Good afternoon. This is John Leach, your Municipal Administrator.

Today, I am declaring a local disaster emergency in accordance with AS 26.23.140 to help prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, to open emergency funding, and formally request State and Federal support.

It is important to note, there are still no known cases of the COVID-19 virus in Sitka.

I am urging citizens who are returning from travel, by either plane or boat, to take individual steps to reduce any potential transmission of any virus. Such actions include washing your hands, coughing/sneezing into your elbow, practicing good social distancing, and not touching your face. I also urge self-reporting of potential contact to the virus to local health officials. When returning from travel, please do your best to limit your contact with community members who are in the identified high-risk groups (persons over 65 and persons with chronic disease) and consider a self-quarantine.

As I said last Friday, I’m asking that travel outside of Sitka be limited to essential travel only. Many local school clubs and sports teams have already cancelled their travel.

Businesses are encouraged to allow remote work for employees who have that capability, and I’m asking that citizens coordinate with their employers to pursue those opportunities. I’m also asking our local businesses to consider “phasing” services by limiting the amount of personnel in their business at one time to avoid creating a large gathering.

City offices and buildings (including Harrigan Hall and the Library) will be closed except for those purposes that are deemed essential to the health, safety, and security of the citizens of Sitka (i.e. power, water, sewer, garbage, emergency services, and police). Any employee that is not directly supporting the essential functions I just mentioned will either work remotely, be placed in a recall status, or placed on administrative leave. I would ask that the School District consider the same administrative leave option to ensure money continues moving through the local economy.

We understand that the schools are a source of childcare for some families, and we also understand that school lunches are a necessity for some students. SSD has been working with their bus drivers to explore opportunities to deliver lunches to those children during the school closure period, however long that extends. Please contact SSD for more information.

Knowing that many families will need to stay home to provide childcare, that businesses may choose to close temporarily, or some employees will have to stay home due to sickness, I’ll be working with the Assembly to develop a plan to address concerns with payments due to the City such as utility payments. Options include placing a temporary moratorium on CBS utility bills. The bills would still require future payment, but we could potentially waive penalties and disconnects on a case-by-case basis.

The biggest message to take away is that we need to work together as a community to slow the spread of the virus, reduce the number of cases, and not overwhelm our healthcare system.

Please go to coronavirus.alaska.gov or call 2-1-1 for more information on the State’s response to COVID-19 and for other helpful resources.

With the hearts of Sitkans and resiliency of Alaskans, we are poised to make Sitka the standard by which all other cities are measured!

Thank you.