

## Latest developments on the public health emergency

*April 30, 2020: Message from Council Chair Sara Scott:*

As we near the end of April I'd like to share some developments with you and let you know what we are working on. But first I'd like to say I hope you, your friends, and your families are well.

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We've been working hard in Los Alamos to help each other during this pandemic, sorting our way through many uncharted challenges, while keeping apart to keep each other safe. I thank you for that and for what we'll do together as we proceed, together, to work through the coming phases of this situation while keeping our determination strong – we need everyone on this.

Please continue keeping your distance and wear face coverings when you must be out in public places. You are making a difference to our community's wellbeing, including to the health of our tireless essential workers, health professionals, and first responders – this is the best way we can thank them for what they are doing every day (although I do know they have appreciated the thoughtful and generous donations of masks, breakfast burritos and many other treats!). Daily updates regarding the spread of the virus are provided by the New Mexico Department of Health (please see [cv.nmhealth.org](http://cv.nmhealth.org)).

You are likely aware that the Governor's stay at home order was extended until at least May 15. While it is clear that the virus will still be having a significant impact on our lives for the foreseeable future, the State is planning for the gradual and safe reopening of the economy.

To accomplish this, the Governor's office will engage a range of stakeholders including local government officials, businesses and employee groups. I will be attending an initial Mayor's Council "meeting" with the Governor's office and other local office holders Thursday, April 30 as a part of these efforts. I anticipate that a deliberate and data informed process for reopening will be developed and its implementation closely monitored and subject to as-needed course correction(s).

Additionally, the County has started developing a recovery plan – this is being led by our emergency manager. Our County's path forward will be considered in the context of and integrated with the overall state plans being developed. I'm sharing with our Emergency Manager Beverley Simpson, the thoughts and ideas received from community members and those issues specific to our County will be appropriately addressed as needed.

To further inform these planning activities and help provide input to state recovery planning, I will establish a County Council sub-committee tasked with gaining perspectives from multiple stakeholders in the community: including businesses in representative sectors of our local economy, the public schools, the Laboratory, those offering recreational and cultural services, consumers, and those most vulnerable in our community, and reporting their findings back to the full Council to inform our decision making process. This County Council subcommittee will also be useful in later phases of recovery – as we consider how efforts are proceeding and how to address continuing challenges.

On Monday April 27, the County passed its Fiscal Year 2021 budget. This budget addresses needs that support our strategic priorities in areas including infrastructure maintenance and improvement, social services, economic development, and open spaces and cultural amenities while keeping reserves of more than 30 percent of our General Fund expenditures.

Budget options totaling \$1.5M were identified for COVID-19 support and recovery; possible uses for these funds could include the County's required match of potential Federal Emergency Management Agency reimbursements, protective equipment for the community, County support for testing and contact tracing, and increased social service needs resulting from the pandemic. However, Council understands that this is an evolving situation and anticipates that the needs and opportunities for use of these funds will continue to evolve over the coming year(s).

Please recall that the state recently expanded eligibility for testing to include those that are asymptomatic but have been in close or indirect contact with a confirmed case and/or have had a fever or cough in the last two weeks. The Public Health Office in Los Alamos is now offering the COVID-19 test on Mondays from 10 a.m. to Noon and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. (no walk ins accepted, call 662-4038 to make an appointment) and the County continues to aggressively work to increase the availability of testing in Los Alamos.

The community has continued to provide amazing and important support during this time. For example, many are making masks for County and other workers (a big thank you!) as well as for anyone else who needs one. New groups ready to help those staying home and needing help with picking up items from stores or would like a check in call have quickly organized – after just a few weeks All Together Los Alamos has over 55 volunteers ready to help ([alltogetherlosalamos.org](http://alltogetherlosalamos.org)).

All volunteers should log their time because this may help the community meet its disaster assistance grant match from organizations such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (please go to the County website, [losalamosnm.us](http://losalamosnm.us), and click on the COVID-19 button to find the form).

Creative ideas for supporting our local businesses are popping up and I know many continue to buy meals and gift cards to pay it forward. The County Department of Public Utilities has a new link on its website that makes it easy to donate to the Utilities Assistance Program (County website, Customer Care Center button). Please continue to use the County help line at 662-8333 to identify support services, find help on how to work through applications for federal aid programs, or find resources for addressing other County or COVID-19 related questions.

As always take care of yourselves – you are in my thoughts.