



CITY OF BIG BEAR LAKE *California*

MEETING

DATE: August 10, 2020

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

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

SUBJECT: COVID-19

ACTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

The City Manager will update the City Council and the public on the latest developments regarding COVID-19 in the City of Big Bear Lake, and the City Council will consider one action item pertaining to COVID-19.

City Council will consider a formal resolution authorizing a grant in the amount of up to \$46,800 to Bear Mountain Family Medicine, Big Bear Lake, CA, to provide 900 free COVID-19 tests to residents of the Big Bear Valley.

Council may also consider and take additional COVID-19 actions deemed necessary or helpful as a result of public comment, Council discussion, and new information that emerges regarding COVID-19.

BACKGROUND

The City continues to be heavily engaged in COVID-19 issues, and continues to strive to strike the right balance among many competing concerns during the COVID-19 event.

As of August 7, the Big Bear Valley continues to experience a relatively low incidence rate of COVID-19. Despite a significant increase in confirmed cases in July, the Big Bear Valley continues to have a lower incidence than California as a whole, San Bernardino County, and all of Southern California. We continue to be relatively fortunate – with relative being the operative term.

As of August 7, there have been a total of 77 confirmed cases in the Big Bear Valley since reporting began in mid-March. A total of 40 cases have been reported in the City limits, with 37 cases reported outside the City limits. Of these 77 cases, San Bernardino County contact tracers report that 55 have recovered, and that 22 of these cases are currently “active”. It is important to note that all of these 22 individuals should currently be isolated, and not moving around the community. To put this in perspective, with an estimated population of 22,000 people in the Big Bear Valley, this means that approximately 1 in every 1,000 residents has a currently active case of COVID-19. Over the past two weeks (July 23 – August 6), a total of 30 new cases have been reported, which equates to a two-week new case rate of 136 cases per 100,000 population. This rate remains far below the State rate, San Bernardino County’s rate, and nearly every other area’s

rate in California, thankfully. Most importantly, there have been no deaths attributed to COVID-19 in the Big Bear Valley, thankfully.

The other key data point is the number of hospitalizations in San Bernardino County. It is important for Big Bear Lake to monitor County hospitalization data because any seriously impacted COVID-19 patients in our community would be treated by one of the larger hospitals off the mountaintop. Bear Valley Community Hospital would initially assist the patient, but if their condition is serious, the patient would be transferred out as soon as possible. During June and July, the number of hospitalizations increased significantly in San Bernardino County, from a hospital census of 217 patients on June 1 to a total of 738 in July 25. Since July 25, the total number of COVID-19 patients has decreased by more than 16%, and as of August 5 had decreased to 617. Although strained, San Bernardino County hospitals have maintained adequate capacity for the duration of the COVID-19 event, and the recent trends are at least slightly encouraging. We all obviously hope this trend will continue.

The City's efforts place the highest priority on public health and safety concerns, but also recognize and seek to balance the economic concerns, personal freedom and fairness concerns, applicable State restrictions, mental health concerns, legal constraints, the City's limited jurisdiction in the Big Bear Valley, the prudent use of the City's financial resources, and practical limitations. Ideally, the City will be able to help keep our community safe while also effectively balancing all of these other concerns.

As you know, there are a wide range of values and opinions in our community, and COVID-19 is a highly emotional and fearful issue for many. The City has relied primarily on the objective data available for *our community* (rather than media reports from around the region, State, and Nation) to guide our decisions, and will continue to do so. The City's efforts have intentionally sought to address each of the concerns in our community, in a balanced manner, in an attempt to maintain public health and safety, the economic vitality of our community, and community cohesion – in both the short-term and the long-term.

The City has and/or continues to implement the following strategies:

- significant public education and communication efforts, via online platforms, partnerships, personal interactions, public signage, and more,
- objective research and analysis of COVID-19 data specific to our community,
- friendly and cooperative enforcement of the various State restrictions in place for various businesses, with both proactive and reactive efforts,
- promotion of face coverings, with emphasis on indoor use requirements and cooperation from local businesses,
- distribution of free face masks to visitors and businesses,
- organization of free, convenient local testing,

- improved contact tracing efforts in the Big Bear Valley,
- cancellation of nearly all special events,
- the recent trial closure of The Village, and consideration of other efforts to promote greater physical distancing,
- additional law enforcement presence around the Big Bear Valley, and
- efforts to manage visitor impacts (trash, graffiti, noise, overcrowding) associated with COVID-19 visitation.

The City continues to experience significant visitation, primarily in the form of second home owners spending extended periods of time in Big Bear Lake and also short term guests visiting local lodging facilities and vacation rentals. Big Bear Lake remains an attractive, convenient, safe outdoor destination for those in other communities seeking to get away for a few days or longer, and occupancy rates have been consistently high for the past several weeks. The high occupancy, and also the generally longer stays (more midweek visitation) are generating additional noise complaints in residential neighborhoods, and City staff and vacation rental managers have been working hard to address these concerns. In an effort to improve enforcement and compliance, the City will now be deploying Sheriff personnel to every noise complaint received after 10 pm (and will also dispatch the vacation rental manager and City staff as needed), and excessive noise citations will be issued as appropriate in the Sheriff's judgment.

Additionally, the general sense of overcrowding has generated some angst in the community, and both City staff and Visit Big Bear are working to be helpful when and where possible. For example, City staff have been assisting the US Forest Service with trash collection along the Alpine Pedal Path since the beginning of the COVID-19 event, and have also been removing graffiti from US Forest Service lands – despite the fact that these locations are not in the City limits. Visit Big Bear continues significant education efforts, and is currently mobilizing to provide additional trash collection and portable toilets in key areas, and vacation rental companies are organizing neighborhood trash collection efforts, all in an attempt to assuage the recent angst about these issues. Ultimately, I believe the source of the angst stems simply from the fact that the typical “breaks” in visitation are not occurring – it is now nearly constant as opposed to midweek breaks and/or slower weekends spaced throughout the year.

Although some will likely be disappointed in this statement, I don't believe the City should restrict visitors to our community UNLESS we are willing to also prevent our residents from leaving our community – which likely results in significant negative consequences on many levels. It's also important to note that the City only has jurisdiction over approximately 6.5 square miles in the Big Bear Valley, with most of the land area not under the City's jurisdiction.

DISCUSSION

City Council should note that the City continues to evaluate many different ideas and strategies to keep our community safe and effectively balance all of the concerns. There are currently four different ideas and strategies in progress and/or under consideration, and these are outlined below:

Additional Testing for Big Bear Valley Residents

San Bernardino County recently executed a new contract for testing services throughout the County, and believes this new contract will allow for quicker scheduling and faster test results. There are numerous testing sites established around the County in larger population centers, and appointments can be made online.

In an effort to make it more convenient for Big Bear Valley residents to be tested, the City and the County have tentatively established a monthly testing event at City Hall. Tentative testing event dates are as follows:

- August 18,
- September 22,
- October 20,
- November 17, and
- December 15.

We are awaiting confirmation of these dates from the County, and will then publicize accordingly. Additionally, we are working to schedule flu vaccinations on a monthly basis also, likely on a similar schedule.

In addition to these tentative County test dates, the City has been working to organize more convenient, daily testing – with nearly immediate test results – in Big Bear Lake. The City Council is asked to formally approve the attached Resolution Authorizing Grant Award for Local COVID-19 Testing, which would establish a partnership between the City and Bear Lake Professionals, Big Bear Lake, CA, to offer free testing to Big Bear Valley residents on a daily basis for at least a 6-week period beginning no later than September 1. As outlined in the attached resolution and draft grant agreement, the program would operate under the following terms:

- the City would award a grant of \$46,800 to Bear Lake Professionals (BLP), a group affiliated with Heritage – Victor Valley Medical Group / Bear Mountain Family Medicine,
- BLP would be responsible for the coordination, administration, and reporting of 900 COVID-19 tests to residents of the Big Bear Valley, and would use the grant funds to purchase the test kits and a rapid test result device from Abbott Laboratories,
- BLP would provide up to 4 COVID-19 tests per hour during normal business hours, upon mutual agreement of City and BBLM, at their facility on Big Bear Boulevard,
- testing would begin as soon as possible, but not later than September 1,
- BLP would provide COVID-19 tests until such time that 900 tests are exhausted,
- BLP would provide all reservation, patient processing, testing, analysis, and reporting services associated with COVID-19 tests,

- in addition to required reporting to public health entities, BLP would provide daily reports to the City indicating the # of tests performed and the # of positive tests on the previous day,
- test results would be provided to the patient within 1 hour,
- BLP would be required to collect patient income data (on a simple 1-2 page form, no identifying information required) so that the City can document low-income individuals receiving the test (the City intends to utilize CDBG funding for this grant),
- all patients would be required to have a 92314, 92315, 92333, or 92386 zip code,
- tests would be provided at no cost to the patient,
- initially, no symptoms would be required to secure a test, but the City and BLP may adjust the testing criteria in the future as warranted,
- the City would reserve the right to establish additional criteria for individuals to receive tests in the future, depending on experience, test supplies, and other factors,
- at the conclusion of 900 tests, BLP would retain the testing device and may use in any manner deemed best by BLP, and
- the City would consider the purchase of additional tests as we near the exhaustion of the initial 900 tests, depending on experience and perceived need at that time.

The attached resolution incorporates the attached draft grant agreement prepared by the City Attorney. The draft grant agreement includes the terms noted above, but has not yet been reviewed by BLP. In the interest of expediency, the attached resolution grants authority to the City Attorney and the City Manager to adjust the provisions of the agreement as warranted after further consultation with BLP. If the City Council approves the attached resolution on August 10 and there are no substantive concerns with the draft agreement, BLP would place the order for the 900 testing kits and rapid test result device on August 11. Testing would begin as soon as possible thereafter, and the City would publicize accordingly.

As you know, the City has been awarded \$100,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for COVID-19 testing, and the City intends to use these funds for this grant. There are numerous requirements associated with these funds, and if it is ultimately not possible to receive reimbursement through CDBG, the City will rely on Federal CARES Act funding for this initiative. As reported previously, the City anticipates an ~ \$64,000 CARES Act award. In a worst case scenario, if the requirements of both CDBG and CARES cannot be met, the City would utilize General Fund monies for this initiative (unlikely, but the General Fund represents the ultimate fall-back provision).

Representatives of BLP and Abbott Laboratories will attend the August 10 meeting, and will be available to answer any questions from the City Council.

Improved Contact Tracing Efforts

As noted above, the City's decisions are based primarily on objective data available for our community, and to this end, I have recently implemented an agreement with San Bernardino

County for the provision of a dedicated contact tracer focused solely on Big Bear Valley cases. Beginning July 31, the contact tracer is working to expedite the contact tracing for our local cases, and is also providing additional data to the City that is specific to the entire Big Bear Valley. This additional data will be valuable as the City formulates its continued response to the COVID-19 event in the coming weeks and months.

The specific reporting format is still being tweaked, however, the additional data has already been very helpful. The contact tracer has indicated that 55 of the 77 cases in the Big Bear Valley have recovered from COVID-19 thus far, resulting in a total of 22 current active cases. This is the most relevant indicator of the current risk in our community, and the City will have access to updated data going forward that will help determine the City's continued response.

I am also currently working with the contact tracer to ascertain, in overall terms, where these 77 confirmed cases were acquired – from another individual in the valley? from a family member? from a visitor to the valley? from a location that our resident travelled to, either off the mountain, out of the region, or out of the state? There are important privacy issues still to be resolved, however, I hope to work through these issues soon and glean additional insights to share with the Council and the community.

The City's cost for this agreement with the County is approximately \$5,000 per month, and we will continue this arrangement for as long as it's beneficial.

Rescheduling of Fireworks Show

The City and Visit Big Bear's arrangement with the pyrotechnic company allows the City to reschedule the show for any date prior to October 31 without forfeiting the combined \$37,500 deposit (\$18,750 from the City and \$18,750 from Visit Big Bear) provided in April. We are now in the process of seeking additional flexibility from the pyrotechnic company to allow for the rescheduling of the show, in a low-key fashion, for Saturday, November 28 – the 40th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Big Bear Lake.

The rescheduling of the fireworks show for this date is dependent on the COVID-19 situation at that time, the cooperation and flexibility of the pyrotechnic company, agreement from Visit Big Bear, and cooperation from Pine Knot Marina. The fireworks show would be set off from the end of the jetty at the Pine Knot Marina, which appears to be far enough from other structures to allow for a similar quality show as originally planned for July 4. Initial conversations with Visit Big Bear, the owner of Pine Knot Marina, and the Big Bear Fire Department have been positive, and if City Council concurs with this strategy we will continue to pursue this option. We would not expect to need significant volunteer assistance from the Rotary Club for this option, however, additional conversations are also necessary with the Rotary Club.

It is important to note that the primary intent of the fireworks show for this date is to celebrate the incorporation of the City and provide a festive event for our residents and second home owners. There will certainly be visitors here that weekend, as it falls during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, however, we would not actively promote the fact that a fireworks show is planned.

Future Village Street Closures

Unfortunately, the City's trial street and parking space closures in The Village on July 25 and 26 were not as helpful to Village businesses or as effective in promoting physical distancing as hoped.

At the special meeting on July 30, City Council expressed interest in considering additional closures later in August or September, with additional lead time for businesses to plan accordingly, and asked City staff to consider ways to improve the “feel” of the closure and provide additional shade options in the center of the street to promote greater physical distancing. One perception of the July 25 – 26 event was that the middle of Pine Knot Avenue was too sunny, and pedestrians remained on the sidewalks because they were shadier and also because of the closer proximity of the business entrances and display windows.

If Council would like to implement another trial closure in August, the City could potentially rent large (30’ by 30’ or similar size) open-air tents for strategic installation on Pine Knot Avenue, at an estimated cost of approximately \$1,300 per tent for a two-day weekend in order to provide shade features in the middle of Pine Knot. We also estimate that the City could purchase large, potted trees for strategic placement along the street for approximately \$300 - \$400 each. After the closure, the City would make beneficial use of these trees at other City facilities. It may also be possible for the City to “borrow” or “rent” these features. If the Council is interested in organizing another trial closure, I recommend the weekend of August 29 – 30 or September 5 – 7 (Labor Day weekend) in order to provide more lead time for businesses. Obviously, any weekend later in September would also be feasible.

Council should note that the motivation for the July 25 – 26 trial closure, and any potential trial closures in August or September, was / is to promote greater physical distancing and allow for additional outdoor business activities – as a potentially helpful response to COVID-19. During previous discussions, however, it appeared that the motivation for the trial closure may be rooted more as a long-term strategy to enhance business activities and the visitor experience in The Village in general. If the motivation for the trial closures is as a potentially helpful response to COVID-19, it is worthwhile to implement another trial closure later in August or September. If, however, the motivation is more of a long-term strategy, I believe it would be best to schedule a trial closure for this purpose after the City has emerged from COVID-19 and we have returned to normal. If the motivation is more of a long-term strategy, I believe it will be more meaningful to evaluate this approach during normal conditions than in the midst of COVID-19, which is already fraught with a variety of challenges.

FISCAL IMPACT

The proposed grant award for COVID-19 testing is \$46,800, and will likely be funded by CDBG or CARES funding.

The cost of focused contact tracing efforts is approximately \$5,000 per month. Sufficient funding is available in the FY 2020-21 budget for this expense, and it may also ultimately be covered by CARES funding.

The City and Visit Big Bear have each placed an \$18,750 deposit toward a fireworks show, and the remaining cost of the fireworks show is \$18,750 each. Sufficient funding is included in the FY 2020-21 budget for this expense.

Depending on the specific amenities included in a future trial closure in The Village, it is estimated that the City may incur approximately \$5,000 - \$10,000 of expense, in addition to staff time, to create the desired “feel” in The Village.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

None requiring review under the California Environmental Quality Act.

RECOMMENDED MOTIONS

1. Motion to adopt the Resolution Authorizing Grant Award for Local COVID-19 Testing.
2. Council should provide general direction regarding a potential November 28 fireworks show.
3. Council should provide general direction regarding future trial street closure(s) in The Village.

I look forward to updating the City Council and the public on COVID-19 issues in Big Bear Lake, and look forward to your questions, suggestions, and direction as we move forward.

Council may also wish to make additional motions regarding COVID-19 depending on the substance of public comments and Council discussion at the August 10 meeting.

Attachments:

1. Resolution Authorizing Grant Award for Local COVID-19 Testing
2. Draft Grant Agreement