



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Routt County Commissioners Extend Lodging Restrictions to May 31 County to Follow State's Lead on "Safer at Home" Restrictions

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO – April 22, 2020 — During their Board meeting today, the Routt County Commissioners received an update on the COVID-19 impact on the local economy from the Northwest Workforce Area of the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Routt County's Department of Human Services, and the Steamboat Chamber. Later in the day, the Commissioners, meeting as the Board of Health, were briefed by the Department of Public Health on COVID-19 trends. Both briefings were designed to inform the Commissioners and the public about the impacts of COVID-19 on Routt County. The Commissioners considered Routt County's standing Public Health Orders, as well as Governor Polis' Orders. The Commissioners decided to extend the first Routt County Public Health Order (2020-01) prohibiting lodging to May 31 after getting recommendations from the Lodging Association last night. Since the Governor's "Safer at Home" Order is expected to limit Public Gatherings to 10 people, the Commissioners decided to let the Public Health Order limiting gatherings to five people to expire as scheduled on Friday.

Economic Update

Kelly Keith, Routt County Human Services Director, John Bristol from the Steamboat Chamber, and Jessica Valand, Director of the Northwest Work Force Area – Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, presented their findings to the Commissioners. All three presentations emphasized that our economy is reliant on tourism, leading to greater impacts locally than those seen on a statewide basis. Without tourism, unemployment and challenges to businesses will continue.

Commissioner Tim Corrigan said, "We are trying to find this balance between public health and economic health data. In a perfect world it would be great if we had parallel data from both at the same time to inform decision-making."

The presenters explained that data is not necessarily available in real time. At this point in Routt County, we've had 1,816 new unemployment claims filed from March through April 4. This represents about 11% of the county's workforce (this is not the unemployment rate). Unemployment can be claimed for a total of 39 weeks, but additional payments of \$600 per week to pad regular unemployment claims will expire at the end of July. Given the price of real estate and the price of rent, the longer this pandemic extends, the harder it will be for businesses to survive.

Jessica Valand also described another dynamic, “\$60 million dollars came into Routt County through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which offers loan forgiveness if employers hire employees back, but there is tension between our labor force and business owners. Business owners need to hire employees back to get their loans forgiven, but some employees are making more on unemployment, or are unwilling to come back due to concerns about health risks or other factors.”

Presentations can be found here:

<http://co.routt.co.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/13719?fileID=12085>)

Board of Health Meeting

The Commissioners met to discuss the existing Routt County Public Health Orders on Lodging restrictions and Public Gatherings.

Commissioner Chair Tim Corrigan started the meeting with this statement, “I think there has been much confusion between the Governor’s Public Health Order and Routt County’s Public Health Orders. At no time did the Routt County Board of Health issue Stay at Home Orders and decide which businesses could stay open or not. That Order came from the Governor and we need to comply with State Orders. We have, however, issued three Public Health Orders to help reduce the spread of COVID-19: a prohibition of short-term lodging; a limiting of public gatherings to five people; and site mitigation plans for essential businesses.”

The first Order considered was the Lodging Order. The Commissioners commended the Lodging Association’s support for maintaining community health and they received an email from Lodging Association Chair Barbara Robinson stating, “The Lodging Community is willing to be patient with a later opening date in order to protect our most valuable summer season. In the interest of the well-being of the community, an opening date of May 22 to June 1 is suggested. We do not expect a large number of visitors at first and see this as a soft roll-out giving us time to react if needed.”

To help them make their decision, the Department of Public Health gave the Commissioners a COVID-19 update. Dr. Harrington, County Medical Officer and Kari Ladrow, Routt County Public Health Director outlined some of the metrics for easing Public Health restrictions like:

- Is disease prevalence decreasing and now low?
 - 14 days of decreased disease burden
 - Number of hospitalizations
 - Analysis of COVID-19 deaths
 - Active monitoring of positive cases
- Do we have adequate testing capacity for diagnosis and contact tracing?
- Can the health care system handle a potential surge of COVID-19 cases?
- Do we have adequate Public Health staff?
- Are prevention measures for personal responsibility in place, such as social distancing, facemasks, etc.?

Returning to normal will be sped up if we have evidence-based effective treatment, evidence-based anti-body testing, a vaccine, and herd immunity. Public Health showed a new dashboard to help the community monitor our community health at <https://routtgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/d812b9ba764546b6aadeed0dee5f9ba2>, which will be on the covid19routtcounty.com website soon.

After much discussion, the Commissioners decided to extend the Lodging Order to May 31 and to let the Routt Public Gatherings Order expire because the Governor's "Safer at Home" Order already limits public gatherings to 10 people.

At the end of the meeting, Commissioner Monger said, "It is important to continuously monitor and evaluate. If the Governor's Order is not stringent enough and we are dissatisfied with community health, we can issue new orders."

Commissioner Melton emphasized, "I am deeply concerned that we need to make sure we maintain 65% social distancing as the Governor has outlined under "Safer at Home." We need to remind our residents that the Governor's "Safer at Home" Order is not a lifting of all Orders. There is always a risk that we go backwards. Everyone needs to understand that personal responsibility is paramount. We need an extreme level of effort of businesses and citizens to reduce community spread. Under "Safer at Home," staying at home is still recommended when possible, as well as wearing facemasks, keeping social distancing, and hand washing. And we still have Orders in place to ensure that businesses and other organizations implement mitigation strategies to keep our community safe."

Public Health Orders can be found here: <https://www.covid19routtcounty.com/public-health-orders>

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