



STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

May 15, 2020 – For immediate release

Contact – Lynne Dixon, Communications Director, (716) 858-8404/ (716) 574-8913

COMPTROLLER MYCHAJLIW: REMOTE WORKPLACES SHOULD BE 'NEW NORMAL'

Keeping employees safe is top priority

(ERIE COUNTY, NY) – Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw Jr. is calling on Erie County to permanently allow employees to work remotely in order to minimize health risks related to the COVID-19 crisis. All employees in the Office of Erie County Comptroller have been working in the Rath Building or remotely since before the New York PAUSE Order was put in place on March 22nd. Those employees work in two divisions: Audit is one, and Accounting, the other.

While most of the 29 employees in the Office of Erie County Comptroller are working remotely, data shows the level of productivity is just as high or even higher than when most of those workers were physically located in the Rath Building at 95 Franklin Street.

“The health and safety of our workers is our number one priority. No one knows when a vaccine will be available. For the health of our employees, as long as they get their work done, the county should allow them to work remotely. The county should not put workers at risk by bringing them back into a crowded building, especially if we don’t have to.”

“Right now, our hard-working employees are getting more work done off-site than they are in our government offices. The job is getting done for the taxpayers we serve,” said Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw.

The Office of Erie County Comptroller planned well ahead to maintain office operations to work remotely, with years of planning in place, thinking it would be a temporary office closure for a short-term emergency or weather-related incident. Most of the work over the years focused on improving technology so the entire office could work from remote locations. As a result, the transition to working remotely due to the pandemic was virtually seamless. The upgrades, software and programs implemented because the office was forward thinking ultimately allowed the County Comptroller’s office to effectively and easily make the switch to handling daily functions off-site.

Even Certificates of Residency, which is necessary for local community college students to qualify for a reduced tuition rate for their out of county tuition, can now be done on-line instead of a physical visit to the 11th floor of the Rath Building. There is no longer a need for people to come into the office to file that paperwork.

“Our work productivity remains the same,” said Comptroller Mychajliw. “As a matter of fact, some units are getting more work done working remotely than when they did sitting in the office. Even the City of Buffalo is

talking about the possibility of making this permanent for some of their employees. Erie County is in a position to do the same. We should make it a permanent change within the walls of Erie County government.”

As we look to what the future may look like post-pandemic, the Comptroller’s Office is prepared to continue working off-site. All options are being explored that can save taxpayer dollars while continuing to do the work and provide the services Erie County taxpayers expect.

“Our vendor payments are being paid in a timely manner, as they always have been. Invoices we receive are being processed the following day. Cash investments are being handled every day,” said Comptroller Mychajliw. “Our workforce is very efficient. They are not missing a beat. Bills are getting paid. Work is getting done.”

For example, in April, 2020;

- 20,192 transactions handled by the Office of Erie County Comptroller.
- 7,432 checks were issued.
- 336 electronic payments were made.

The Audit Division is also working remotely and the division is currently in various stages of six different audits. In addition, templates for future work are being designed to standardize reporting and procedure. Internal training is underway and meetings via conference call are being held to ensure employees have all the tools and training available to them to continue operating efficiently and effectively. The Comptroller’s office is also revising the audit manual to better accommodate work from home.

The Office also continues to handle all whistleblower complaints as appropriate. Our hotline has received and processed as many complaints at this point in 2020 as we have in all of 2019.

“We are well positioned to continue our work in this productive way. Prior the COVID-19 crisis, I was working on a proposal to turn the keys of the Rath Building over to the private sector. Same way the Federal government did with the Avant Building at 200 Delaware Avenue. We can sell the Rath building and save Erie County taxpayer dollars.”

It is perfectly understandable that not all Erie County employees are physically able to perform their job functions remotely. Some are required, because of the nature of their job description, to come to the Rath Building or other county office buildings.

As for the Office of Erie County Comptroller, most employees are working remotely, while others are required to physically be in the Rath Building a few days a week. Comptroller Mychajliw is proposing to give the five county-wide elected officials and the Legislature the option to manage their employee’s schedules and physical locations.

“Now is the perfect time to continue that conversation. We didn’t need so much space before. We especially do not need it now. When companies like Twitter and the City of Buffalo talk about making work from home permanent, we should do the same. My office employees are doing phenomenal work under very difficult circumstances. They should be able to continue to do so. We should always be looking at ways to be more efficient and save taxpayer dollars. Besides, the health risks are just too great to the health of our employees. Why risk their health if they’re doing a great job working remotely,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

#####