



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Routt County Commissioners Move towards Helping Restaurants Get a Variance from the State**

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STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO – May 14, 2020 — In the Board of Health meeting yesterday, the Steamboat Chapter of the Colorado Restaurant Association, along with the Steamboat Springs Chamber, formally requested that the Routt County Commissioners support and request a variance from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to allow restaurants in Routt County to open in late May, before the state’s planned re-opening of food establishments.

In the letter, Nick Sharp of the Steamboat Restaurant Association and Kara Stoller from the Steamboat Chamber said, “As one of the largest collective employers in the county, we are comprised of over 100 small business owners and operators. As such, we have created a plan to safely re-open restaurants in order to provide an opportunity to survive this economic downturn. Sanitation has always been at the forefront of this industry with training systems and existing protocol in place that can be effectively adapted to meet the new higher level of awareness. It is paramount that operators have an opportunity to adopt and practice new procedures and best practices prior to our summer visitors arriving in Steamboat.”

Commissioner Beth Melton reacted to the proposal by saying, “I really thank the restaurants and commend the work that they have done. The restaurant industry is used to health and safety mitigation and sanitation and are regulated but the Environmental Health Department. They have a unique ability to place customers in set locations to maintain social distancing and manage this adequately. I am very supportive of this and think that Memorial Day would be a great target. The timeline from CDPHE may be difficult for meeting this date, but I think we should have our Public Health Department take their proposal and create a variance request to the state.”

The Commissioners asked Routt County’s Public Health officials, Dr. Brian Harrington and Director Kari Ladrow, about the current disease prevalence in the county and Dr. Harrington responded, “We are approaching the two-week mark with no new cases of COVID-19. Disease prevalence appears to be very low; the lowest it has been since March. We have conducted 310 tests in the last two weeks, and our last positive community test was obtained April 30. Our scheduled community testing has not been filled with residents calling for appointments, which also suggests that we do not have many community members with symptoms either.”

Routt County's Public Health Director, Kari Ladrow explained that any variance from a county needs to be submitted by the local Public Health Department, with support from the local hospital to CDPHE. After the variance request is submitted, five members at the State review it and then it proceeds to the Director of CDPHE. If approved, then the variance proceeds to the Governor's desk for signature. The timeline for the turnaround is unclear.

Commissioner Doug Monger voiced his support by saying, "I am very supportive of moving forward. I have been championing this all along. I want to see how we can open things up. We know we will have risk and we need to ensure that the correct protocols are in place to protect employees and customers. I say let's open up the restaurants to our local herd and they can get some practice before the tourists arrive... a phased approach to re-opening."

At the meeting, the Steamboat Restaurant Association asked for the variance to allow dine-in service starting in late May or sooner. Many restaurants will have to use their PPP funds by the first or second week of June. Reopening in late May will enable restaurant owners to open safely with more labor costs covered. This will allow restaurants more time to practice and implement new processes before visitors arrive. The full letter can be seen here: <http://co.routt.co.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/13920?fileID=12188>

Commissioner Chair, Tim Corrigan ended the discussion by saying, "I support moving forward on this exemption request. We are directing staff to put together the necessary documentation to present to the state. None of this is without risk. The more we open up, the more likely we will see some spikes in the number of cases and we need manage as best we can. The community has done a great job so far in practicing prevention measures, like keeping a physical distance. We will need to remain vigilant as we move forward. I look forward to our economy opening up safely."

At the same meeting, the Steamboat Lodging Association presented a "safe return" proposal for lodging in Routt County. This proposal included local adoption of the American Hotel and Lodging Association's "Stay Safe" protocols, as well as communicating the Five Commitments to Containment to all guests. Barbara Robinson, the chair of the Lodging Association, explained that June is typically not a very busy month and that they expect about 15% occupancy in June.

The commissioners were optimistic that they would be able to allow the Public Health Order prohibiting short-term lodging to expire on May 31, but cautioned that there are no guarantees. If there were to be a spike in cases, they would have to evaluate the safest steps forward.

The Board of County Commissioners meet Monday through Saturday at 10:30 a.m., and all meetings are open to the public via a call-in line. The Board of Health meets every Wednesday at noon. Agendas and dial-in information can be found here: <http://www.co.routt.co.us/agendacenter>

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