

April 24, 2020

Livermore,

Under normal circumstances, running a city is an exercise in invisibility. In a well-run city, even though we can get indignant about one issue or another from time to time, much of the time most of us are content to take our community for granted. For thirty years, that was true for me. I advocated for the urban growth boundary, paid my water bill, and got the occasional building permit. But I took everything else for granted.

Then I participated in Key to the City, a crash course in the internal working of Livermore city life. Over ten weeks a cohort of two dozen residents learned about every aspect of Livermore city government: finance, water, maintenance, land use and planning, and much more. Every week taught me something new, but what most impressed me—and our entire class—was the passion, dedication, and pride City employees brought to their jobs. The year and half I've held office has only deepened my respect for how City employees serve Livermore and all of us.

That appreciation has increased as I've watched them respond to our current long-lasting emergency situation. These are the folks who are holding the City together. It's time to make the invisible work they do visible.

Under normal circumstances, City Council Members represent Livermore residents in all of Livermore's diversity and balance their competing needs. Each of us comes with our own knowledge, values, and experience. We take that knowledge and use it to publicly develop policy and goals. But none of us are trained professionals: we cannot and should not implement those policies and goals. That is the job of the City staff, people who bring professional training and experience to carry out policy.

This takes time—representative government sacrifices speed for the sake of that representation. During a State of Emergency things happen fast and the person responsible for managing the City must make necessary quick decisions. That's what happened on Friday, March 13, 2020. City Manager Marc Roberts declared a State of Emergency, which City Council affirmed the following Monday, giving the City Manager the additional role of Director of Emergency Services and the ability to make quick decisions in an everchanging situation. Council is still responsible to the residents: at the several Council meetings over the past month, we have affirmed decisions and given direction to staff.

But the heavy lifting has been done by City employees. Let's take a moment to appreciate the amount of work necessary for the City to function during this emergency and with what good will and competence City staff has gone forward accomplishing it.

Livermore was well-prepared to face an emergency. As the Emergency Operations Center was under construction, City staff was developing a better disaster preparedness plan. COVID-19 was not the likeliest emergency; but a solid plan meant the City could respond quickly to reestablish normal business: ensuring that the City's internal daily business continued, that residents and businesses could accomplish their business needs, whether paying bills or getting a permit, and that ways of participating in governmental policy remained open. City staff switched as much business as possible—both internal and customer service—to remote access. Some staff moved from City Hall to home. Some was reassigned to help non-profits in their important work. Shifts for police, fire, sewer and water were changed to ensure essential infrastructure and public safety functions would continue.

City staff has also responded to the emergency itself. Within Livermore they have put Shelter in Place regulations into place, developed mitigation for economic hardships created by this emergency, coordinated with the school and park districts, and communicated new information to residents. Staff has gathered information from county, state, and federal bodies regarding both ever-changing regulations and funding allocations for both City and residents. To adequately manage Livermore's response to COVID-19, staff has remained current on information about the disease, its effects, and progress toward the future.

In these past few weeks, much that we've taken for granted, much that has been invisible to us, has suddenly become startlingly visible. How our public servants are ensuring our City and all of us survive this crisis should be one of those things.

Sincerely,



Trish Munro  
Council Member  
City of Livermore