

## **Community update on COVID-19 and topics of current interest**

*August 06, 2020: Message from Council Chair Sara Scott*

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Today I'll provide some information on a few topics of current interest: an update regarding COVID-19 response, a high-level summary of the upcoming decision and public meetings regarding the Carbon Free Power Project, and information regarding two upcoming workshops that are part of the engagement process for the Downtown planning initiative.

I hope this note finds you and families and friends well; I hear from many folks who want us to keep working hard as a community to help our businesses and schools by staying home and always wearing our masks and keeping our distance when we must be out. An increased number of reminders are being provided around the community regarding public health requirements. As a community we've shown our generosity, patience, and kindness as we always do when addressing challenges – let's keep that going as we move forward, realizing that we have a ways to go, and we are best when working together.

Regarding the pandemic, during the last Mayor's Council call we discussed issues including concern regarding the current rate of infections, updates that were subsequently included in the July 30th Public Health Order, and the availability of tests. While some providers are limiting testing to symptomatic individuals the Los Alamos County Public Health Office is still providing tests to anyone who wants one. Another important topic was the disbursement of CARES Act funding received by the state from the federal government. Of approximately 150M\$ available to local governments about 50M\$ is targeted for the establishment of local grant programs to support small businesses that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic emergency.

Los Alamos County staff is preparing a proposal for a share of these funds; the due date is Aug 7th. While funds can be requested to support local government response to the emergency (e.g. personal protective equipment required to conduct government business, sanitizing, public service announcements, and other public health and safety personnel costs) the County proposal will focus on three areas of need:

- Small Business Continuity Grants,
- Childcare assistance (for either care providers or care purchasers), and
- Housing/rental assistance.

The Governor's goal is to get these funds out quickly and we anticipate that the review of proposals and decisions regarding fund disbursements will be made over the next two-three weeks. While our community has really worked hard to help support our businesses during the health emergency and I know we'll continue to do that, the County looks forward to other tools for helping small businesses that have been severely impacted by COVID-19. The funds for childcare and housing assistance will further support those in need in our community – and also have a benefit to businesses and schools through support for workers, teachers, and parents.

We'll all be keeping an important focus on our response to the pandemic but there are a couple of other near-term decisions and initiatives that will greatly benefit from public engagement and input as well.

First – on Aug 19 the Board of Public Utilities and on Aug 25 County Council will make decisions regarding whether to continue Los Alamos County participation in the Carbon Free Power Project. The County's consideration of and participation in this small modular nuclear reactor project (with planned power availability in 2030 for 40-60 years) so far has been a result of:

- Interest in identifying cost-effective options for realizing the County's 2040 carbon neutral goal,
- Concern regarding the future price of electrical power resources in the context of a significant number of primarily coal plant closures over the next 10-20 years (estimated at approximately 7 GigaWatt),
- Identification of the Carbon Free Power Project as option for firming renewable power in the County's portfolio at \$55/MegaWatt hour (in 2018 dollars) at about the same cost as combined cycle natural gas generation, and
- The Department of Energy's expressed willingness to invest approximately \$1.4B in the project to lower costs for all participants.

Specifically, the upcoming decision is whether to commit approximately \$1M to the 2020-2023 phase of the project. During this phase a combined construction and operating license application (COLA) for submission to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will be developed. In 2023, the next decision point will be whether to commit to proceeding with submitting the completed license application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC); at that point the County will have another opportunity to decide to remain in, or opt out, of the project. The final decision point to remain in, or opt out, of the project is following the approval of the COLA by NRC (estimated date 2025) before the construction phase of the project. If the County does remain in the project until completion, the funds committed by the County will be repaid as a part of power purchased (i.e. these costs are included in the \$55/MegaWatt hour rate (this rate is in 2018 dollars)).

An extensive set of project information including videos of town halls and a joint Board of Public Utilities and County Council meeting, FAQs, and project overview and status summaries is provided on the Department of Public Utilities website <https://ladpu.com/CFPP>. Additionally, the County's Open Forum <https://www.opentownhall.com/9354> can be used to provide input to the process. The Open Forum will close on Aug 9.

Second – the Los Alamos and White Rock Downtown Master Plan and corresponding code update process is now underway. On Aug 5 a workshop with business representatives was held; the next opportunity for public input will be on Aug 19 focusing on the White Rock Town Center and Aug 20 focusing on the Los Alamos downtown district.

Because of current interest in both commercial and housing development in our downtown areas, public input is critical for helping make sure these areas are developed in a smart and responsible way that serve our community's needs and consider how new options for mobility, transportation, and parking could be included. If you can't attend one of the upcoming virtual workshops, please visit the project website ([losalamosconnect.org](http://losalamosconnect.org)) for information regarding the project, results of engagement to date, and other ways to participate in this important effort.

Please stay well, take care of yourselves, and remember we are Los Alamos and we'll get through this together.