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OUR STATE OF EMERGENCY CONTINUES

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic Mayor Palmieri declared a state of emergency starting at noon on Monday, March 16th. He has extended the state of emergency and I think we should assume that he will continue doing so until the State of New York lifts its statewide state of emergency. City Hall is closed to the public and public meetings are being conducted online.

**YOU CAN READ MORE ON THE CITY'S WEBSITE**

RENT RELIEF RESOLUTION

Over six million Americans have filed for unemployment in the last two weeks! The Coronavirus Crisis is also, not surprisingly, an economic crisis. Here in Utica, as in many places across the country, one group of people who we know will be hard hit by this crisis is low-income renters. Governor Cuomo has enacted a 90-day suspension of all evictions, but not rents themselves, so when the crisis does lift, and people can go back to work, many people here in Utica are apt to be severely behind on their rent and could face eviction then. After the recession of 2008, there was a large spike in homelessness here in Utica. We are at risk of seeing another spike in homelessness. And this is bad for everyone - for the people who are made homeless, for the landlords who do not want to evict people but may have little financial choice, and for all of us. We need rent relief for these people, and we need it NOW.

Delvin Moody, Councilmember for the Fifth Ward and I, are bringing to the Council a Resolution calling upon the City and Mayor Palmieri to use extra funds, coming to the City via the Federal CARES act, to help people stay in their homes. These are Emergency Solutions Grants, specifically meant to address and mitigate against homelessness. Councilmember Moody and I believe that this money is best spent on rent relief NOW, in order to ensure that people do not become homeless down the road. You can read about Congressman Brindisi's announcement here. [Emergency Solutions Grants funds secured by Congressman Brindisi](#) These funds, to be clear, are not in any way part of the City budget. These are funds coming to Utica from the federal government, as part of the relief act signed by President Trump, to mitigate

against the economic hardships caused by Covid-19.

We will be presenting the "Rent Relief Resolution: Covid-19 Emergency Assistance" to the Common Council on April 15th. (To be clear, a Resolution is an expression of the will of the Common Council. It does not have the force of law. In the end it will up to Mayor Palmieri to decide how to allocate these funds. But we hope that he and the Council agree that keeping people in their homes is best for all of us.)

We are happy to have Citizen Action's support for this Resolution. Please consider signing their petition. And if you agree with us, please tell other members of the Council and the Mayor that we need Rent Relief NOW.

### MY VOTES ON THE COUNCIL

(an explanation of why I voted how I voted on important issues before the Council)

#### **March 20, 2020**

The Common Council met at a Special Meeting to vote on the 2020-2021 Budget and Mayor's Raise and on the budget itself. I voted against amending the budget to give the Mayor a raise of approximately \$10,000 a year, and the Comptroller a raise of approximately \$8,000 a year. I had been leaning towards voting for it, even though it was slightly higher than I would have liked. I think it is important that when we think about salaries, we not think about the particular persons occupying those positions, but rather that we think of the role. And I do in fact believe that the Mayor of a city such as Utica should be compensated proportionately to the job and in a way that is comparable to other similar cities. So I had been inclined to vote for the raise. But by the time we actually got to the point of voting on this, Covid-19 had already reared its ugly head. It was clear to me that the pandemic was going to have terrible economic consequences. We were already in a state of emergency. It was obvious that sales tax revenues would not meet our expectations. And so I thought that the only responsible thing to do was to vote to keep the budget leaner if we could. So I voted against the amendment and against the Local Law that is required to adjust the Charter. I was in the minority on both votes. I then voted for the Budget. Overall I had gone into the vote thinking that the Budget was well thought out and appropriate. It includes a small property tax increase of 1.9%, which is well within the range of inflation. It is a good budget, and I voted for it despite the amendment that I did not like because the entire budget was acceptable.

#### **April 1, 2020**

I voted to set reasonable fees for the use of the new Sal Longo Field. I voted to change our Rules of Order to allow the Common Council to meet via live online video conferencing until such a time a we are again allowed to meet in the Council Chambers. I did try to amend the new Rules of Order to state that as soon as possible we would include Public Comment in these meetings. My amendment received no support in our Pre-Conference meeting, so I did not pursue it during our regular Council meeting, but I did qualify my vote as to that one qualm I had with our new Rules of Order. I voted to reduce the amount we would borrow for paving by \$2,000,000. So we are now borrowing \$500,000 for paving rather than \$2,500,000.

This will give us a total of \$3,000,000 to spend on paving this year. I felt very torn about this vote, and struggled with it up to the very last minute. On the one hand, I do know how important paving is to all of us. And I know that the voters voted by way of a referendum to allow the city to borrow money to pave the streets. So I did not feel at all good about overriding those decisions made by my Constituents. But at the same time, given the budget crisis that we may very well be facing next year, I decided that the most fiscally responsible thing to do was to tighten our belts as much as we could. I feel that my vote to reduce the paving and my vote not to give the Mayor a raise were consistent with one another: both were votes meant to prepare us for a future in which we might have to make much harder choices. I voted to change the rate of compensation members of the Board of Assessment Review from \$750 a year to \$500 a year. Finally, I voted to authorize the City to borrow \$785,000 to finance the cost of various capital projects.

#### COMMON COUNCIL ADAPTS

Because of the current situation, our Council meetings will continue to be held online, via WebX. I realize that this limits the possibility of public comment. No one cares more about public comment than I do. ([You Can Read My Views About That Here.](#)) I expect us to accomodate public comment as soon as we can figure out how to do so under the current circumstances.

#### IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO DO, HERE ARE A COUPLE OF OPPORTUNITIES:

- We all know that healthcare workers are on the frontline of this crisis - they are the truly "essential" workers who can't stay home. Consider writing thank you notes and notes of encouragement to these workers. Deliver them to me and I will distribute them.
- Help me figure out who in South Utica might be isolated and alone, and is in need of extra social support. I can get them some help, but first I need to know who needs some extra support. So check in with your neighbors (from a safe distance) and let me know if someone is in need.
- Have a sewing machine, some basic sewing skills, and some extra time? Consider making protective masks for healthcare workers. [Follow this link for instructions.](#) (Drop them off to me, and I can get them where they need to go.)

#### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT HELPLINE

The State of New York has gathered mental health professional volunteers from all over the state - over six thousand of them! - to staff the NYS COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline at [844-863-9314](tel:844-863-9314). It is staffed 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week. The

phone line is staffed with specially trained volunteer professionals who are there to listen, support and refer if needed.

#### NEED BLUE BAGS?

Many people are taking the advice to "STAY HOME, STAY SAFE, SAVE LIVES" very seriously, not even venturing out to the grocery store. Good for them! But if you need a couple of blue bags to get you through, please drop me a line. I am happy to distribute some blue bags to those who are self-isolating.

#### CONSTITUENT HOURS

Until the Governor, under the advice of experts, gives us permission to ease up on our social isolating, I will be suspending my Constituent Hours. I will happily resume them as soon as possible. Meanwhile, call or text or email me anytime. I am looking into what it would take for me to hold a Tele-Town Hall. So stay tuned.

#### PLEASE: STAY HOME, STAY SAFE, SAVE LIVES

We all need to do our parts in order to protect everyone in our community. Staying home, practicing social distancing, and only going out when you absolutely have to, these are the right things to do.

**[The CDC has lots of excellent information, which you can link to here.](#)**

#### MAKE SURE TO BE COUNTED!

The Census is very important - it is the way we can make sure that our state and our region gets what it deserves, both in terms of representation and resources.

**[To fill out the Census online, just go here. It couldn't be much easier!](#)**

I WILL BE IN TOUCH AGAIN AS SOON AS I HAVE ANYTHING TO REPORT.

MEANWHILE, REMEMBER THAT AS A COMMUNITY, AS A CITY, AND AS A COUNTRY, WE HAVE WHAT WE NEED TO MAKE IT THROUGH THIS. BE KIND TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS. BE SAFE, AND REACH OUT ANYTIME.

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