

June 12, 2020**CITY OF GUNNISON COUNCIL
SPECIAL SESSION MEETING MINUTES****10:00 A.M**

A Gunnison City Council Special Session meeting was called to order on June 12, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. remotely and in Council Chambers located at 201 W. Virginia Avenue, Gunnison, Colorado, by Mayor Jim Gelwicks. Councilor Jim Miles, Police Chief Keith Robinson, Community Development Director Anton Sinkewich, City Manager Russ Forrest, and City Clerk Erica Boucher were physically present in Chambers. Councilors Logan, Freeburn, and Plata participated remotely along with City Attorney Kathy Fogo and Gunnison County Health and Human Services Director Joni Reynolds. The Special Session's agenda was limited to consultation with Gunnison County Health and Human Services officials and discussion amongst Council. This Special Session was not open to public comment, but the public was welcome to listen and submit comments afterwards. A handful of interested citizens and guests attended the meeting online. The press was present online. A Council quorum was present.

Mayor Gelwicks thanked Gunnison County Health and Health Services Director Joni Reynolds for meeting with Council. He asked Director Reynolds to start the discussion and then Council would follow up with their comments.

Director Reynolds thanked Council for their invitation to speak with them. She acknowledged the stress COVID-19 has put on the community. Her goal with the amended 10th Public Health Orders was to provide a path unique for Gunnison County. Its purpose was to give long-term direction for more predictability. She chose to use a colored risk indicator system because she wanted to be transparent in risk levels and show what indicators would be monitored with local data to determine what actions and directions each risk level would mean for the community. She considered many options before issuing the recent public health, including deferring to the State for orders. She chose not to pivot to follow State orders, preferring to tailor the order to the individual community. She asked Council for feedback on that choice.

Director Reynold responded to pre-submitted questions from Council on different topics. The first question asked was about collaboration and communication, especially why more communication was not made about the mask requirement prior to the release of the order. She responded that the inclusion of requiring masks was meant to be one part of a comprehensive approach that would include other strategies to limit risks, such as social distancing and hygiene. She noted that the regular incident command meeting, where she often received feedback from stakeholders, was recently held as frequently as it was in the past. Mayor Gelwicks said that Council would have liked more time to discuss a mask requirement amongst themselves prior to the mandate. When previous major changes were on the horizon, discussion on those topics occurred verbally and in writing amongst the stakeholders. The Mayor preferred that two-step process to ensure more inclusion and feedback. Director Reynolds agreed that presenting the ideas in writing and verbally could be more effective, especially with the reduction of stakeholder meetings. The second question asked the Director regarded enforcement and education. She responded that the focus should be on shifting the local culture to make mask-wearing a part of the culture to help limit COVID-19 outbreaks in the community. She hoped that enforcement would be done through education. She acknowledged Police Chief Robinson's support and assistance throughout this time. The third question was about timing and asked if now is the right time to have a mandate for masks since COVID-19 rates have stabilized. She responded that previously the community was in a reactive mode and as the situation has stabilized some, the Health Department wanted to think proactively and take steps that could help maintain the stability for the long-term. She chose to include the mask requirement now as one of multiple tools to help preserve the health of the community and to support the economy, tourism, and the mental and social well-being of the community.

Councilor Miles commended Director Reynolds on her overall response to the pandemic. He recommended supporting education over enforcement in this situation. Residents with whom he has spoken to may feel like they have been threatened with fines and penalties. He will continue to support the Health Department and does not want the County to lose the support and overall compliance it has received from residents so far. He would have liked to have seen more direction and signage earlier on.

Director Reynolds responded that the public health orders were never intended to be a threat. She saw masks as an effective tool that can be used to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, along with using disinfectants and hand sanitizer. She wondered if the County should continue to issue their own health orders or transition to following State orders. Councilor Miles supported the County issuing its own health orders, as they need to be appropriate for our community. Director Reynolds has submitted a variance to the State that would allow for more community openings and activity based on local data. The County is waiting to hear back on the variance from the State at this time.

Councilor Diego thanked Director Reynolds for her work. He acknowledged that emotions are running high. He spoke about how the community and world is experiencing a variety of feelings, such as anger and grief. Those emotions have resulted in community divisions. He reminded the attendees that the County is in a marathon and not a sprint and we need to be ready for a potential second wave of infections. He supported the use of masks within the community as one method to reduce spread. He acknowledged that all people are facing challenges and he wants to work to find the best paths forward. Director Reynolds appreciated Councilor Plata's acknowledgment of the grieving process and how all communities will respond differently.

Councilor Logan concurred with Councilor Miles' and Councilor Plata's sentiments, concerns, and questions. She also stated her appreciation of the work Director Reynolds has done and her conviction to the safety of the residents. Councilor Logan also noted her concern about enforcement and communication. She would have liked to have had more communication about the mask mandate to better prepare businesses and residents. Director Reynolds stated a commitment to better communication in the future. She had some input from businesses about masks prior to the release of the health order. She acknowledged that the science around this infection continues to evolve and she sees masks are part of a reduction pathway.

Councilor Freeburn thanked Director Reynolds. He expressed concern about the division that has been created in the community. He supported the safeguards that residents and visitors have been asked to do to possibly reduce spread. He said that some of the tone of the communication has been off-putting to residents and second-homeowners. He noted the final statement in the amended 10th Public Health Order that says violations included 'a high fine and imprisonment' seems harsh.

Director Reynolds responded to Councilor Freeburn's concern about the consequences in the health order. She said that the language used is directly out of the statute and it was included, rather than just referenced, so people would not have to personally look for it. She noted that, in general, public health orders are extremely rare. A public health order has never been issued before in Gunnison County and this is uncharted territory. She acknowledged how the rarity and unfamiliarity of this situation is causing challenges and great stress for everyone. She said that she takes the responsibilities for the public health of Gunnison County seriously. She considers all aspects of health throughout the community, including social, mental, and economic impacts.

Mayor Gelwicks agreed with the Director's goal to increase the percentage of patrons wearing masks. He stated, for medical reasons, he cannot wear a mask for an extended amount of time. He acknowledged to the Director that the feedback he has provided has been received and taken into consideration. He shared two different perspectives in an effort to move forward. First, he expressed concern about having a lack of compliance from some local business owners and their patrons and the obligation of putting the enforcement of wearing masks on business owners. He does not want to increase the chances for unnecessary conflicts between the local police officers and individuals not wearing masks. More communication or a different tone of communication could be considered to educate why the County is mandating masks now.

Police Chief Robinson agreed with the Mayor's points. Chief Robinson stated that the first step of enforcement will continue to be education. Education has moved to business owners from residents and second homeowners. Clear intent to disobey the order must be adequately shown to make it a criminal action. He reviewed the steps that could occur in a business before the police are called. Businesses are the place where the most consistent level of communication can occur. Education about the mask-wearing exemptions may be helpful for people to improve understanding and compliance with the order.

City Manager Forrest noted that the County and local municipalities will receive \$1.4 million to help support the community's COVID-19 response and then be reimbursed for some previous

expenses, like the COVID-19 Business Relief Grant program. Highway banners will also be displayed and more communication is coming. City Attorney Fogo suggested that the tone of the order could be adjusted in the future to make it more understandable and to help increase compliance from business owners, residents, and patrons.

Director Reynolds responded to previous comments. She used scientific modeling information as part of her decision-making process. The County's increased number of guests and visitors may increase vulnerability.

Councilor Plata stated that Gunnison City Council supported the orders and the Director. It is time to move forward with better communication and continue to respect that we are all human beings working through a difficult crisis. Mayor Gelwicks expressed final thoughts on the fact that people are coming into Gunnison from a wide variety of places and have different views and reactions to masks; therefore, consistency and communication are essential. He wondered aloud if the mandate could be loosened if COVID-19 becomes less of a risk with a vaccine or a prolonged timeframe of decreases in infections. Director Reynolds agreed that the situation will continue to evolve and the public health order may change if warranted. She thanked Council and stated that she will take the City of Gunnison's input into consideration. Masks have been distributed to the Chambers and the County's PIO will continue to provide the community with the most recent updates. Council thanked Director Reynolds.

City Manager Forrest mentioned that the City is working on a July 4th celebration with a fireworks show, traveling band, and house decorating contest. An update was given on the downtown parklets. More discussion will occur about parklet locations and logistics before they are finalized and executed. Likely locations for the parklets are South Main and East Virginia.

Councilor Miles departed the Special Session. With no further business for the Special Session, Mayor Gelwicks adjourned the Special Session at 11:42 a.m.

Attest:

E. Boucher

City Clerk



Jim Gelwicks
Mayor