

COLUMBIA



UPDATE APRIL 2020



TOWN OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE FIRST SELECTMAN

At the time of this newsletter's publication we have as a community and a nation been dealing with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic for several weeks. I would like to take this opportunity to update residents on town services, the budget process and on-going projects; as well as resource information pertaining to COVID-19.

The Town of Columbia is monitoring the impact of COVID-19 and are engaged in constant communications with local and state public health and safety officials. The health of our residents, staff, and families are our top priority. While we understand that life has been disrupted for many, the Town's services and projects continue. The Town Hall facilities and the Beckish Senior Center are closed to the public, as well as the Horace W. Porter School and Saxton B. Little Free Library; however, staff are working to provide services and assistance to our residents behind the scenes.

AHM Youth and Family Services has implemented a telehealth network for Columbia residents to have a place to call for services and resources. Staff members will be available from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every weekday and are ready to offer support to residents who are experiencing anxiety about the Coronavirus pandemic. Call 860-228-9488 ext. 13 for general questions and concerns. Current Clients, or those who wish to obtain mental health services for youth can be directed to ext. 17

NEW MEETING AND BUDGET VIRTUAL PROTOCOLS

Boards and Committees have begun to implement remote access to meetings via video conferencing using on-line platforms such as Zoom Meeting. Each Board or Committee will post login information for that meeting on the Town's website. As a resident you will be able to join the meeting from your Internet connection through a PC or cell phone. The COVID-19 emergency hit during peak budget season, which has posed some challenges. Governor Lamont has issued Executive Orders that help towns and municipalities meet their budget obligations. *Please note:* While Executive Order 7I Budget Adoption, Section 13, still contemplates that the Town agencies will continue to make budget presentations and hold hearings, it prohibits town meetings and referenda for purposes of adopting the 2020-2021 fiscal year municipal budgets and setting the mill rate. The legislative body of

the town – or, in Columbia, the Board of Selectmen because the town meeting is the legislative body – shall authorize the budget-making authority of the town to adopt a budget and set a mill rate. The budget-making authority is obligated to make reasonable efforts to reach out to the public and receive comments.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO YOU? The Board of Selectmen (BOS) and the Financial Planning & Allocation Commission (FiPAC) will be conducting their meetings via on-line video conferencing. We will be posting login information on the Town’s website so that you can attend the meetings. Budget documents will be available on the Town’s website for review and public comments will be accepted by email at PublicInput@columbiact.org or by USPS mail and must be received prior to the meeting. The Host of the meeting will control the audio ability of allowing residents to comment. Based on the meeting agenda comments may be limited to certain times. If typing a comment on the Chat feature or sending a comment in on the PublicInput@columbiact.org, always include your name and address.

Executive Order 7S issued on Wednesday, April 1, 2020 allows certain municipal financial actions to be taken without complying with any town meeting requirements that may be imposed by statute, charter, ordinance or otherwise. As with the previous executive order 7I dealing with the budget adoption process, the intent is to eliminate the need for large numbers of individuals to gather in order to satisfy those town meeting or referendum requirements.

Executive Order 7S permits the Board of Selectmen, together with the budget-making authority of the municipality (FIPAC), by a majority vote of each body, to authorize any supplemental, special or additional appropriations in an amount less than one percent (1%) of the current total municipality budget under CGS 7-348 or any comparable provisions of any special act, charter, or ordinance without a town meeting or referendum if one or both of those would be required.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO YOU? The vote to finalize the \$30,000 contribution to the purchase of the Mono Park State Park expansion, known as the Inzinga property, will now have to be approved in the on-line BOS meeting at 7:00 on April 7th and then the FIPAC meeting at 7:00 on April 8th, rather than at the special town meeting that had been called for April 7th. These agendas will be posted on the Town website and comments are always welcome at PublicInput@columbiact.org.

Thank you for your patience and please be safe.

Steven M. Everett, First Selectman

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S MONTHLY UPDATE

APRIL 2020



The Town of Columbia has compiled an [Operations Guide](#) that will provide the public on what services they can expect to receive from the town government during the COVID-19 national health emergency. If you have questions about this guide, please refer them to the Selectmen's Office at 860-228-0110.

UPDATES FROM THE FIRST SELECTMAN: To see the latest updates from the First Selectman regarding COVID-19, please click [here](#).

The Town has set up a dedicated page on our website for updates and information regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Please click on [CORONAVIRUS \(COVID-19\) TAB](#) on the website.

TOWN HALL: Entrance by the public available by appointment only. Screening conducted to ensure those entering are not ill, including a line of questions regarding virus exposure and potentially a non-invasive temperature screening. Staff are working within the facility to provide services while minimizing exposure to others. The Town Hall Thursday late hours have been reduced until further notice from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Town Hall is still closed to the public; however, departments are available by phone and email.

SENIOR CENTER: Facility closed to the public until further notice; staff working within to provide services. Please see page 11 for more information on services provided to our Seniors.

SAXTON B. LITTLE FREE LIBRARY: Facility closed to the public until further notice. Please see page 17 for more information.

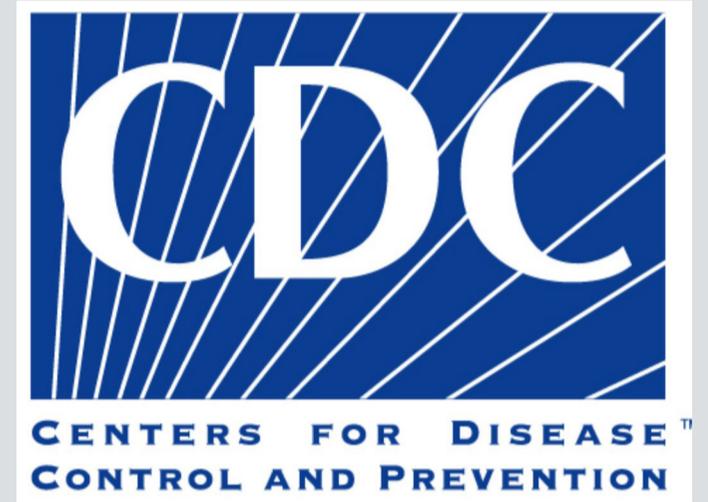
FIREHOUSE: Facility only open to volunteer firefighters.

HORACE W. PORTER SCHOOL: Facilities closed to all until further notice. H.W. Porter has begun REMOTE learning as of Wednesday, March 25th. The link can be accessed on the [Porter website](#). Board of Education Meetings are working towards providing information as soon as possible so the community can participate in meetings from their homes. EASTCONN Food Services is providing meals which are available to all Columbia students.

REC PARK: Grounds are open to the public; facility is closed except in special circumstances. Please note that social distancing is recommended even in open parks, and that group sizes should be kept to an absolute minimum. **The use of the playground equipment is prohibited.**

IMPORTANT LINKS FOR ASSISTANCE AND INFORMATION RELATED TO COVID-19

CORONA VIRUS: As the details of the COVID-19 outbreak change and the likelihood of community transmission increases, Easter Highland Health District (EHHD) has real-time information on their website www.ehhd.org with an embedded link to the CDC (COVID-19 Information from the CDC).



If you have specific questions please contact EHHD directly at (860) 429-3325.

- [Statewide: FAQ regarding the State of CT's actions related to COVID-19 from Governor Lamont's office](#)
- [Bridge Recovery Loans for Small Businesses](#)
- [Unemployment claims due to COVID-19](#)

CENSUS: We'd like to remind residents that the 2020 Census is happening now. You can complete your questionnaire on-line, by phone, or by mail. To find out how, please go to the [Census website.](#)



BOAT LAUNCH GATE KEY: We have implemented a new procedure for obtaining Gate Keys. Residents can fill out the application and test on-line through the Rec Department's web page. Go to [ReckDesk](#) click on Programs and then scroll down to Boat Launch Gate Key Application. This will take you through the Boat Launch Gate Key Application, Test and payment feature. We will then mail the key to you.



PLEASE NOTE: Keys will not be mailed until the lake has reached the natural water level. This is to ensure that boats loading into or out of the lake do not damage the lake bed.

THE TRANSFER STATION is still open Wednesday and Saturday, but **ONLY for household waste, recyclables, and leaves.** Bulky waste, library book donations, bottles and cans for the Scouts, brush or tires are not accepted at this time. To protect our employees and the public the Swap Shop will be closed. No exchange of currency will be conducted.

EVERBRIDGE NOTIFICATIONS: We will from time to time issue an Everbridge Notification with a message from the First Selectman, Steven M. Everett to help keep you informed. If you would like to sign up for Everbridge Notifications please go to the Town's website and on the [Everbridge Notifications](#) tab.

EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS: To receive Town news please go to the Town's website and click on the [Email Notifications](#) tab.

**Stay Informed with
Emergency Alerts and
Town News**

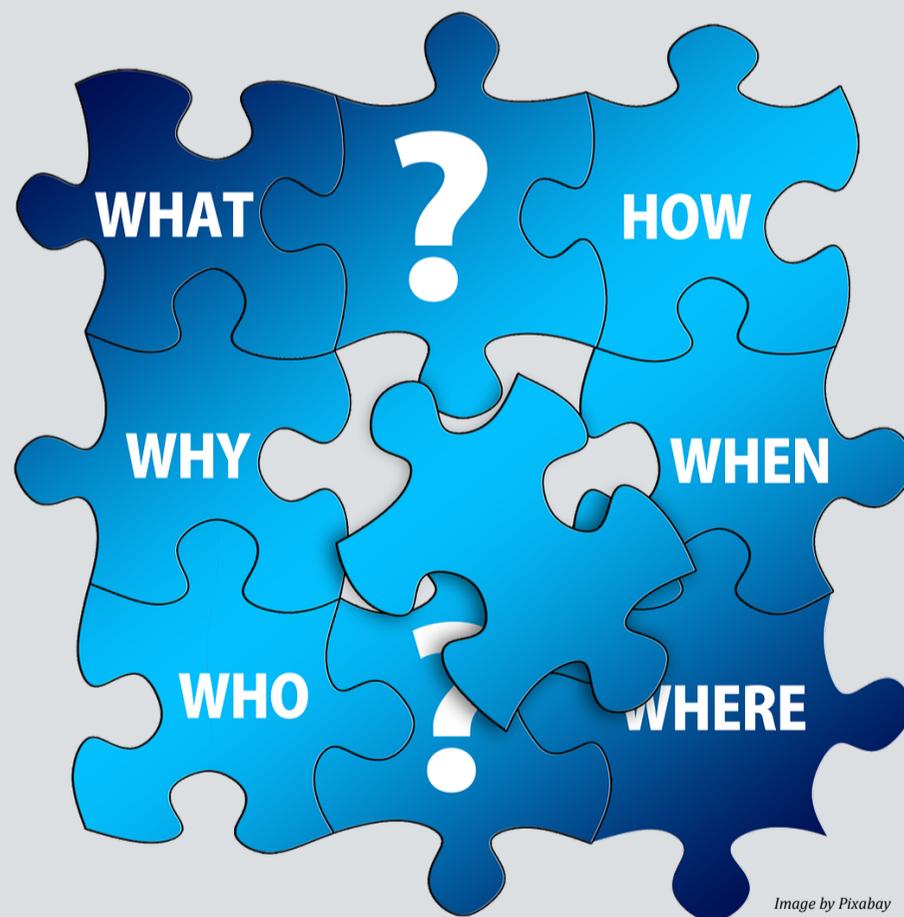
To Receive Emergency Alerts
[EVERBRIDGE Alert Program](#)
To Receive Town News there are several choices!
[Email Notifications](#)
[Town Administrators Monthly Newsletter](#)
[Columbia Views Magazine](#)

Find us on 

The health of our residents, staff, and families are our top priority. Please stay home and stay safe and we will get through this together. If you need assistance please do not hesitate to call the Town Administrative Office or the First Selectman at 860-228-0110 or email us at townadministrator@columbiact.org.

Thank you,

Mark B. Walter, Town Administrator
323 Route 87
Columbia, CT 06237
860-228-0110
townadministrator@columbiact.org



Find us on 

UPCOMING TOWN MEETINGS

Due to the current COVID-19 Emergency, meetings will be held by utilizing remote access. Each board or committee will provide the information needed to join using an on-line conferencing platform. Please check the Town of Columbia's [website](#) for updates.

Below are some helpful tips and best practices with video conferencing.

- Test your video and audio before the meeting starts.
- Allow more time in case there is something to download.
- On a cellphone: make sure you have a strong signal.
- On a computer: use a wired connection rather than Wi-Fi.
- Make sure the computer camera works (or is uncovered).
- Make sure the speakers and the microphone works.
- Choose a quiet location.
- Place pets in another room.
- Use the mute button.
- And lastly, remember you are on camera!!!



TOWN DEPARTMENT NEWS AND INFORMATION

REGISTRAR OF VOTERS:

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY 6/2/20

The Republican and Democratic Primary has been postponed to June 2, 2020. Primaries in CT are "Closed Primaries", meaning that only voters registered in the party which is holding the Primary may vote. Only registered Republicans can vote for Republican candidates, and only registered Democrats can vote for Democratic candidates. If you are not currently registered to vote, or not currently affiliated with a political party (registered as Unaffiliated), you can enroll in a party via mail until May 28th, 2020 or in person until noon on June 1,, 2020 and still be eligible to vote in the Presidential Primary.



For information about obtaining an Absentee Ballot, please contact the Town Clerk at (860) 228-3284.

Please check our [Registrar of Voters](#) page on the Town website or contact our office for more information.

Registrars of Voters

Karen Butzgy – Democratic

Katherine Morrison – Republican

(860) 228-6843 x113

registrar@columbiact.org

ASSESSOR'S OFFICE: Operations are continuing normally, though the public is encouraged to submit information electronically whenever possible. Mail or hard-copy drop-off is still permissible, though not advised.

[Property cards are available online](#)

If you no longer own a vehicle, you can mail, scan and email or place in our mail slot at the Town Hall, your cancellation of plates and the bill of sale to: Inquiries can be made by phone or email. Phone: (860) 228-9555 Email: mlavallee@columbiact.org

TOWN DEPARTMENT NEWS AND INFORMATION

(Continued)

The **Renter's Relief program** will begin April 1st and will run through October 1st. You will need proof of rent payments and utilities paid in the 2019 calendar year.

Motor Vehicle Adjustments

In order to have a motor vehicle bill adjusted we need two forms of proof because the tax is a car tax not a road tax.

- The first is a copy of your motor vehicle plate return receipt
- The second is something proving you got rid of the vehicle. For a list of accepted proofs look on the [Assessor's website](#) or call the office.
- If you traded a vehicle and kept the same plate do not bring us any documentation because DMV will automatically process the adjustments.

Income and Expense Forms

Connecticut General Statute 12-63c requires all owners of rental real property to annually file an Income and Expense form with the Assessor's Office by June 1st. **The information filed and furnished with this report will remain confidential and is not open to public inspection.** Any information related to the actual rental and operating expenses shall not be a public record and is not subject to the provisions of Section 1-19 (Freedom of Information) of the Connecticut General Statutes. All properties that are rented or leased, including commercial, retail, industrial, land and residential properties, except "such property used for residential purposes, containing not more than six dwelling units and in which the owner resides" must file and in the case of a non-residential property that is partially rented and partially owner-occupied.

In accordance with Section 12-63c(d), of the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended, any owner of rental real property who fails to file this form or files an incomplete or false form with intent to defraud, shall be subject to a penalty assessment equal to a **Ten Percent (10%) increase** in the assessed value of such property.

The Assessor's Office is open Monday through Wednesday from 8 am. until 4 pm., Thursdays 8 am. until 6 pm. and Fridays 8 am. until Noon. Our telephone number is 228-9555.

TOWN DEPARTMENT NEWS AND INFORMATION (Continued)

BECKISH SENIOR CENTER: In the on-going effort to help prevent the spread of the CoronavVirus (COVID-19), the Beckish Senior Center and Transportation Program are closed to the public until further notice. The Beckish Senior Center will be open on Tuesdays from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm for donations to the food pantry to help those in need. We are asking if gift cards could be donated to help those with special dietary needs. It has been said that gift cards are the safer choice of donation during this time to prevent further spread of COVID-19. The Meal on Wheels program is still on going, and we are now accepting new clients in Columbia. Tuesdays will be the delivery day for all Meal on Wheels (MOW) clients and those who rely on the congregate meal program. Senior Center Staff will also be making deliveries to those in need on Tuesdays between 11am and 1pm. The Director, Bernadette Derring will also be available Monday - Friday 8-3pm or those who might need items on non-delivery days. Please call to request items in need.



- All trips for March and April are canceled
- No Transportation Services
- No Congregate meals

Please call the Beckish Senior Center at 860-228-0759 for any questions or concerns. Please check the town website www.columbiact.org, Beckish Senior Center [Facebook](#) page , as well as [The Gem Newsletter](#) for future updates.

Contact Info:

- Phone: 860-228-0759
- Email: beckish@columbiact.org

TOWN DEPARTMENT NEWS AND INFORMATION

(Continued)

BUILDING/LAND USE DEPARTMENT: We will remain open for phone calls. We can be reached at 860-228-0440. The office will be closed to the public, but we will be taking applications by postal mail and email LandUse@columbiact.org. We are working on implementing on-line services for permits. Please check the Town's website for upcoming information on this service.

Please click [here](#) for all permit paperwork.

Please call or email ahead to verify permit fees (by check only, made out to Town of Columbia), or to address other questions. Work that is to be done by a contractor must include a copy of their State license, and certificate of insurance with workman's comp, and should include a signed authorization from the property owner. Inspections will be carried out by appointment only for exterior inspections as well as inspections of non-occupied structures (new construction/additions) will continue.

PERMITTING & INSPECTION INFORMATION: Inspections will be carried out by appointment as always but with the following restrictions; interior inspections of occupied buildings for items such as, but not limited to, kitchen/bath remodels, air conditioner or furnace replacements, or other minor interior repairs/alterations will not be completed at this time. Please remember to call when the emergency passes. All exterior inspections as well as inspections of non-occupied structures (new construction/additions) will continue.

We are making our best effort to protect the public and staff health while maintaining some level of progress.

COLUMBIA ART COUNCIL: On February 18, 2020, the Board of Selectmen voted to approve the establishment of a Columbia Art Council that supports Sustainable CT Vibrant and Creative Cultural Ecosystems. An eight-member committee created a mission and vision statement for the establishment.

The Columbia Art Council's Mission Statement: Enhance the quality of community life by promoting opportunities for residents to experience and participate in forms of innovative expression and communication through the arts.

The Columbia Art Council's Vision Statement: Transforming the community and lives through the power of creative expression.

TOWN DEPARTMENT NEWS AND INFORMATION (Continued)

The committee is working on action items that include a Poet Laureate and artists-in-residence. Additionally, we hope to have dedicated space in the Columbia Views, the Town's website, and the Town's Administrator Monthly Newsletter. In the future, we hope to create an events calendar to provide information to the Community.

Whether it is art, music, dance, or theatre, the Council hopes to showcase many Columbia artists.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS: Rec Park final road grading has been completed and the installation cap for the road will be complete. The the guardrail will be installed along the new roadway and walking path. Until construction is completed we ask that you please park in the winter gate parking lot. Do not go into the main gate parking lot. Only construction vehicles will have access to the main gate parking lot during the final stages of construction on the Rec Park road.



Road Sweeping will begin the week of April 6th.

TAX OFFICE: To Pay Online and 2019 Tax Payment Information click [here](#). The Town of Columbia, in partnership with Invoice Cloud, is excited to offer residents an easy and secure way to view, print and pay their real estate, personal property and motor vehicle tax bills online.

Another way of paying taxes is to call ahead to the tax collector's office to ensure the department is staffed and when we can expect your arrival. Payments can be put in the key box outside the front door of the Town Hall.



TOWN DEPARTMENT NEWS AND INFORMATION (Continued)

At this time, the Tax Office is requesting that payment be made with a bank check or money order if motor vehicle clearance is needed before 2 weeks. Please do NOT make your payment with cash.

Motor vehicle clearance will be on a case-by-case basis. Please be prepared and pay your taxes at least a month before you need to register a vehicle to make sure the release will be able to be processed.

Many questions regarding tax bills can also be found on the [Town website](#) or call us at the number above.

Please direct phone calls regarding selling, junked, or totaled vehicles to the Assessor's office at 860-228-9555.

TOWN CLERKS OFFICE: The Town Clerks office is offering the following services during the COVID-19 Emergency.

- Vital record requests (certified copies) via mail. Funeral Home directors/representatives are requested to call our office to make arrangements.
- Dog licensing via mail. Please go to the Town Clerk's page at www.columbiact.org for more information.
- Land Record Recordings, Trade Names and Name Changes via Mail, UPS, Fed-Ex. Attorneys with Warranty deeds, Quit-Claim deeds, etc. should contact our office.
- Online land records searches (with images) available through Record Hub (COTT) remotely on a temporary basis for the next 90 days then back to Index only. Maps are not online – Please call our office to get emailed copies.
- Voter Registration can be done online via SOTS website. <https://voterregistration.ct.gov/OLVR/welcome.do>

TOWN DEPARTMENT NEWS AND INFORMATION (Continued)

TOWN CLERKS OFFICE CONTINUED:

The following Services Not Currently Offering:

- Notary services suspended due to severe exposure to the public.
- Liquor permit filings suspended due to severe exposure to the public.

Alternatives

- Inquiries about notary services - Please check with the UPS stores or your local bank to see if they are offering these services.
- Inquiries about Marriage Licenses - Please go to the Town Clerk's page at www.columbiact.org for more information.
- Processing of Marriage license applications - Please call the Town Clerk's office for more information.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Phone: 860-228-3284

Email: townclerk@columbiact.org

Email: atownclerk@columbiact.org

NOTE: THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARY HAS BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL JUNE 2, 2020

TOWN DEPARTMENT NEWS AND INFORMATION (Continued)

RECREATION

DEPARTMENT: All programs and events are cancelled until further notice.

Follow us on [FaceBook](#) and [Instagram!](#)

REC PARK PROJECTS: The softball field is all but done with a few more finishing touches. Thanks to Public Works for doing all the grubbing, tree removal, and rough grading of the road. It's coming along great!

Program Descriptions

Coloring & Art Contests

Coloring and art contests will be run every two weeks to give children enough time to complete their work. Kids in grades K-2 can participate in the coloring contest. Images will be provided for kids to choose from our town website. Kids in grades 3-8 can participate in art contests. We will release a different theme every two weeks; participants are asked to create an original piece of artwork interpreting the theme using their choice of medium. Submissions should be posted to our social media account. The Recreation Department will judge the submissions and a first-place prize will be awarded. Please take a picture of completed work and tag our FaceBook page as well as e-mail to recreation@columbiact.org. If you do not have a FaceBook account, please e-mail to the above address and we will post it online. Multiple submissions allowed.

Scavenger Bingo

Scavenger bingo sheets will be created weekly and will consist of objects or places that you will be able to find around town, outdoors or in your home. Each bingo square needs to be crossed off and we ask that you take a picture of the object in the square to submit with your completed bingo sheet. All completed sheets/pictures should be e-mailed to recreation@columbiact.org. Once submitted, applicant's name will be entered into a drawing to receive a prize.

Pinterest Board

The Columbia Recreation Department is continuously working to come up with ideas and programs to keep our community engaged while practicing social distancing. We have created a Pinterest Board that is composed of different ideas for activities to help keep your kids active and entertained while at home. Our username for Pinterest is Columbia Recreation. Follow us!

Tik Tok Video Contest

Every Thursday, the Columbia Parks and Recreation Department will release a Tik Tok video. This will mark the beginning of the week's competition. We want to see Columbia's best videos. Make your own video and share it with us on FaceBook, Instagram, or email it to us at recreation@columbiact.org. We will select one winner each week to win a gift card.



Run Into Spring



Sign up online for this two-week running/walking competition. Send us a screen shot of your mileage from your fit bit, app, pedometer or other tracking device. We will keep running totals for two weeks. This competition lasts from March 19th through April 2nd. The winner will be the person who has the highest total mileage in the two-week span and will receive a gift card. You must sign up on RecDesk; there is no cost to this program.



NON-MUNICIPAL SERVICES PROVIDERS AND NON-PROFIT NEWS AND INFORMATION

SAXTON B. LITTLE LIBRARY: The library building and book drop are closed. (No fines are accruing on items checked out.) We will keep you posted here, on Facebook and in the Newsletter as things change.

For something interesting and fun to do... Follow this [link](#)!

For information on COVID-19, Click [Here](#).

For information that doesn't seem to be everywhere, but is crossing our path (like Stop & Shop's Senior only hours) [Click Here](#). (If you hear of something you think should be here email us!)

Click [here](#) to see Saxton's Work from Home adventures.

Digital Newsletters are being sent out on Fridays with updates about the Library and stuff to distract. Not signed up? Go to the [WEBSITE](#) and click subscribe.

Watch our Library's [Facebook](#) page (@saxtonblibrary), posting a few times a day. Megan is posting links to online story times, museum visits, web-cams, and more. Cait is updating new titles we're adding to our digital platforms. Even if you are not a member, our Facebook page is public so you can view it at any time!

If you have questions for us, just want to know we're here or want to chat! Write us.

We have a dedicated email for these times at SBL@COLUMBIACLIBRARY.ORG.

NON-MUNICIPAL SERVICES PROVIDERS AND NON-PROFIT NEWS AND INFORMATION

EVERSOURCE will be replacing existing wood structures with new steel structures on a transmission line that runs through Mansfield, Coventry, Columbia, and Lebanon. The scope of work will also include the installation of new communication wire (called Optical Ground Wire or OPGW), enhancing electric reliability by improving communications between Eversource's substations. In Columbia, this work will take place on a right-of-way (ROW) that starts at an Eversource-owned parcel on Willimantic Road, continues through densely forested areas, and ends at Baker Hill Road.

This work is expected to begin in July and will continue through next year, with final restoration occurring during the summer 2021. Note that this work will not interrupt electric service to homes or businesses.

During this time, Eversource is also expected to conduct routine vegetation maintenance activities in this same ROW. This will include brush control, side trimming, and removal of tall-growing tree species. You can expect further communications about the transmission ROW vegetation maintenance work before it begins.

Property owners near the six structures with a slight height increase will receive additional communications as required by the CSC. **Due to the recent health concerns with COVID-19, Eversource has temporarily suspended its door-to-door outreach efforts.** Prior to any work beginning, nearby property owners will receive written communications and/or phone calls in lieu of our usual door-to-door outreach. A toll free phone number and an email address (1.800.793.2202 or ProjectInfo@eversource.com) are available if property owners would like additional information.

