

Changes in June for Los Alamos and New Mexico

June 03, 2020: Message from Council Chair Sara Scott:

I hope this note finds you and your families and friends well. (And if you read all the way through this note, you win a special good news item at the end!)

COUNTY COUNCIL

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Council Chair

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What a change June will bring to our community and state. With the opening of in-door dining, gyms, salons, pools and other businesses (all at limited capacities), we are completing the transition to Phase 1 reopening that started mid-May. Mass gatherings of five or more individuals continue to be prohibited.

Throughout the next few weeks the Governor and her team will continue to closely monitor the impact that these expanded business activities have on the four gating criteria (rate of spread, testing capacity, contact tracing capacity, and statewide health care system capacity). These data will help determine when the next phases of opening occur and what they include. Potentially, Phase 2 could occur in early July and Phase 3 in August; additional business openings (e.g. theaters, bars, and casinos) and allowing for gatherings of up to 25-50 (Phase 2) and 100 (Phase 3) individuals may be considered. Our community has worked hard to support each other and our local businesses through the last few months and I look forward to the positive impact this next phase of reopening will have on our community as we proceed carefully in the coming weeks.

The best way we can support continued progress and, in turn, our business community is by doing what we've been doing to protect each other and minimize the spread of the virus – wearing face coverings and keeping six feet apart when we are out in public. In addition, the County has pushed hard for increased testing and at this point anyone who wants a test can get one at the Los Alamos Public Health Office (call 662-4038 for an appointment); as of June 3, a total of 853 tests have been performed for the County out of more than 200,000 tests statewide. The testing program recently implemented at LANL will contribute to growing the local numbers significantly. In addition, the state is working aggressively to continue to grow the contact tracing capacity. Key state and County COVID information is available at cv.nmhealth.org and lacnm.us, respectively.

Per the June 1, 2020 Public Health Order, the County will be opening the aquatic center on Monday June 8. In accordance with explicit guidance in the order, the pool will be available for lane swimming only and reservations will be required. The community can begin reserving pool lanes on Friday, June 5 by calling (505) 662-8170. In addition, the library staff has been working hard to prepare for limited operations and will be opening June 15 for curbside check-out and drop-off of materials. The County Manager and staff continue to proactively prepare for additional opening of County facilities and staff returning to on-site operations, as safe and appropriate, to be ready for Phases 2 and 3 of the state reopening plan.

I'm continuing to represent the community's interests in the state's reopening path forward by participating in the Mayor's Council (this Council is an advisory group to the Governor's office and includes a subset of Mayors from around the state). In addition to what will be reopened as we proceed through the phased approach outlined by the Governor (and specifics that might pertain to those reopenings) – topics for this group include advocacy for potential future sources of funds to help local businesses as well as state and local governments hit hard by the pandemic. I continue to engage weekly with LANL regarding their path forward and the Medical Center regarding their posture (e.g. supplies and approval for some elective surgeries to be performed). I very much appreciate the time folks are taking to communicate and coordinate as a part of all of us supporting the health, safety, and economic recovery of the County.

The Council COVID subcommittee (Councilors Ryti, Robinson and myself) continues to work to address local needs. Recent recommendations include immediately reconvening the Health Council (County Boards and Commissions have been on standby since the beginning of the stay at home order), looking at new ways of getting the word out to those that need help or supplies but have limited access to traditional or on-line media, making sure folks know that the Public Health Office and Las Clinicas, as well as our other service providers are continuing to provide physical and behavioral health services, and starting to consider what type of disbursement process could be used if federal dollars become available to help our small businesses. The subcommittee also continues to look for gaps in social services created by the COVID pandemic and how those could be addressed through County investments, including using the funding allocated for that purpose during the April budget hearings. One current area of focus is the need created by isolation either at home or in assisted living facilities.

Separate from COVID, I'd like to share some good news regarding vacant spaces. I've been informed that the Kroger property located between Central and Trinity is now under contract. The plan is for demolition and redevelopment. My understanding is that the developer, New Mexico Innovation Triangle (a New Mexico based entity that is broadly interested in economic development and job creation) looks forward to working with the community to address needs including housing and other interests.

So stay well and stay kind – let's keep after facing our challenges together – we've got this.