

Dozens of municipalities haven't sought COVID-19 aid as deadline looms

By Jason Schreiber
Union Leader Correspondent

Nearly 50 New Hampshire communities have yet to request their portion of the \$32 million set aside to reimburse them for coronavirus-related expenses, according to data from the state.

The next deadline to apply for relief payments is Sept. 15, but many towns — some with more than \$100,000 waiting for them — have held off because they've got a small staff, and they're still crunching numbers or wading through paperwork.

"It's just a matter of being a small town. We've got the documents and we've got the expenses that we've spent to date. We just haven't submitted for reimbursement to the state," said Austin Albro, who is town administrator in Warren — a town of just over 900 people with a full-time staff of four.

Warren was allotted \$22,061 in coronavirus relief funds through the Governor's Office for Emergency Relief and Recovery and is one of 49 municipalities that must apply soon or risk losing money that could help them cover purchases ranging from hand sanitizer to entire payroll costs for certain public safety and other employees who have dedicated much of their time to addressing coronavirus-related issues.

Gov. Chris Sununu has allocated \$32 million to municipalities and \$8 million to counties to cover eligible costs incurred between March 1 and Oct. 15.

The amounts earmarked for each town or city was based on population.

Approximately \$3.9 million has been approved to be paid out to 134 municipalities as of Tuesday while many others have applied for some of their allotted funds and are awaiting payment.

Those that don't apply by Sept. 15 will have another chance on Oct. 30, but Kate Giaquinto, spokesperson for the Governor's Office for Emergency Relief and Recovery, warned that only expenses between Sept. 1 and Oct. 15 will be allowed at that time.

Newport Town Manager Hunter Rieseberg said he's well aware of the \$153,174 that was allotted for his town, and while the town hasn't applied for the relief funds yet, he said Newport will seek reimbursement for some of the nearly \$30,000 that it's spent so far. That figure includes the cost of renting a tent and chairs when town meeting was moved outside, and personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer made by a local distillery.

Rieseberg said the town hasn't applied yet because the expenses haven't been "fast and furious."

"They've been small and infrequent," he said, adding that he expects additional costs as the town is negotiating with a vendor to improve its virtual capabilities.

Jefferson has \$26,543 waiting for it if the town applies, which selectmen's assistant Kathi Marshall said it intends to do.

She said the town has spent just under \$6,000, which was mostly used for town office renovations to address foot traffic and other safety precautions.

While the application process will take time, Mar-

shall said the town plans to submit its request for reimbursement before the Sept. 15 deadline.

"I'm expecting it's going to be a little bit of a challenge," she said.

For some towns, waiting to apply has had its advantages.

Albro, the town administrator in Warren, said he wasn't aware that he could seek reimbursement for increased solid waste costs after the town shut down its recycling program for a short time until he learned that Henniker had included the expense and it was approved.

"That's one of those things I probably wouldn't have thought of without the other town," he said.

The town of Greenland will seek some of the \$97,680 that's available, but officials are waiting for reimbursement on some costs from the Federal Emergency Management Agency first before applying for the GOFERR funds, according to Dennis Cote, Greenland's fire chief and emergency management director.

Cote said he hopes the state funds will cover those costs not reimbursed by FEMA.

"The town of Greenland has incurred additional expenses due to COVID-19 and will be submitting for GOFERR funds that will help offset these additional costs," Town Administrator Matt Scruton said.

More information on the application process and eligible expenses can be found at: <https://www.goferr.nh.gov/covid-expenditures/municipal-county-payments>.

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Staff Reporter Paul Feely contributed to this report.

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