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With most people staying home, residents directing their coronavirus questions to Elgin City Hall

By **GLORIA CASAS**

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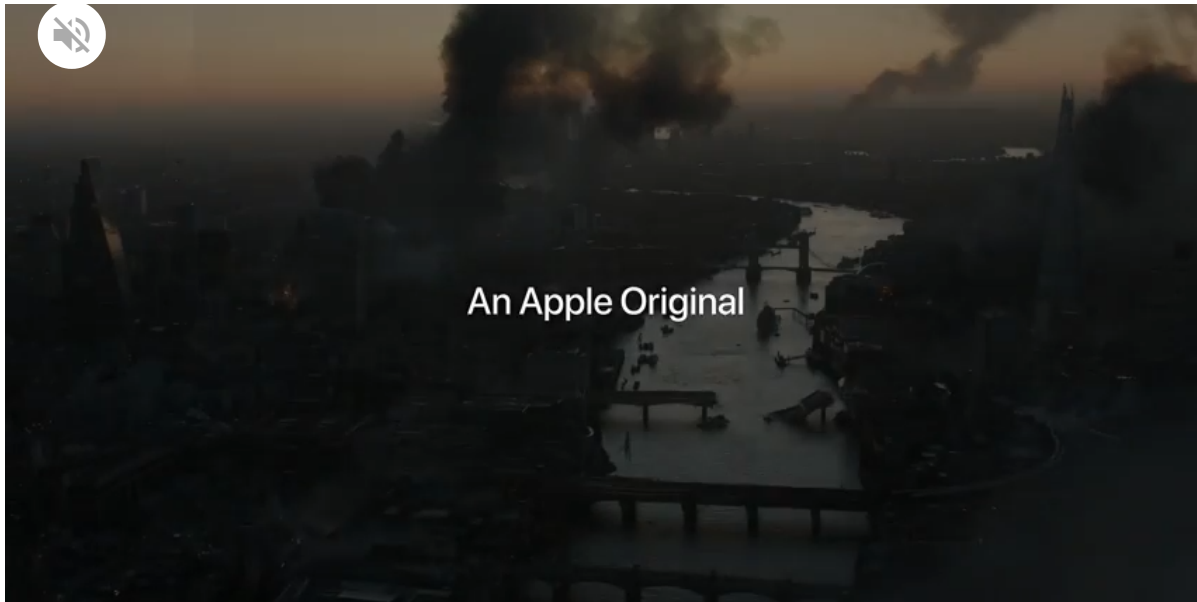


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Elgin's Neighborhood Service Department employees have been coronavirus experts of sorts, taking on a new role in educating the public and businesses about all things COVID-19 the city continues its efforts to be a primary source of information during the pandemic.

The department encompasses the public health, Elgin 311 and code compliance divisions, city spokeswoman Molly Gillespie said.

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Public health is staffed by two employees who've been responding to essential business and illness complaints with support from the Elgin Police Department since mid-March, she said. Public Health Manager Brad Bohner said the call volumes have remained constant, but the types of questions have changed over the last few months.

"Initially, the nature of calls was more focused on health concerns like symptoms of coronavirus or what to do if a household member becomes ill," he said.

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"That shifted with the first stay-at-home order to inquiries about what people could or could not do, what businesses were essential or nonessential, and most recently calls inquiring about the mask requirement, phases of the governor's Restore Illinois recovery plan, testing locations and how the city is handling stay-at-home order regulations," Bohner said.

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Additionally, Elgin 311 has been coordinating with the legal department to determine what's an essential business, and operators have been taking calls about

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Elgin 311, which typically helps people with questions on such things as garbage collection and paying water bills, received 256 inquiries between February to early May related to coronavirus, Manager Jennie Phillips said. Of that number, 169 were to get general information and 87 specifically about the shelter-in-place rules, she said.

The second phase of the stay-at-home order requiring face masks be worn in public has meant more calls going to code compliance employees assisting with the enforcement effort, Gillespie said. Elgin has developed an informational graphic, in English and Spanish, to hand out to businesses when responding to a complaint, she said.

“I am glad that our code compliance team can be out there helping to educate the community during this challenging time,” Code Compliance Manager David Koski said. “It’s nice to be able to have our officers be in the community and seen as more than just people that tell you to move your garbage cans,” Koski said.

“Enforcement” of the state order is educational more than punitive, Koski said. No ticket or notice of violation is issued, and enforcement is complaint-driven only, he said.

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Issues can be escalated in extreme circumstances, requiring the police to be brought in, he said.

Anyone with concerns or inquiries about essential business requirements should dial 311 in the city or 847-931-6001, send email to elgin311@cityofelgin.org or submitting a request through the Elgin 311 mobile app (available in the App Store and Google Play).

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Gloria Casas is a freelance reporter for The Courier-News.

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