly in a properly noticed public meeting can bind the Borough to a course of action, this makes the prospect of the Assembly managing an emergency a very cumbersome prospect. Instead, municipalities prepare in advance for the eventuality of a disaster or emergency and preordain who will be in charge if the need arises. In the proposed ordinance, the Borough Manager who is the Principal Executive Officer of the Borough, is the designated Incident Commander for all emergencies or disasters. This is done so that decisions can be made efficiently, and a response can begin or be changed quickly depending on developing situations. As proposed in the ordinance, The Manager would also have the ability to assign an alternate Incident Commander, with Assembly approval, in circumstances that dictate a different skill set for the disaster lead or if other circumstances prevent the Manager from assuming the duties of the IC.

While the purpose of the ordinance is not strictly focused on responding to a pandemic, the ongoing health emergency presented by COVID-19 is the most significant disaster that many Petersburg residents have ever dealt with. The temporary emergency ordinance that has been passed, and subsequently extended, during the pandemic has helped the Borough respond to the threat and hazards presented by the coronavirus by providing a framework for leadership for the response.

Some of the actions and programs that have been borne out of the Emergency Operations Center and the Unified Command team (PB and PMC form the Unified Command team), include:

- Formally establishing a relationship with FEMA and DHSEM in order to access disaster relief funds and supplies associated with common response tactics and resources.
- Receiving and reviewing a multitude of state issued mandates and health alerts and sharing them with the public. Providing the latest information in adherence to the law to Petersburg's population.
- Scheduling and participating in regular Incident Command meetings, both at the Hospital level and the Borough level to coordinate efforts and assign tasks and share knowledge regarding the evolving situation. At first, these meetings were daily but as the situation stabilized and comfort levels rose with the defined course of action the meeting schedule was decreased. These meetings allowed for numerous local agencies to be represented including the PMC, school, chamber of commerce, PEDC, Petersburg Mental Health and at times, the Mayor or an Assembly member.
- Receiving invitations to, and attending, countless State of Alaska video conferenced meetings regarding all manner of the statewide response, with access to top State medical, financial and political personnel in order to further Petersburg's understanding of the emergency and access assistance programs.
- Developing recommendations for local public health alerts and mandates to mitigate the potential and/or actual spread of the virus in Petersburg. i.e. shelter in place, face coverings, teleconferenced meetings, harbor access restrictions.
- Developing a Non-congregate Sheltering plan and system in order to house homeless persons and health care workers who are waiting for COVID testing results or become infected so that these people can be isolated and prevent the spread to others.

- Support for a community-wide mask making call-to-action and distribution of masks to those in need.
- Assignment of an expert Public Information Officer who has put together a comprehensive Public Information Campaign using common social media platforms to share the most current coronavirus information including: local testing and case information, infection prevention, federal, state and local mandate and regulatory information, travel requirements, symptom information, financial assistance information and public meeting access.
- Development of asymptomatic testing programs in support of the Medical Center, long term care, Mountain View Manor and local populations.
- Support of local seafood processing mitigation plans and coordinating an asymptomatic testing program for local workers. The processors should be recognized for comprehensive plans that resulted in minimal infections and no work stoppages in Petersburg related to COVID throughout the season.
- Development of traveler screening and testing services as required by State of Alaska mandates.
- Development of local financial assistance programs include non-profit assistance, federal application assistance, small business support, child care assistance and utility assistance programs.
- Focused outreach to visitor industry businesses to inform and collaborate on the preparation and response to potentially infected visitors entering the community.
- Review of transient business mitigation plans as well as access to cruise industry contacts and review of cruise boat operational and mitigation plans.
- Development of a community based protective plan to inform residents of recommended actions for self-protection based on the ongoing situational awareness of the virus in Petersburg.

## **CLOSING STATEMENTS**

The civil emergency ordinance provides the overriding structure for the Incident Command team to perform their duties in support of the pandemic response. However, when looking at the need for a permanent civil emergency ordinance, the community must look past the current public health emergency and understand that the ordinance will be helpful in responding to all manner of emergency in the future. The Borough Manager and Assembly need to have this structure at the ready in order to respond to a fire, landslide, tidal wave, earthquake and so on. The Borough does not have the option of NOT responding to an emergency or disaster. With that in mind, preparation is key to an effective response that may save someone's life or property – this starts with a codified emergency ordinance.

Every emergency management decision is borne from the responsibility to protect life and property and support our community. There is no need to do any more than necessary to protect our citizens and "handle" the emergency or disaster as quickly as possible. The ordinance requires that any orders are to be designed to be the least restrictive as possible when seeking to protect life and property. With that being said, it is natural for Americans and Alaskans to question authority and second guess whether the actions of the government (Assembly, Manager and Incident Commander) are in their best interests. To mitigate the questions, the focus of leadership in the face of a disaster must be just wide enough to encompass all known hazardous conditions, to anticipate the next potential problem, to define and carry out solutions and to return normalcy once the emergency is over. The responsibility to lead, make good decisions and help others in the face of a disaster weighs heavily on those who have been given this role.

The Assembly has put people in place to help navigate our way through the pandemic, but the major decisions have ultimately fallen to our elected leaders – regardless of what powers were granted to the Manager or Incident Commander in the temporary emergency ordinance. The IC team understands this, accepts this and has tried to build a relationship of trust and cooperation with the elected body and the community. Yet, we know that it is impossible to make everyone happy. For every person who claims unthinkable overreach, there is another that is urging to reach farther in pursuit of public health and safety. Hearing and managing the desires and opinions of all residents is part of a public sector job, but the responsibility to keep the population safe must be taken seriously and requires that response actions fall on the side of caution as much as possible.

A civil emergency ordinance does set the table for a quick, cautious, and successful response when called for and should be part of the municipal code on a permanent basis.