

## GREENFIELD

# Emergency ops center keeps preparing

By ANITA FRITZ  
Staff Writer

GREENFIELD – A few weeks ago, depending on what time of day it was, you could walk into the John Zon Community Center on Pleasant Street and find a City Council meeting being held in the large community room, a chair yoga class for seniors happening in a smaller room on the other side of the building, or a writing group where members were sharing their stories.

On Monday, it became the city's COVID-19 Emergency Operations Center where you now find desks set up and city officials sitting at them responding to the coronavirus pandemic in safe and responsible ways, following all of the guidelines set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the state Department of Public Health and state and federal governments.

Chief Robert Strahan said, as he gave a Recorder reporter and photographer a tour of the building on Thursday that, for instance, Christy Moore, director of the city's Recreation Department, is not only doing her day-to-day job, but serving as liaison



STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

**Susan McMahon, a parking officer reassigned to the Emergency Operations Center in the John Zon Community Center, checks the temperature of Greenfield Fire Chief Robert Strahan as he enters Thursday.**

for the city with different community organizations and agencies.

He said the heads of many of Greenfield's departments are currently working out of the center, attending daily morning meetings to discuss what the city will do if things

get a lot worse like in other parts of the country.

"Everyone is doing at least two jobs right now," Strahan said.

Both Strahan and Police Chief Robert Haigh Jr. are working out of the center, as are Health Director Valerie

Bird, Marlo Warner, the city's public works director, Moore and Senior Center and Council on Aging Director Hope McCary, who will coordinate volunteers, when and if the city needs them. And, there are

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others, like Police Lt. William Gordon, who is compiling and analyzing data the city will use in its response.

"We're trying to take care of our employees and prepare to take care of our residents if we have to," Strahan said.

He said the city identified the need to have an operations center in place several weeks ago so that everyone could work in one place and be ready to respond to whatever came its way.

Mayor Roxann Wedegartner's Chief of Staff Danielle Letourneau said calls were coming in to all departments, asking questions about COVID-19, so it made sense to have them all going to one place.

"We're in constant contact with hospitals and health care centers in the area," Strahan said. "We want to make sure that if we really get hit, we can manage the response. We're looking out for our residents."

Strahan said the center has been receiving some supplies, but will need many more before it's all over. He said many of what the city has stockpiled has come from local businesses.

"This isn't really about funding, but about the supply chain," he said. "We expect to receive more as time goes on, and we'll be giving them out, as needed."

Some city officials are helping people find the resources they need when they call the hotline, while other residents are helped with information on how to isolate themselves if they think they've been exposed.

Letourneau said everyone working at the center is maintaining the proper distance from each other to make sure no one there gets sick. She said people are also practicing the same when they leave to go home at night.

She said everyone who walks through the door — the building is closed to the public



STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZPAUL FRANZ

**Greenfield Mayor Roxann Wedegartner in the Emergency Operations Center in the John Zon Community Center on Thursday talks with Let William Gordon of the Greenfield Police, left, and Alex Cooley of the Greenfield Fire Department.**

— has to sign in, have their temperature taken, use hand sanitizer and wear a mask throughout their stay.

She said though the city announced last week that it will most likely be using the help of volunteers, if the time comes, it won't do so until it needs to.

Strahan said the center is also working with a liaison from the public school system who is taking information to and from the schools.

"This has been a tremendous amount of work," he said. "We spent last week getting everything in place and were operational on Monday," he said. "People did a great job getting our phone and computer systems up and running and getting everything set up. It was an all-hands effort."

Strahan said the unfortunate news is that six of the city's first responders have self-quarantined — some because they were sick with unknown illnesses and don't want to spread anything, and a couple because they came in contact with someone with COVID-19. They are awaiting test results.

He said because of that, the Fire Department has increased its staff on different shifts and is working closely with the local ambulance company to make sure all calls are

covered.

Strahan said if a 911 call comes in, it will be answered and responded to appropriately and immediately. He said protocol changes day-to-day, though, but the city will make sure its residents and staff are safe at all times.

"We're taking this time now, when we don't have it as bad as other parts of the country, to train people, clean and plan," Strahan said.

Wedegartner meets every morning at the center with her department heads. She is at the daily briefing at 8 a.m. and then meets with senior leaders at 9. The 9 a.m. meeting also includes people on conference call from the hospital and other health care facilities, including nursing homes.

Strahan said his captains are manning the fire station, while Haigh said his assistant chief, Mark Williams, is manning the police station.

"Everything is going like it always does, except that I'm here," Haigh said. "I send messages to the public as often as possible."

He said he's glad the city started this work earlier, rather than later. He said it has been an opportunity to get plans in place before anything happens and to work with other agencies so everyone

can coordinate efforts.

"This is a great spot for this," he said. "If we had a public safety complex, that's where we'd be doing it from, but since this building isn't being used right now, this is good."

Haigh said it is important to keep everyone in one spot so that everyone can interact and act immediately when needed.

"We'll be able to expand here, if we need to," he said. "We're just working the best that we can right now. We'd rather be overly cautious than not."

Strahan and Letourneau said the city and its first responders are currently preparing for "all scenarios." They said they'd prefer to over-prepare and never have to take extreme measures, but no community is immune at this point.

"People just need to do what they've been told over and over: isolate themselves, wash their hands, practice social distancing, everything that they've been told can slow this down," Strahan said. "It's the only way."

The COVID-19 Emergency Operations Center's community hotline can be reached at 413-775-6411 Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Emergency Operations Center is seeking donations of medical grade personal protective equipment for use by first responders and health professionals, according to a press release from the mayor's office. The needed supplies include: masks, gloves, gowns, shoe coverings (booties) and hand sanitizer. No homemade items will be accepted.

Everyone is advised to call 413-775-6411 before bringing donations. Items will need to be dropped off outside the John Zon Community Center, but should not be dropped off after hours. The staff will follow a cleaning procedure before bringing supplies into the building.

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