

Intro ([00:00](#)):

Soft intro music.

Barry Lee ([00:05](#)):

Hi, I'm Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM and I'm excited to be here at Rouss City Hall hosting the second season of our City of Winchester podcast, the Rouss Review. We do this twice each month on the second and fourth Thursday. Little adjustment here with the schedule, but we explore City services, programs and events and discuss information that you need to know. So, we appreciate your tuning in each month.

Barry Lee ([00:28](#)):

Now up first, the Council BLUF or Bottom Line Up Front Recap of the March 31, 2020 Council meetings. During the regular meeting, Mayor Smith announced that four councilors were participating in the meeting remotely due to the pandemic and urged residents to abide by the stay at home order and group ban issued by the Governor. After a public hearing, for which no public comments were received, City Council adopted an ordinance to address inconsistencies with personnel procedures in City Code. Council also discussed a resolution providing increased flexibility for the City to ensure the continuity of government services during the State of Emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The provisions are in accordance with Virginia and City of Winchester laws and regulations and will expire six months following the conclusion of the emergency. The ordinance was forwarded to the next regular meeting for official vote. Currently, Council's process for considering and acting on ordinances as outlined in the City Code, surpass those required by the Code of Virginia. Therefore, Council discussed and adopted a proposed ordinance that would more closely align the City Code and the Code of Virginia resulting in improved flexibility when actions are time sensitive to achieve favorable financial results. The changes included in the ordinance would allow the City to act quickly with adopting ordinances relating to emergencies, securing financial opportunities, issuing or refinancing debt, and or reducing City expenses. At the Work Session, Winchester Public School Superintendent Jason Van Heukelum presented the school board's proposed FY21 budget request to Council for consideration while discussing the budget options. Dr. Van Heukelum requested approximately \$570,000 from City Council to close the gap between what they need and the funding they receive from state and federal sources. The school system is experiencing some natural savings with the schools being closed in this fiscal year, but FY21 is a little unknown at this point due to the pandemic. They're doing their best to be flexible and ready to make adjustments according to the changes that may come in the next three to six months. Interim City Manager Mary Beth Price provided an overview of the City's FY21 budget options and discuss the tax rate ordinance for calendar year 2020. No real estate or meals tax increases are planned for this year's budget due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The City may not meet its budget revenue projections in FY20. Therefore, several current cost measures that have been implemented recently are expected to carry over into the next fiscal year. These include hiring freezes, travel, cancellations, delays and starting new projects unless they impact the safety and security of the community, and more. After further discussion, Council directed staff to propose more options with additional budget cuts for further discussion at the April 14th Regular Meeting. For more information on these topics and to view the agenda packet, visit the City of Winchester website and click Council Meeting Agendas under the "Government" tab.

Barry Lee ([03:32](#)):

So, the hot topic of conversation obviously this month, understandably, is COVID-19, and this is not something many, if not all of us, have ever experienced before and we're learning fast and sort of adapting as we go. We have with us today two special guests to provide information about COVID-19 in Winchester. Communications Director Amy Simmons and Development Services Director Shawn Hershberger are here to talk about current recommendations and mandates as well as some programs that have been implemented to help local businesses. So we'll start with a COVID-19 update and welcome to the mic, Amy.

Amy Simmons ([04:07](#)):

Thank you, Barry. Usually, I'm behind the scenes driving everyone crazy with my production changes, but now it's my turn to sit at the table. I just wish it was under better circumstances, though. I did want to mention that Scott Kensinger, our Emergency Management Coordinator, was planning on being here today. But as you can imagine with the dynamic and overwhelming nature of this coronavirus response that we're dealing with, he had several other very important things he had to attend to today. So you're stuck with me today.

Barry Lee ([04:35](#)):

Well, completely understandable and we don't mind at all. And I'm sure you've also been busy with getting information that seems to be constantly changing out to the community. When Scott was on our last podcast in early March, we were talking about Flood Awareness Week and there was only a few positive cases in Virginia and none in our Lord Fairfax Health District. And now there's over a thousand in Virginia and some in Winchester and Frederick County. So, a lot has changed over the last several weeks. Where do we stand as of this recording on Wednesday, April 1st?

Amy Simmons ([05:08](#)):

Right. Everything, not just the numbers or number of cases changes daily, if not hourly. Sometimes, it's kind of hard to keep up. But, as of today, we know of 22 confirmed cases in the Lord Fairfax Health District. Three of those are in the City of Winchester, and 10 are in Frederick County and thankfully there have been no deaths to date. But keep in mind that there is a delay in reporting due to testing. So the Virginia Department of Health reported last Friday that we should see a surge in cases this week and next week. The increase, of course, will be the result of testing from the previous week. It takes a little while to get those results.

Barry Lee ([05:46](#)):

Well, we've been stressing to people about how they protect themselves and social distancing. It really helps, doesn't it?

Amy Simmons ([05:52](#)):

Absolutely. Everyone that we've talked to from the state, local, feds, everyone is talking about how germs spread. They spread by touch, which is why you should wash your hands and disinfect surfaces often, and by breathing air contaminated with those germs. It is proven that when someone sneezes or coughs without covering their mouth and nose, the germs will disperse into the air. If someone walks through the air cloud and breathes in those germs, they will get sick, most likely, and will likely spread those germs to people. And that can even happen before they realize they are sick. Right? But the cloud becomes less potent the more it is dispersed into the air. So that's why social distancing, which means that you stay at least six feet away from others, is strongly recommended.

Barry Lee ([06:34](#)):

And it's a lot easier to do that outside. I mean, our spring weather is here. I know we haven't seen the peak of the infections yet, but I'm sure people are growing tired of being inside. They may want to get outside more, enjoy some activities like walking in the park or playing some outside games. So social distancing, even though we're in the big outdoors, that's still needed outside too, right?

Amy Simmons ([06:56](#)):

Yes. Even in outdoor areas, we still need to make sure that we adhere to social distancing, as well as the Governor's ban on group gatherings and recommendations about washing hands regularly, disinfecting often, and staying home if you're sick, that's most important. The more people that get out and about, the more likely they are to spread germs to more people. We really need people to stay home as much as possible so we can hopefully stay healthy and not overwhelm our healthcare system.

Barry Lee ([07:21](#)):

Governor Northam issued another order on March 30th that made the stay at home recommendation a directive, except for certain circumstances. So, can you give us a rundown of those allowable circumstances?

Amy Simmons ([07:33](#)):

Sure. There extremely limited circumstances that include leaving your home to seek medical attention, go to work, get care for family or household members, obtain goods and services like food, prescriptions or government services, and engage in outdoor activities, so long as we mentioned, you adhere to those strict social distancing requirements and avoid groups. Governor Northam also urged Virginians to limit those trips whenever possible.

Barry Lee ([08:00](#)):

All right. Now let's talk about City services and any changes that may have occurred as a result of the pandemic.

Amy Simmons ([08:06](#)):

Sure. Well, as everyone knows, we closed all City facilities to the public on March 17th and more recently we had to close playgrounds, athletic fields and outdoor basketball courts at all City parks. That includes Jim Barnett Park and the 13 neighborhood parks located throughout the city. We're still collecting trash and recycling and maintaining all other essential services like utilities and social services. WinTran, however, our public transit system, has reduced their hours. They're still running but their hours are reduced and they're adhering to the 10-person requirement. We are encouraging people to do business with the City through our available resources on our website. A lot of our staff are teleworking and are available by phone, email and mail. We also have several drop boxes. Those are located outside City Hall, Timbrook Public Safety Center [Winchester Social Services], and the Creamery Building and that's at 21 South Kent Street. And that can be used for dropping off correspondence, bill payments or completed forms for staff. We know these are very, very difficult times and we are working with our residents and businesses to do whatever we can to be flexible and ease the hardship as much as possible.

Barry Lee ([09:14](#)):

Well, we appreciate this Amy and it's good information. Anything else you'd like to add before you go?

Amy Simmons ([09:19](#)):

Well, I always like to encourage City residents and businesses to regularly check our coronavirus web at www.winchesterva.gov/coronavirus for current information because we update that very regularly, several times, as much as possible throughout the day. And we also want people to sign up for our notification system, subscribe to our electronic newsletters, and follow us on social media. These are the quickest ways to get information about and from the City. Links and more information to all of our communication channels are available on the City's website. Just click communications under the "Department" tab.

Barry Lee ([09:51](#)):

All right, Amy. Thank you very, very much. Appreciate your helping us out at the table.

Amy Simmons ([09:56](#)):

Thanks Barry.

Barry Lee ([09:56](#)):

And now let's move on to our second guest. Shawn Hershberger, Development Services Director for the City. Shawn, welcome to the show.

Shawn Hershberger ([10:03](#)):

Thanks, Barry. Thanks for having me.

Barry Lee ([10:04](#)):

So now with social distancing, the group ban, the new stay at home directive and the Governor requiring some businesses close during the pandemic. I can only imagine this is really hard on our local businesses. So what are you hearing out in the community.

Shawn Hershberger ([10:17](#)):

You're right, Barry. It is extremely difficult for our local businesses, especially smaller businesses. The thing that people think about most often right now are bars and restaurants and they're definitely experiencing the brunt of this. But you know, really the impact has been industry-wide or over every industry. You know, think of any business that's dependent upon people gathering together-gyms, our performance venues. We have several small businesses that their business is built around having arts and crafts parties. None of them can actually function right now. And it goes so much further than that too. The tourism industry. When you think of a lot of businesses that we as locals don't interact with on a daily basis, but they employ a lot of people in this community and their numbers are going down significantly just like everybody else's. And, you know, it's really impacting pretty much every business sector right now. It's obviously hard, but one thing that's on a positive, we try and look at the positives here. The community has shown a lot of resiliency and a lot of community spirit, focusing on supporting local businesses. A lot of restaurants are doing take out. We do have up on the old town website, there is a page that what services people are providing right now and we're also working together with winfoods.com to kind of share their updates as well. Because it's more of a city-wide platform that we just don't have time to replicate that.

Barry Lee ([12:10](#)):

Yeah. So what resources are available now to help our local businesses?

Shawn Hershberger ([12:15](#)):

So one thing that has been positive is we have really, on a regional level, banded together. Winchester, Frederick County EDA, Clarke County EDA, SBDC [Small Business Development Center], and Chamber of Commerce, as well. We're all working together to kind of share resources and put things up on a kind of communal website. The easiest thing for me to do is say if people are looking for resources, if you go to www.developwinchesterva.com, in the middle of the homepage there is a bar that will take you to the regional our page for business resources. That's has a world of information for people to sift through. There is a lot, though. There is a lot of programs and they seem to be changing on almost a daily basis. So, really the biggest tool right now, our program's coming through Small Business Administration that are as a result of the CARES Act that was passed last week. There is a paycheck protection program that's geared towards small businesses. Helping them retain employees for an eight-week period. There are too many programs to sift through right now, but what I would say is go to the website, follow the directions, go find the resources and while you're there you can find contact information for myself and Shirley Dodson. We have shifted to primarily focusing on helping people find resources and helping people go through the processes of resources. So, we're here to help. In addition to what we did as Winchester EDA, we did create a Disaster Relief Funding Program for small businesses. That is a \$5,000 loan with no payment for six months, no interest for two years, and then 2% interest after a two-year period. That is focused solely on small businesses under two and a half million dollars of revenue, under 25 employees and having a physical store front in the city.

Shawn Hershberger ([14:38](#)):

In addition to that, council has approved a resolution, R-2020-13. This directs the City Treasurer and Commissioner the Revenue to not impose penalties and interest upon certain local taxes. Think of like meals, transient occupancy, admissions taxes. That lasts for the lifetime of the pandemic. It allows businesses additional time to pay certain taxes. They have no penalties, interests or collection activities. Council is also strongly recommending that the City Treasurer not undertake collection actions upon any business that fails to pay any taxes subject to this relief. In addition, the Virginia Department of Taxation has offered a sales tax exemption. Businesses impacted by the pandemic can request an extension of the due date for filing and payment of their February 2020 sales tax return due March 20, 2020 for 30 days. When granted, businesses will be able to file and pay no later than April 20th with a waiver of any penalties. And as I mentioned a little while ago, feel free to contact any of the City's Development Services team. We're here to provide assistance for businesses, property owners, anybody looking to do business in the City of Winchester. We're still here to help. We are still moving forward with development projects. So, anybody who's interested in moving forward with a project that they had in mind. We are still open for business and we're still trying to help people move in directions of expanding or investing in Winchester.

Barry Lee ([16:18](#)):

We've talked about businesses. What about workers? What resources are available out there to help them during this difficult time?

Shawn Hershberger ([16:25](#)):

So part of what we already talked about with the cares act and the paycheck protection program that is primarily geared towards helping small businesses retain employees and keep people on their payroll and you know, not have them go on unemployment. But, Virginia has some new initiatives to help residents. The waiting period [has been waived] and enhancing eligibility for unemployment benefits and restrictions have been loosened for those receiving unemployment insurance. And there is a prohibition on new eviction cases for tenants who are unable to pay rent as a result of the pandemic. And the Virginia State Corporation Commission is directing utilities that it regulates, electric, natural gas, water companies, to suspend service disconnection actions for the next 60 days. So, there is help and we're hoping that as this progresses there, there'll be additional programs that we can direct people towards. But so far, you know, it's been a fairly good response across the board, so we're happy to see that.

Barry Lee ([17:42](#)):

Excellent. Excellent. Well, we thank you Shawn for all you're doing to help our local businesses. And I appreciate your being with us on the podcast.

Shawn Hershberger ([17:49](#)):

No problem. Thank you for having me.

Barry Lee ([17:52](#)):

And now it's time for the Now U Know segment. That's where we talk about interesting City of Winchester facts that you may not be aware of or important information you need to know. This segment will focus on what else, coronavirus symptoms and what to do if you get those symptoms. So did you know that the incubation time from exposure to showing symptoms is five days and in some cases 14 days? Individuals who know they've been exposed but aren't yet showing symptoms are asked to self quarantine for 14 days. And of course those who are most affected or are the most at risk are individuals over 60 years of age and someone with a compromised immune system such as cancer, diabetes, or an immunosuppressive medication. However, in Virginia thus far, all adult age groups have been affected. So, the following symptoms may appear two to 14 days after exposure. They include, fever, cough, shortness of breath or trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, bluish lips or bluish face. So if you think you've been exposed to the coronavirus or if you have symptoms, the Virginia Department of Health strongly urges you to not go directly to your doctor, urgent care or hospital. Instead, here's what you do. Call Virginia's Health Department's toll free line at 877-ASK-VDH3 or your doctor before going in, follow instructions provided by your doctor VDH and the CDC. If you are severely ill, call 911, share your concerns with the dispatcher and EMS before making contact with personnel who respond. Well, if you didn't know before, now you know.

Barry Lee ([19:42](#)):

Checking out some of the upcoming activities, a few ways that you can stay active and connected during the stay-at-home ban. Winchester Parks and Recreation is hosting a weekly spirit week full of fun activities for you to do and share with other participants. Check out the Jim Barnett Park Facebook page to participate. Coming soon, several Park fitness classes will be available online. Look for the videos on the City's YouTube channel and social media. Winchester Police Department's true crime podcast, Defrost, is often releasing new evidence and information through videos, social media discussions and previews. You can find the podcast on anchor.fm and more on the new Defrost Facebook group. The Lord Fairfax Health Department Director, Dr. Collin Greene, has recommended several outdoor exercise

activities that are still permitted to help you stay active while maintaining social distancing. Some may include walking, running, cycling, hiking, golf, frisbee golf, singles tennis, and swimming. When in public areas, be sure to maintain a distance of at least six feet from others. Cover your coughs and sneezes and wash your hands often and as in any situation, please stay home if you're sick.

Barry Lee ([20:56](#)):

Thanks so much for joining us on the second season of Rouss Review. I'm Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM. We'll be back on the second Thursday in April at 5:00 PM. Bye now and stay safe.