



CITY OF BIG BEAR LAKE *California*

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May 13, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom
Office of the Governor
State Capital
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: "Plan for the Safe, Responsible Reopening of Big Bear Lake"

Dear Governor Newsom:

The City of Big Bear Lake hereby requests your thoughtful consideration of the City's request to implement the attached "Plan for the Safe, Responsible Reopening of Big Bear Lake" (the "Plan") for the Big Bear Valley (the "Valley") region of San Bernardino County.

The City has worked hard in recent weeks to craft the attached Plan, with helpful input from community members, business leaders, County officials, our other governmental partners, and many others. We believe this Plan represents the most effective approach to keep our residents, second homeowners, investors, businesses, and visitors safe while salvaging our local economy, preserving the livelihoods of our residents, and maintaining the social fabric of our community. The Big Bear Valley has been fortunate to avoid the significant health impacts from COVID-19, and we now need your approval to implement the attached Plan to save our community from catastrophic economic and social collapse as a result of this unprecedented event.

Our Community – Isolated But Close, And Large Enough To Be Our Own County

The City of Big Bear Lake is the commercial and cultural center of the Big Bear Valley, a large forested area of San Bernardino County atop the San Bernardino Mountains at an elevation of 6,700 feet +. The Valley is isolated from large suburban areas to the southwest, located nearly one hour away via long, winding, mountain roads. The area has a rural, small-town atmosphere, we are blessed to live in a beautiful natural environment with plentiful outdoor recreational opportunities (skiing, fishing, boating, hiking, biking, and more), and we are completely dependent upon outdoor tourism for our economic survival. Because of our unique setting, we are naturally socially distanced from others, and this geography and natural environment are undoubtedly the key reasons we have been fortunate with regard to COVID-19.

San Bernardino County is the largest county by land area in the United States, with a total area of more than 20,000 sq. miles, and has a total population of approximately 2.2 million people. The vast majority of the County population is concentrated in the western end of our county, in close proximity to the Los Angeles region. The Big Bear Valley consists of approximately 265 square miles with a population of approximately 22,000, is removed from the main population centers in our County, and enjoys a vastly different lifestyle than our suburban neighbors. We are fortunate to be removed from the challenges these suburban areas face, but also fortunate to have larger city amenities within an hour's drive.

Rick Herrick, Mayor Randy Putz, Mayor Pro Tem David Caretto, City Council Bob Jackowski, City Council Bill Jahn, City Council

Frank A. Rush, Jr., City Manager frush@citybigbearlake.com

The City of Big Bear Lake is the only incorporated city in the Big Bear Valley, and because of our isolation from other populated areas, the entire Valley looks to the City for leadership on Valley-wide issues. The City maintains an excellent working relationship with San Bernardino County and other regional local government agencies serving the Big Bear Valley, and we have been in close coordination throughout the COVID-19 event.

Our COVID-19 Experience – Fortunate And Manageable, But Economically Devastating

The Big Bear Valley has diligently implemented and enforced your “stay at home” order for the duration of the COVID-19 event, and our community’s diligence and responsible behavior have paid off. Thankfully, we have experienced only limited public health and health care system impacts in the Big Bear Valley. Additionally, despite its large size and population, San Bernardino County has also been relatively fortunate, and the COVID-19 crisis has been and continues to be manageable in our county. We note the following for your consideration:

- The incidence of COVID-19 is low in the Big Bear Valley with a cumulative total of 9 confirmed cases. There were a total of 3 cases by the end of March, 8 cases by the end of April, and now a total of 9 cases.
- Thankfully, there have been no COVID-19 deaths in the Big Bear Valley.
- Bear Valley Community Hospital, our local hospital, relocated patients from its skilled nursing facility to an off-site, isolated location several weeks ago, and there are no COVID-19 cases among these individuals or hospital staff. The hospital has more than 30 beds available, and has had few overnight patients for the duration of the COVID-19 event. There are a total of 7 ventilators available for use in our community.
- Big Bear Fire Department, our emergency medical services provider, has consistently reported lower than typical call volumes for the duration of the COVID-19 event.
- In all of San Bernardino County, with approximately 6,000 total hospital beds, the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 (confirmed and suspected) is decreasing at a steady pace, and has not exceeded 451 patients (peak occurred on April 10). There are currently 218 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 (confirmed and suspected).
- In all of San Bernardino County, the number of intensive care patients with COVID-19 (confirmed and suspected) is also decreasing at a steady pace, and has not exceeded 124 patients (peak occurred on April 10). There are currently 65 patients hospitalized in ICU with COVID-19 (confirmed and suspected).
- In all of San Bernardino County, there are a total of 839 ventilators. There are currently a total of 74 COVID-19 patients (confirmed and suspected) utilizing a ventilator, and 200 patients utilizing a ventilator for other ailments. There are currently 565 ventilators not in use in our county. The number of COVID-19 patients (confirmed and suspected) utilizing a ventilator has remained constant.
- Adequate COVID-19 testing is available for all Big Bear Valley residents, both locally in the Valley and in nearby communities located just off the mountain. Anyone who wants a test can secure a test.
- Most local businesses, nearly all of which rely on tourism to survive, have now been closed for nearly 8 weeks. Although you have noted recently that 70% of the California economy is functioning, that is not the case in our community (and likely many others that lack a diverse economy). It is estimated that 70% (or more) of our local economy is NOT functioning, and our community is and will continue to suffer significant harm – from which many will never recover.

The Big Bear Valley has achieved both of the key goals expressed at the beginning of the COVID-19 event in March. First, the spread of COVID-19 has been slowed and minimized in the Big Bear Valley, and our community has and continues to act responsibly. Second, COVID-19 has not overwhelmed the health care system in the Big Bear Valley nor San Bernardino County, and there is adequate (and perhaps greater) capacity in our health care facilities.

Variance Criteria – Big Bear Valley Checks All The Boxes

The Big Bear Valley, either within the Valley or as part of San Bernardino County, meets the variance criteria outlined by your Administration. Evidence is presented below:

- There has been 1 new case identified in the Big Bear Valley in the past 14 days, or approximately 0.45 cases per 10,000.
- As noted above, there have been no COVID-19 deaths in the Big Bear Valley for the duration of the COVID-19 event.
- Adequate protection is available for essential critical infrastructure workers in the Big Bear Valley, and there are no current shortages of equipment or supplies.
- Adequate COVID-19 testing is available for all Big Bear Valley residents, both locally in the Valley and in nearby communities located just off the mountain. Additionally, the City of Big Bear Lake commits to fund antibody testing for all residents at such time that public health officials identify and recommend the most effective and reliable antibody testing product.
- Contact tracing has either already been completed or is nearing completion for all confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Big Bear Valley. Additionally, the City of Big Bear Lake commits to fund a dedicated position(s) to conduct contact tracing in the Big Bear Valley, working under the direction of public health officials.
- As outlined above, there is adequate hospital capacity and ventilator capacity, both in the Big Bear Valley and throughout San Bernardino County.
- As noted above, Bear Valley Community Hospital has relocated skilled nursing facility patients to an off-site, isolated location. There have been no COVID-19 cases at this facility, and hospital staff have implemented safe procedures to protect these most vulnerable individuals. Additionally, the City's Plan includes efforts to further protect other vulnerable residents in our community.
- The City's Plan outlines a safe, responsible strategy to reopen our community in a phased and fair manner that effectively balances public health with economic and social needs. Adjustments to this Plan will be considered in real time by the City Council and City Manager as circumstances evolve in our community, and in consultation with County and other governmental officials.

The City will continue to work with San Bernardino County and our other governmental and health care partners to ensure that we continue to meet your variance criteria moving forward.

Our Plan Keeps Our Community Safer Than Statewide Restrictions

The City's Plan was developed over a 3-week period, initially drafted by City staff, presented publicly to the community and reviewed by the City Council, further reviewed and improved by a broad ad hoc committee of community members and business leaders, again presented publicly, reviewed again by City Council,

and ultimately unanimously adopted by the City Council on May 11. The City's Plan enjoys broad support in our community, and we are anxious to implement this plan as soon as possible.

As you have acknowledged, the impact of COVID-19 and the associated restrictions has been and continues to vary significantly across our vast State. There are considerably different experiences in northern and southern California, urban and rural areas, mountain and coastal and desert communities, and with very different economic considerations. These different experiences confirm that "one size does not fit all" in a state as large as California, and also in a county as large as San Bernardino.

In recognition of the relatively fortunate experience of the Big Bear Valley, the fact that Statewide restrictions are designed for the large urban centers in California that have been most impacted by COVID-19, and the growing frustration among our residents and businesses, it is becoming increasingly difficult to enforce Statewide restrictions. This non-compliance has the potential to create a less safe condition in the Big Bear Valley than that which can be achieved by the implementation of the City's Plan. The City's Plan is safe, responsible, thoughtful, fair, easy to consistently message, flexible, and nimble, and there is widespread support in our community – all of which will promote greater compliance and more efficient and effective enforcement.

We are certain that, as a former City official, you recognize that local government is best equipped to meet the needs of California communities. We know the conditions on the ground, we know our residents and businesses, and we understand their concerns and challenges. A State as large as California or a County as large as San Bernardino simply cannot be as effective as our local community in guiding us through this unprecedented challenge. We expect to continue to rely on the State's and the County's guidance and support, and simply ask you to delegate policy decisions to our local officials, as outlined in the attached "Plan for the Safe, Responsible Reopening of Big Bear Lake". You have our firm commitment to keep our community safe.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration,



Rick Herrick, Mayor

Copy: Dr. Sonia Angell, California Public Health Director
Mayor Pro Tem Putz and Council Members Caretto, Jackowski, and Jahn
Frank A. Rush, Jr., City Manager
Dawn Rowe, San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors
Gary McBride, San Bernardino County Chief Executive Officer
Leonard Hernandez, San Bernardino County Chief Operating Officer

Attachments:

"Plan for the Safe, Responsible Reopening of Big Bear Lake"
Business Guidelines and Best Practices for Reopening in Big Bear Lake