

April 1, 2020 | Facebook Live Chat Q&A

1. Will there be any property tax relief for those of us who lost jobs?

I am not aware of any program that would provide a direct amount of money to affected individuals other than the stimulus package which has been announced which will provide checks to tax payers at different points in time. We will get more information on that; I will be more than happy to share such information with you.

2. Can you repeat hotline number again?

The hotline number is 908-373-5105. This is for those who are feeling symptoms and want live 24/7 access.

3. PMUA has cut residential services like trash pickup once a week. Is it fair to expect reduction in our bills as we are not receiving what we have been paying for?

At this point in time, neither the PMUA nor the city is in a position to provide the kind of relief you are asking for. PMUA has obligations to make sure garbage is picked up, and like the City of Plainfield, is operating on reduced modified schedule as well to protect the health of employees. I hope you will be very patient knowing that these are unusual times.

4. We need the essential people to wear masks so that they do not get infected. There are working people with families and if they get sick, so will their families. This includes bodegas, grocery stores, pharmacies and restaurants. We all need to work together to flatten the curve.

I echo those sentiments and I want you to know that we are doing all that we can to try to secure masks for our first responders. We've reached the state and county to try and get some of those PPEs so we can be better protected.

5. Neighbors are going out and about every day. One of them told us they have been exposed and continues to leave their homes. How will this be enforced?

Our police officers are continuing to ride our streets with public address systems and are doing all they can to discourage people from doing precisely what you have indicated. I hope they will realize the gravity of the situation and the danger they are posing to others as a result of behavior that we are discouraging at this time. If you believe the person is infected, you should reach out to our health department or my office, and we will make sure the appropriate action is taken. We encourage people to obey the executive order, stay off the streets, stay in your homes, wear your masks if you have to go out for medical supplies or food, or are an essential worker.

6. Where can we get masks? There aren't any available in the stores.

We are trying to work through that and hopefully the situation will improve in the midterm.

7. The Plainfield census response rate is only at 25.8 % through March 30th vs. Union County at 36.1 % and 36.5 % statewide.

I believe that I provided an update which are the numbers we have as of yesterday and that number for Plainfield now stands at 27.9%. The number is increasing. One of the reasons I stress to our residents to make sure to go online and fill out that survey is because we need to get all of our people counted and it would be great for us if we can surpass the state __ by playing our part and making sure that we are counted.

Visit my2020census.gov to complete the census online today.

8. Why are we not given any more information on the people who have the virus? We need to know the whereabouts of the infected people.

There are some things that we can and cannot do. We can report to you the numbers as we receive them on a daily basis, but we cannot reveal the individuals that have been infected by the virus because the HIPPA law protects those individuals. We cannot reveal information on infected individuals any more than doctors can reveal information about their patients. We are releasing as much information as we can, and if we were able to more, we would, but we are limited by law in terms of what we can and cannot do.

9. Are the local supermarkets also following the limit of social gatherings?

The local supermarkets are supposed to honor the social distancing guidelines as well, and many of them have law enforcement officers at the stores to help them with that. However, when you are at a grocery store, you are to practice the 6-8 feet distancing guidelines. It is the supermarket's responsibility to monitor the inflow and outflow of people in the stores. We will make sure to echo a reminder to the supermarkets that they must also follow social distancing guidelines.

10. Why doesn't Plainfield close down?

We have closed down to the extent that we can. There is an executive order that has imposed an 8 PM curfew; restaurants and bars are not open other than for pickup and delivery. Essential services are still allowed to be open. We are following the governor's executive order and we are trying to enforce it the best we can. Please be patient with us. Our officers are working around the clock, doing the absolute best to keep all of us safe. We can't close down, there isn't a blanket we can put over the city to stop all activities. We still must function as a city.

11. There seems to be a growing number of homeless people in Plainfield especially since the release of certain level of inmates from the jails. These inmates normally might have had a place to reside, however, this is no longer the case for the concerns of coronavirus and we need to be quarantined and reduce exposure to the virus. What provisions are made by the City of Plainfield?

The City of Plainfield does not have a place where homeless individuals can be housed. I suspect that is the same for other municipalities such as Scotch Plains, Westfield, and Cranford. We have a number of homeless people in our city that come from other places and we provide them with the level of care and services that we're able to. We make sure we feed the homeless. There are a number of food organizations that are helping us deliver food to our homeless population, but there's only so much we can do. The homeless crisis that is faced by the City of Plainfield is one that is faced by many cities across New Jersey and across the U.S. We are trying to be as compassionate as we can, but there's only so much we can do.

12. Do you have the number of residents who are currently infected?

We currently have 108 confirmed cases and an additional 126 people on quarantine. We have lost 2 residents to the coronavirus.

****(that number was accurate for 4/1/2020 – the updated numbers are 124 infected, 137 quarantined and 4 passed away due to health complications caused by the coronavirus) 4/2/2020*****

13. Are kids allowed to play on school playgrounds?

Our city parks are closed and there is no gathering of individuals permitted in any park. If there are kids on school playgrounds, I would like the superintendent to put measures in place to prevent that. Our Plainfield police department will also be monitoring playgrounds in our schools in the city. The hoops from basketball courts have been removed, and we will continue to discourage gatherings of any kind. So the answer is no, children are not allowed to play on the playgrounds.

14. Is our police dept checking doors at night to make sure bars and lounges are shut down, not just riding by and looking?

The police director indicated an appreciation for the suggestion and will be making sure that we do that as we move forward. Anyone who is aware of locations where there is a violation, please give Director Burgess a call. We need assistance from everyone. Please note that we are looking forward to you providing that support to us.

15. People are having a tough time paying bills, is Plainfield considering lowering taxes?

I know that property taxes are on the minds of so many people at this time. Plainfield, like so many other municipalities, struggles with property taxes. We always look at that and balance it against the services that we provide and we try our best to keep a lid on that as possible. We have rising costs for public safety, police, fire, and for our DPW crews that take care of our public spaces. We have pension costs that escalate every year; there are a plethora of things that go into what makes a city budget and we are doing the best we can to hold the line on taxes. We will continue to look for ways to do that. When these development projects go online, I can assure you they will make a significant difference in our budget, but these projects are currently under construction and more are in the pipeline.

16. Is there a deadline for census?

The census deadline has been pushed back to August 14th in response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 virus. I encourage everyone each and every day, to take that piece of paper that you got in the mail, find your ID, and log on to that census website and fill in your info. We will continue working on the census until the window closes, there will be updated information that will be provided and we will pass that along to everyone. We are hoping that people aren't waiting for that extension and that they will go on right now and fill out that census form.

COVID-19 will impact the census and there will be additional questions that will be mailed out. Stay tuned in order to be counted.

Visit my2020census.gov to be counted today!

17. Are you planning a freeze on spending? How much do you have in our rainy-day fund?

We have already issued word at City Hall that there is to be absolutely no spending unless it is absolutely necessary, and so we have put a freeze in place that will only be essential purchasing. In terms of rainy-day fund: the surplus by December, 2019 was 10.8 million dollars. Of that amount, we intend to place about 7.4 million dollars back into the budget to help cushion the impact of any tax increase that might be necessary.

18. Can we limit city robocalls to once a day after 10AM and before 8PM?

We do try to limit the calls to before 8PM. There was a call that went out a few weeks ago at the beginning of emergency that went out about 10PM. We felt that it was so important for us to get that information out that we chose to do that. It is not our practice to send calls out after 8PM. We want to catch people early and before they retire for recreational activities in their homes, and we try to send calls out around 6PM, 6:30PM or 7PM, but we will be conscious of the concern expressed by that question.

There have also been additional calls from the police department because of complaints of people not staying home; the police have been beating that drum to let people know that they're supposed to stay home, off the streets, and practice social distancing. We are going over and above what we would normally do. Please be patient with us knowing that we have yours and your family's best interest at heart.

19. What is the status of supplies for first responders?

That is something we are concerned about and we are not able at this time to get the supplies we need. We are still working on that and we hope we are able to get supplies from the county and state so our first responders can be properly equipped.

20. Why aren't we arresting people who aren't honoring the executive order?

Well, it's very easy to say that. We don't want to use this emergency as a means to go around arresting people, because that would make the problem worse. We don't have room in our jails. The state and county have been releasing people because of the spread of the virus between inmates. Officers are exercising restraint and are asking people to move along and are refraining from arresting people who are assembling. We just want to disperse them and have them move along and not be a danger to others. We are not using this as an opportunity to arrest our citizens as a result of this emergency.

21. Are there any other testing sites other than Union County where people can go?

If you are Union County resident and have a need to be tested, you should first call 908-373-5105. Or 908-214-7107. Don't hesitate to call that number if you are short of breath or experiencing fever or cough. Take it seriously. Our main testing site is located at Kean University and it is a drive-through testing facility.

22. Can you please let us know what is being done to reach the Hispanic community? There are a vast majority that do not read or speak English well or not at all. How can they be tested without fear of being identified for deportation?

We have been trying to reach the Latino community by providing a robocall in both English and Spanish. We've also been putting out information in our newsletters in English and Spanish. To the extent that we can communicate to our residents in their language, we are trying to do that. Obviously, we have limited resources to be able to do it in the extent that we would like to. We will put an effort in making information shared in flyers available in English and Spanish.

23. Maybe there should be a regular occurrence where you can answer questions that you don't get to through any other means.

We intend to use social media in a more effective way and to bring these opportunities to interact with our residents on a more frequent basis. This will not be the last. This is the first of many that will follow, but thank you for bringing it to my attention.

24. Is it possible to have a translator for the next live chat? Our Hispanic families need to take part. They are a part of the City of Plainfield and in order to help flatten the curve, they need to be a part of knowing.

This is a wonderful suggestion. We will look at how we can accommodate a dual-language broadcast as we live stream to you.

25. Do you have any food sources for people that are shut in or have low immune systems?

In partnership with the Evangel church, we've shared a number which you can send the text HOPE to 908-325-5163. These baskets are for affected individuals who really need them such as senior citizens, those unemployed, and quarantined individuals. You can also go to the city's Salvation Army. If you are in need, you can visit the Salvation Army as long as you practice social distancing guidelines.

26. Are there any local business owners who want to donate meals for Plainfield's first responders? I am a caterer and would like to donate meals for hospitals and nursing home staff.

If anyone knows of any businesses that would like to donate, please let us at the city know and we will get that information to you. Send the information to communications@plainfieldnj.gov

27. Is Plainfield freezing the interest rates on property taxes?

The statute only allows for a 10-day grace period on interest. There is no statutory authority for municipalities to extend beyond 10 days.

28. What is the cutoff time for numbers reported of people infected with the virus?

We receive updates every day from NJDOH; we try to wait until about 5PM for the latest numbers before reporting.

29. I have not heard anything from the school in reference to staff being positive. When are they going to let us know?

Superintendent Mitchell has been providing updates, and those cases are included in the overall numbers reported by the city.

30. People are having a tough time paying rent. Is Plainfield giving any help?

Please contact Plainfield Action Services to see if there is any assistance at this time. The number is 908-753-3519.

31. Will the Spring curbside pickups be changed?

There is no change. Pickups will occur as scheduled.

32. Why can't we close all the businesses for a week? Or only open for a couple of hours a day?

This is an order that would have to come from the Governor.

33. What happens if you have an expired inspection sticker?

All driver licenses, non-driver IDs, vehicle registrations, and inspection stickers expiring before May 31st have been extended by two months, as per the MVC of NJ.

34. Many people don't have health insurance. Can they get tested for COVID-19?

Yes. There is no cost to be tested.

35. Is there a phone number I can call in Plainfield?

The dedicated phone number for Plainfield residents who feel they have COVID-19 symptoms is 908-214-7107. If you have symptoms or feel the need to call, assistance will be rendered.

36. Are we still recycling?

Recycling is suspended during the current emergency. Because of the state of emergency and the need for a reduced work schedule, PMUA has decided to allow the comingling of all household waste at this time including plastics, aluminum paper, etc. Everything can go together at this time until further notice. Additionally, there is an increased risk of transmission in recyclable items, which is another reason why there is no recycling at this time.

For the next live chat, we will provide you with the opportunity to send written questions to the Mayor.