



CITY OF BIG BEAR LAKE *California*

MEETING

DATE: April 27, 2020

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Frank A. Rush, Jr., City Manager

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Update, Next Steps?

ACTION TO BE CONSIDERED

The City Council will receive an update from City staff regarding the current status of COVID-19 in Big Bear Lake and the City's response, and will also review a potential strategy for our community to move forward in the coming weeks and months. City Council is also asked to appoint a special, broad "ad hoc" committee to advise the City on the path forward with regard to the expansion of business activities and the return of visitors.

BACKGROUND

Like nearly every other community, the City has been dealing with the COVID-19 threats for the past several weeks. City staff have been working and continue to work hard to keep our residents safe and healthy, and continue to coordinate regularly with public health officials, other governmental agencies, community leaders, and other stakeholders.

The City first became engaged on COVID-19 in late February when the threats were still perceived to be manageable by Federal and State leaders. The COVID-19 threat escalated significantly in the United States and California on March 12, and the City has essentially been in emergency operations mode since that time. Since March 12, multiple daily meetings and briefings have been occurring, additional planning and preparation has occurred and continues, local testing has been conducted, significant public communications efforts have been implemented, additional sanitizing efforts have occurred, City business interactions have been adjusted, and increasingly stringent restrictions have been placed on the public in the United States, California, San Bernardino County, and Big Bear Lake.

As of April 24, the following restrictions on the public remain in place in the City of Big Bear Lake:

- everyone in Big Bear Lake is directed to "shelter in place", especially those age 65 and older and those who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, however, travel is permitted for work and to conduct personal business,
- face coverings must be worn when interacting with others out in the community,

- grocery stores, drug stores, and other essential retail and service businesses may operate,
- construction and repair activities may continue,
- bars, nightclubs, movie theaters, gyms, bowling alleys, ski areas, snow play areas, and other non-essential businesses may not operate,
- restaurants are closed for in-restaurant seated dining, however, take-out and delivery services are permitted,
- lodging and vacation rentals may no longer operate, except for very limited situations,
- second home owners are permitted to occupy their own homes, provided they abide by all current restrictions and recommendations,
- non-essential group gatherings of any size are prohibited, including commercial establishments, churches, community groups, and other formal and informal group activities,
- the lake remains closed to boating activities,
- isolated, outdoor exercise is permitted, including walking a dog, and
- City parks and the Alpine Pedal Path remain open, however, these facilities should be enjoyed by one's self or with their small family group, and users should avoid close contact with others.

It is important to note that the current restrictions were established by Governor Newsom and San Bernardino County public health officials, and the City is implementing and enforcing these restrictions within the City limits. It is also important to note that any adjustments to these restrictions may only be made by the Governor and/or San Bernardino County, and/or through future delegation of authority to the City.

To date, Governor Newsom has only made minor adjustments to State-wide restrictions, although he appears to be moving closer to more significant adjustments in the coming weeks. San Bernardino County officials recently announced minor adjustments, including allowing golf courses and boating activities on the lake. Additionally, an increasing number of California counties and cities with relatively low incidence of COVID-19 are either challenging the Governor's restrictions or actively questioning and lobbying for significant adjustments or local flexibility.

The City does not currently have the authority to relax any of these restrictions, however, I remain hopeful that the Governor and/or the County will soon provide helpful flexibility to the City to adjust these restrictions as our City deems best based on local conditions and the unique geography of Big Bear Lake.

As of April 24, there are a total of 5 confirmed cases in the City of Big Bear Lake and 2 confirmed cases in unincorporated areas of the Big Bear Valley. There are 1,608 cases in San Bernardino County, and a total of 14,885 people have been tested, with 10.8% of those tested yielding a positive result and a confirmed case. It is at least somewhat encouraging that only ~10% of those tested are confirmed to have COVID-19. The County recently conducted a drive-thru testing event in Big Bear Lake on April 17, and specimens were collected from 229 individuals. Aggregate test result data was received from the County on April 22, and, thankfully, only 1 of these 229 individuals tested positive.

A key concern for leaders at levels, including Governor Newsom and San Bernardino County, is the ability of our healthcare system to adequately address COVID-19 cases. As of April 19, the overall County healthcare system is operating with sufficient capacity, with limited and relatively stable numbers of hospitalized COVID-19 patients (approximately 300 – 400 per day during the entire month of April) and adequate ventilator supply (a total of 836 available, with approximately 300 – 350 in use per day during the entire month of April). Locally, in the Big Bear Valley, Big Bear Fire / EMS continues to experience low call volumes, well below typical volumes for this time of year, and is well-stocked with PPE. Bear Valley Community Hospital has relocated patients from its skilled nursing facility to an alternative, off-site location, resulting in more than 30 hospital beds routinely available at the hospital. Bear Valley Community Hospital also consistently reports lower than typical patient loads, and is equipped with 7 ventilators locally.

The City has been awarded a \$100,000 Community Development Block Grant for COVID-19 efforts. There appear to be significant limitations on these funds, and City staff are currently exploring two potential options for these funds to benefit our community: a) a potential antibody testing program for either the entire Big Bear Lake (City limits only) population OR Big Bear Valley healthcare / first responder / public / institutional employees, and b) a small business loan program. City staff and others continue to develop these two ideas, and I hope to present more information to City Council at the April 27 meeting. I also welcome any other helpful ideas that Council may have for the expenditure of these funds. It should be noted that grant applications are tentatively due on May 4, so time is of the essence.

Overall, Big Bear Lake (and the entire Big Bear Valley) has been relatively fortunate, with a relatively low incidence of COVID-19 in our community, thanks to the diligent efforts of our residents and businesses over the past several weeks. I believe the State and County orders, our community's diligence, and our somewhat isolated geography have all contributed to our low incidence, and it's obviously in everyone's best interest to prevent additional spread of COVID-19 in our community. While we have been fortunate in generally holding COVID-19 at bay in our community, many of our businesses and residents are suffering significant and long-lasting economic harm. For some, this economic harm may morph into other negative social and relationship impacts, and perhaps even different forms of physical harm. We are now nearly 7 weeks into the significant disruption of society from COVID-19 in California, and the economic toll is mounting. Considering the relatively low incidence of COVID-19 in our community, many are seeking to adjust the restrictions in place and resume more normal activities. Additionally, the absence of any semblance of a timeline contributes to even greater anxiety in

our community. Perhaps just knowing that there's a light at the end of the tunnel (regardless of how faint or uncertain it may be) would be helpful as we continue to manage this unprecedented crisis.

I continue to direct the City organization with a primary goal of keeping our residents safe and healthy, and will continue this emphasis in the coming weeks and months. However, as this issue continues to evolve, I am increasingly more focused on the City's economic and social recovery, and I have been spending more and more time discussing and contemplating a strategy to gradually, incrementally, thoughtfully, and safely return the community to some sense of normalcy in the coming weeks and months.

DISCUSSION

In my judgment, it is now time for the City to begin taking the initial steps toward economic and social recovery – gradually, incrementally, thoughtfully, and safely. Essentially, I believe we are ready to start taking “baby steps”. As noted, however, the City does not currently have this authority. I remain hopeful that the Governor and/or the County will soon provide flexibility to the City to implement its own strategy in the near future, and I anticipate that some form of adjustments are forthcoming in late April or early May.

I am a firm believer that we (collectively, all of us – the Council, the staff, and our community) are better equipped to gauge local conditions, thoughtfully consider ALL local concerns, and chart a reasonable and responsible path forward for OUR community than the Governor or the County. I am 100% confident that we (collectively, all of us) can figure this out for OUR community, and strike the appropriate balance now and as this issue continues to evolve in the future.

As such, assuming the Governor and San Bernardino County provide the necessary flexibility, and, importantly, assuming that we continue to experience a relatively low incidence of COVID-19 in our community, I present the following framework for City Council to consider and discuss on April 27, and to hopefully promote additional discussion and dialogue by others in our community:

Fundamental Considerations for Implementation of Revised Restrictions:

- The adjustments should be gradual, incremental, thoughtful, and safe.
- The adjustments should balance all aspects of this issue and all community concerns, including medical, scientific, economic, financial, social, and political concerns. Decisions should not be based solely on one aspect or concern, as it's simply not that simple when making a collective decision.
- The very first adjustment should be the elimination of the stay-at-home order, to simply enable our residents to move more freely around the community.
- The most vulnerable residents of our community (over age 65, significant other health issues, compromised immune systems) should continue to be advised to

take appropriate precautions and limit their interactions with others to the maximum extent practical.

- Social and physical distancing requirements, disinfection procedures, limits on group gatherings, face coverings, and proper hygiene must be included in every incremental adjustment. Our residents, businesses, and visitors must diligently commit to honoring these requirements, and proper messaging and social pressure will be vital.
- Various business and industry groups, including a local Big Bear group, continue to develop “best practices” for specific activities, and these “best practices” should be included (and refined) in every incremental adjustment.
- Restrictions imposed at various stages should regulate personal and business behavior, and specifically not seek to dictate which businesses may operate and which businesses may not operate. Different businesses will operate safely based on their diligent adherence to behavioral restrictions and adherence to best practices, and not based on what type of product or service they offer. For example, a grocery store that does not operate with proper restrictions on behavior is likely to be far less safe than a gift shop that diligently enforces behavioral restrictions.
- Business activities that involve direct physical contact between the employee / provider and the customer / patient (doctor offices, dental offices, hair salons, tattoo parlors, and nail salons) should implement additional, special procedures and restrictions specifically determined by licensing boards and/or health officials.
- The responsibility for operating safely should be placed firmly upon the business, and smart businesses will recognize that their customers will demand (and reward) those businesses that operate safely. Additionally, restrictions should be structured such that the business is legally liable for ensuring compliance rather than local government. Consideration must also be given to the limited local and law enforcement resources available for enforcement.
- To the extent possible, restrictions should be as simple and straightforward as possible to promote effective messaging, accurate understanding, strict compliance, and community cohesion. Complexity breeds confusion, and confusion breeds conflict.
- The City must be willing to re-institute more stringent restrictions if necessary to protect public health and safety. Rigid triggers should not be established, one

way or the other, but rather the City should reserve the right to re-institute more stringent restrictions as nimbly and quickly as possible as may be necessary in the future.

- Bear Valley Community Hospital should continue to care for skilled nursing facility patients at its alternative, off-site location to maintain maximum local hospital capacity.

Phase I – “Community Opening” - Target Period: Early May

Key Assumptions: continuing low incidence of COVID-19, adequate healthcare system capacity, and consent from Governor Newsom and San Bernardino County.

- Eliminate stay-at-home order, and simply enable our residents to move more freely around the community.
 - Group gatherings limited to household members only.
 - Maintain effective physical and social distancing in all interactions.
 - Most vulnerable residents advised to take appropriate precautions and limit their interactions with others to the maximum extent practical.
- Allow all businesses (no distinction between types of business activities – retail, restaurant, service, entertainment, recreation all permitted) and churches in Big Bear Lake to operate, with exception of lodging and vacation rental accommodations.
 - All businesses and churches limited to 25% of typical occupancy, as per established and posted occupancy limits.
 - All businesses and churches required to staff entrance to maintain 25% occupancy threshold, instruct patrons regarding other restrictions.
 - Patrons must maintain effective physical and social distancing from all patrons and employees during all aspects of transaction / experience.
 - Food establishments permitted to operate take-out, delivery, and at 25% of permitted occupancy, with in-restaurant seating limited to every 4th table.
 - Installation of hand washing stations or hand sanitizing stations, or immediate direction to restroom when entering establishment.
 - Implement business and industry “best practices”, recommended disinfection procedures and frequency.
 - Implement appropriate protections for employees.
 - Face coverings required for all activity, except while eating and/or drinking.

- Courtesy checkpoint manned by SBC Sheriff and/or CHP at 3 entrances to Big Bear Valley.
 - Not intended to check ID, prevent visitors from entering valley, or enforce typical motor vehicle regulations (unless egregious violations and/or immediate safety concern).
 - Mission is to provide courtesy explanation about physical and social distancing, face coverings, and proper hygiene. Ask if individuals have face coverings, discourage inappropriate behavior, explain the critical need for responsible behavior to keep our community safe and allow for continued visitation in the future.

Phase II – “Limited Overnight Visitation” - Target Period: Mid-May

Key Assumptions: reasonable success of Phase I, continuing low incidence of COVID-19, adequate healthcare system capacity, and consent from Governor Newsom and San Bernardino County.

- Continued free movement in the community.
 - Group gatherings limited to groups of 5 only, unless from same household or family unit.
 - Maintain effective physical and social distancing in all interactions.
 - Most vulnerable residents advised to take appropriate precautions and limit their interactions with others to the maximum extent practical.
- Allow all businesses (no distinction between types of business activities – retail, restaurant, service, entertainment, recreation all permitted) and churches in Big Bear Lake to operate, including professionally / locally-managed lodging and vacation rental accommodations.
 - All businesses and churches limited to 50% of typical occupancy, as per established and posted occupancy limits.
 - All businesses and churches required to staff entrance to maintain 50% occupancy threshold, instruct patrons regarding other restrictions.
 - Patrons must maintain effective physical and social distancing from all patrons and employees during all aspects of transaction / experience.
 - Food establishments permitted to operate take-out, delivery, and at 50% of permitted occupancy, with in-restaurant seating limited to every other table.
 - Installation of hand washing stations or hand sanitizing stations, or immediate direction to restroom when entering establishment.
 - Implement business and industry “best practices”, recommended disinfection procedures and frequency.

- Implement appropriate protections for employees.
- Face coverings required for all activity, except while eating and/or drinking.
- Professionally / locally-managed lodging and vacation rental accommodations permitted to operate.
 - Limited to 50% of maximum occupancy, as per room census or # of managed vacation rental units, at any given time.
 - Guests must be members of same household or family unit.
 - Guests must adhere to all physical and social distancing restrictions, limits on group gatherings, face coverings, and proper hygiene.
 - Managers of lodging and vacation rental accommodations specifically required to register with the City and provide mobile phone contact information to City enforcement staff prior to operating. Primary goal is to maintain effective and immediate communications and immediate remedy of any non-compliance.
 - Implement business and industry “best practices”, recommended disinfection procedures and frequency.
 - Managers / owners required to properly educate guests prior to arrival.
 - City enforcement staff granted immediate eviction authority for violations of restrictions.
 - Self-managed vacation rental accommodations not yet permitted to operate.
- Courtesy checkpoint manned by SBC Sheriff and/or CHP at 3 entrances to Big Bear Valley.
 - Not intended to check ID, prevent visitors from entering valley, or enforce typical motor vehicle regulations (unless egregious violations and/or immediate safety concern).
 - Provide courtesy explanation about physical and social distancing, face coverings, and proper hygiene. Ask if individuals have face coverings, discourage inappropriate behavior, explain the critical need for responsible behavior to keep our community safe and allow for continued visitation in the future.

Phase III – “Expanded Overnight Visitation” - Target Period: Early June and Beyond

Key Assumptions: reasonable success of Phase II, continuing low incidence of COVID-19, adequate healthcare system capacity, and consent from Governor Newsom and San Bernardino County.

- Continued free movement in the community.
 - Group gatherings limited to groups of 10 only, unless from same household or family unit.
 - Maintain effective physical and social distancing in all interactions.
 - Most vulnerable residents advised to take appropriate precautions and limit their interactions with others to the maximum extent practical.

- Allow all businesses (no distinction between types of business activities – retail, restaurant, service, entertainment, recreation all permitted) and churches in Big Bear Lake to operate, including all lodging and vacation rental accommodations.
 - All businesses and churches limited to 50% of typical occupancy, as per established and posted occupancy limits.
 - All businesses and churches required to staff entrance to maintain 50% occupancy threshold, instruct patrons regarding other restrictions.
 - Patrons must maintain effective physical and social distancing from all patrons and employees during all aspects of transaction / experience.
 - Food establishments permitted to operate take-out, delivery, and at 50% of permitted occupancy, with in-restaurant seating limited to every other table.
 - Installation of hand washing stations or hand sanitizing stations, or immediate direction to restroom when entering establishment.
 - Implement business and industry “best practices”, recommended disinfection procedures and frequency.
 - Implement appropriate protections for employees.
 - Face coverings required for all activity, except while eating and/or drinking.

- All lodging and vacation rental accommodations permitted to operate.
 - Limited to maximum occupancy, as per room census or vacation rental permitted occupancy, at any given time.
 - Guests must adhere to all physical and social distancing restrictions, limits on group gatherings, face coverings, and proper hygiene.
 - Implement business and industry “best practices”, recommended disinfection procedures and frequency.
 - Managers / owners required to properly educate guests prior to arrival.
 - City enforcement staff granted immediate eviction authority for violations of restrictions.

Future Phases – To Be Determined

City Council should note that this proposal is essentially a “straw man” to stimulate productive discussion, and can and should be adjusted, at any time and in any way deemed best by City Council and/or to conform with evolving State and County restrictions.

The proposal was thoughtfully crafted based on input from ALL segments of our community in recent weeks, and is carefully structured to achieve a reasonable and responsible balance of community interests. This proposal, however, should be thoroughly reviewed and refined as necessary or desired.

In an effort to ensure the inclusion of broad community perspectives, I am requesting that City Council, at the April 27 meeting, appoint a special ad hoc committee to review, refine, adjust, and improve upon this proposal. I recommend this committee include only a manageable number of 9 members, allow for meaningful public input, and that this committee move nimbly and quickly, with the first meeting conducted during the week of April 27. The committee will be subject to all applicable Brown Act provisions.

Recommended committee members include the following:

- 2 members of the City Council,
- 1 member representing the lodging industry, who also resides in the City limits,
- 1 member representing the vacation rental industry, who also resides in the City limits,
- 1 member representing the restaurant industry, who also resides in the City limits,
- 1 member representing the recreation industry, who also resides in the City limits,
- 1 member representing the retail industry, who also resides in the City limits, and
- 2 at-large residents of Big Bear Lake.

This committee would meet as necessary, initially via ZOOM or telephone conference, and would be staffed by the following individuals:

- Frank A. Rush, Jr., City Manager,
- Ellen Clarke, Big Bear Chamber of Commerce,
- John Friel, Bear Valley Community Hospital, and

- Michael Perry, Visit Big Bear.

The first meeting of this committee would be scheduled for Wednesday, April 29 at 9 am via ZOOM.

It should be noted that the success of this proposal, or any similar proposal, will be absolutely dependent on maximum cooperation from all segments of our community – our residents, second home owners, investors, business, and visitors – and it will be critical to provide the proper messaging, with the right tone, and with continually reinforced social pressure by all parties. The last thing ANYONE wants is to make the COVID-19 issue worse, and / or prolong the economic and social harm. If, however, it ultimately becomes necessary to re-institute more stringent restrictions, City Council should be prepared to do exactly that, and to act nimbly and quickly as required.

FISCAL IMPACT

Implementation of this proposal, or something similar, will continue to require significant City staff time to plan, implement, and enforce, however, we anticipate these activities occurring during regularly scheduled hours for which employees are already compensated.

The cost to staff each of 3 checkpoints with 2 SBC Sheriff deputies, 24 hours per day, is approximately \$11,500 per day, or approximately \$80,500 per week. The City would need to identify funding for this activity, and would also seek a contribution from San Bernardino County (coordination with the County, Caltrans, and others will be essential) for this activity. I believe the City's expense would ultimately be eligible for FEMA reimbursement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

City Council should provide feedback and direction as warranted regarding a) the City's planned CDBG grant application, and b) the proposal outlined herein.

City Council should also appoint 9 individuals to the proposed new ad hoc committee to specifically review, refine, adjust, and improve upon the proposal outlined herein.

Council should note that I fully recognize that some in our community will be very pleased with the proposal, some in our community will be very displeased with the proposal, and that nearly everyone will have their own opinion or idea about each of the specific provisions included in the proposal. That's understandable, and I have no illusion that Council will direct us to implement the proposal as outlined herein. The intent of the proposal is initiate this process, promote constructive dialogue, and provide a framework for the committee to develop a broad, community-based recommendation to the City Council. For the sake of our entire community, I believe we need to begin to move forward now.

These are times unlike any other in our lifetimes, everyone (and everywhere) is impacted in some negative way, health fears are valid and real, frustration is building, and emotions are running high. I have listened intently to every single comment, suggestion, and criticism from everyone I've encountered in our community in recent weeks, and I have tried to craft the proposal to balance all of the concerns expressed. I know, however, that will not be good enough for some, and I simply encourage everyone in our community to first take a step back, and truly consider the other's

perspective as we work through this crisis. The reality is that we are all hurting right now, and we need to work together to pull through this crisis.

I look forward to discussing these issues with City Council at the April 27 meeting, and to working with the new committee in the coming days and weeks.

Attachments:

None.