

The City of Spokane

## Weekly News Update for Dec. 14

*Information about COVID-19 is evolving rapidly, and our important work as a City is continuing. We want to make sure our City employees have up-to-date information on both COVID and employee news. We will provide this update, as needed, to communicate what you need to know, while we work to reduce the spread of this disease in our community and continue to provide critical public services.*

### **A Message from Mayor Woodward**

Trust is a delicate proposition. It is easily lost and a lot of work to maintain.

The littlest actions or inactions can make all of the difference, especially when it is being built or rebuilt. Promises made and not kept. Actions contradicting words. Omissions and mistruths. Time allowed to pass without sincerely investing in the relationship. Each works against building lasting partnership.

There will be setbacks and moments of doubt. Disappointments have to be worked through very intentionally, prioritizing what is most important and setting aside the rest, making sure those around you are supported and shown their value in achieving the goals established for the team and the individuals on it.

People reveal a lot during times of change and extreme pressure. Be slow to judge in those moments. Save your evaluations for longer durations where patterns and priorities are revealed.

People are not perfect and will make imperfect decisions. If we expect them to be we will be disappointed. A more important measure is how invested people are in the relationship or outcome when the stakes are highest, the moments are biggest, and the pressure is greatest. Are they still there, standing side-by-side, and following through on the promises made or following other priorities?

It is completely reasonable to expect the process to be as imperfect as the person. Everyone involved will have to work at it. Mistakes will be made and courses will have to correct. True trust and partnership avoids repeating them and demonstrates a level of care and investment that is formed over shared experiences, celebrations, and disappointments.

Reflecting back on the past several months as we have worked collaboratively to build a budget that defines the direction for a City and an organization, there is a lot to be proud of and more to learn. The road had imperfections and missteps, but we solidified the foundation. Much room remains for growth and we are invested in those enhancements.

## **Second Harvest Food Drive**

Hunger and food shortage is one of the great challenges affecting our community and in an effort to do



what we can to meet that need, collection boxes are present near the elevators on each floor of City Hall, as well as at several of the City's satellite facilities through the end of December. For more info on which items are most in need, and to learn about where your donations end up, visit the Second Harvest [website](#).

## **Mandatory Payroll Tax Effective Jan. 1, 2022**

Taxation of employees in Washington state for the new WA Cares Fund (Long-Term Care Tax) begins in January 2022. The one-time, opt-out period has ended. To qualify for an exemption from the tax, you must have purchased a private Long-Term Care plan and have the plan in force prior to November 1, 2021. If you have done so, below are the necessary steps to obtain an exemption. Please read carefully:

1. [Create a SAW account](#). This account also provides you access to Paid Family Medical Leave benefits.
  - If you have used Unemployment, Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) benefits or renewed vehicle tabs online in the past, you should already have a SAW account.
2. Visit [WA Cares Fund](#) to complete an exemption application.
  - You are attesting that you have individual coverage. At this time, no specific information regarding your policy is needed. **However**, it is our understanding, the State is creating an auditing program for exempt residents.
  - Proof of ID will be required. Please have this image ready to upload beforehand.
3. **Once approved, kindly submit a copy of your exemption approval letter to [Accountingpayroll@spokanecity.org](mailto:Accountingpayroll@spokanecity.org).**
  - Your exemption letter must be submitted prior to December 31, 2021 to ensure you are not paying the tax beginning January 2022. Please allow additional time for Payroll to process.
  - The turnaround time for receiving this letter, after completing your application, can fluctuate. The letter will be mailed to you and uploaded to your SAW account.

### **Important things to note:**

- Neither Employee Benefits nor Payroll are able to assist with your login credentials to SAW.
- The WA Cares Fund Exemption website is overloaded and occasionally crashes; the best times to access the site is evenings and weekends.
- If you do not submit your letter of exemption by December 31, 2021, you will be required to pay the tax through, at minimum, March 31, 2022. Payroll can only remove the tax, on behalf of an employee, quarterly.
- A screenshot that you have submitted an exemption will not suffice, you must provide the official letter to be exempt from the tax.

The City of Spokane Payroll Department and Employee Benefits Department have no additional information to share other than referring you to the [WA Cares Fund website](#).

## **Paid Family Medical Leave Rate Change Effective Jan. 1, 2022**

For the first time since Paid Family and Medical Leave launched, the **premium rate will increase**. This change goes into effect Quarter 1 of 2022. The split of the employer and employee share of the premium rates will also change in the new year.

**Starting Jan. 1, 2022, the premium rate will be 0.6%.**

The new premium rate of 0.6% takes effect on Jan. 1, 2022. The current rate of 0.4% remains in effect until Dec. 31, 2021.

Employers will pay approximately 27% of the total premium and employees will pay about 73%. For more information on Paid Family and Medical Leave, [click here](#).

## **More Information to Assist You**

*Here are some more resources from our Employee Assistance Program:*

- [Ten Holiday Tips](#)  
Each year, December brings a month filled with holidays and celebrations complete with a variety of gift giving traditions. [Click here](#) for a list of holiday tips to keep you and your family safe and healthy this holiday season.
- [Handling Holidays, Vacations, and Special Events](#)  
It is common to neglect healthy eating and physical activity during holidays, a vacation, or a special event. One reason is too much to do in too little time. To help you manage your time, take a minute to reflect on what's important to you.

## **Employee Information Portal** ([covid19.spokanecity.org/](https://covid19.spokanecity.org/))

Remember, this Employee Information Portal is a great resource for employees to stay current on what's happening with the COVID-19 response. The [Employee Information Portal](#) can be accessed from work or home, using a computer or mobile device. All of the emailed information we have sent to employees is archived here.