

**#WappingerStrong**  
**Looking Back and Ahead on the Covid19 Pandemic**

Dr. Richard L. Thurston, Esq.  
Supervisor, Town of Wappinger

Two years ago, in March 2020, an invisible, harmful, and life-threatening enemy began to change our lives forever. The Covid 19 Pandemic continues to affect our physical and mental health, and economic well-being. No individual has escaped unaffected.

Before continuing, a heartfelt thanks for the past/ongoing efforts of all of our doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, first responders, teachers, supply chain workers, and countless others. Those guardian angels, their families, friends, our neighbors, are all heroes. May God bless them and continue to look over them. Since we continue to remain in your debt for your bravery and sacrifices, we will continue to reach out.

Since early February 2020, the Town of Wappinger government has been addressing relentlessly the many challenges that have disrupted our businesses, education, and personal lives. All Town staff and officials have been focused on doing the best that a local government can to mitigate the impact locally. From the outset of the Pandemic, I deemed all employees to be essential personnel, not only to help them earn a living but to continue to provide essential government services. Although, initially, we had to shut down physical access to Town Hall and our indoor facilities for 3 months, we did not let the emergency orders and mandates stop us.

Whether it was: operating continuously our Town sewer and water systems; ensuring highway repair, maintenance, and snow removal; keeping open and maintaining our parks; and issuing various permits for DYI projects, we remained on the job. We established and maintained advanced IT and telephone systems to conduct open and regular communications, not just with our residents, but with our County and State counterparts to address the constantly changing environment influenced by Covid19. Throughout the Pandemic, we were among the first communities to establish and maintain a comprehensive and friendly set of protocols

to protect our employees and residents until vaccinations and test kits would become readily available. Even then, we proactively distributed test kits, PPE, and information to residents in need.

A few of the many other significant actions that we undertook include that we:

- a. Created alternate means of electronic/written communications, including, at the Pandemic's worst, mail and document drop-off boxes outside of Town Hall;
- b. Kept open the Recycle Center to receive kitchen garbage initially;
- c. Monitored employee health (some of whom contacted Covid), and placed calls to our Senior Center members at least weekly;
- d. Initially, held Town Board meetings via Zoom, and then reopened live meetings once allowed by the NYS Governor (and earlier than most local municipal governments);
- e. Produced and posted various videos/graphic information for our residents;
- f. Expanded our Sheriff's Department Town Patrols;
- g. Passed the earliest legislation allowing outdoor dining;
- h. Reopened summer camp/other recreation programs earlier than most other municipalities, all-the-while maintaining the health and welfare of our participants (realizing the importance of physical and mental health of our residents); and
- i. Kept taxes and fees lower than other neighboring municipalities.

But, we are far from done with our planning and initiatives. In the months ahead, we will sponsor more programs to assist with the physical/mental health and welfare of our residents. Also, other initiatives will enable us to continue to:

- i. Maintain conservative fiscal management while investing in our parks, recreation facilities, and our local environment;
- ii. Maintain our diligence and planning for future natural disasters and possible pandemics;

- iii. Invest in our infrastructure to provide more residents with quality, reliable water and sewer services;
- iv. Study how future macro developments might impact our businesses, residential patterns, etc., so that we can be better prepared for many uncertainties and to reduce risk to our residents and businesses;
- v. Work with the Wappinger Central SD and other organizations to provide increased opportunities for our Town's youth; and
- vi. Focus on our Veterans, Seniors, and residents with special needs and those who are suffering from bullying, opioid abuse, and other diseases facing our community; to name a few.

We will emerge from the heavy fog of pandemic even stronger than before.

**God Bless Wappinger and America**