

A special emergency session of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 12:00 pm.

Councilors Present: Brownson, Herman (via telephone), Rocka, West (via telephone), and Mayor Jones.

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Executive Assistant Benoit, Police Chief Spalding, and City Attorney Henningsgaard. The meeting was live streamed online, recorded, and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

Item 3(a): Resolution to Ensure the Public Health and Safety of the Citizens of Astoria and Avoid Unnecessary Risks to Hospital Surge in Clatsop County

Mayor Jones briefly provided background information on the resolution, noting that on Monday, March 16, 2020, the City Council unanimously approved an emergency declaration recognizing the severity of the threat to public health and safety by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the weekend, the City became aware that large numbers of vacationers were not heeding Governor Brown's thorough and strong recommendation to refrain from travel over spring break and to stay home except for essential tasks. Travelers have poured into the coast and through town on Highway 30 and Highway 26, creating an immediate threat to public health and safety. The threats the City is specifically worried about are the transmission of the COVID-19 virus by persons in large gatherings and the health system's lack of capacity to absorb an influx of patients. Data published nationally showing the virus spread across the country indicates it is reasonable to project that the virus could begin spreading in Clatsop County during this spring break week, rendering this resolution urgent. Columbia Memorial Hospital may be overwhelmed caring for residents if there is an outbreak. Due to the urgency of the situation, the City did not have time to allow for the normal 72 hours advanced notice for a public meeting. Currently, the community was facing two crises in Astoria related to COVID-19. The economic crisis is the hundreds of individuals who have been laid off and businesses have closed or have very little revenue. Astoria has made great sacrifices to comply with the Governor and President's recommendations to slow the spread of the virus. The City cannot let those sacrifices be in vain by allowing thousands of visitors pass through or stop in the city during this time. Therefore, the City has proposed a resolution to restrict commercial lodging to residents and essential workers only.

Councilor Rocka said he agreed with the resolution. Yesterday, he was out walking his dog and ran into two groups of visitors in different parts of town who were not tuned in to the need for social distancing. The City needs to protect the hospital so that it can protect the community. Recreational travel is non-essential and the City also needs to abide by the Governor's request. He believed the resolution was necessary.

Councilor Herman stated that the resolution was necessary. In the last day, a number of vacationers came to the coast. The vacation mindset is to forget about the worries of the world. She had been following social media closely and reading hundreds of comments in response to Warrenton's similar resolution. All but one comment was in favor of the closures in Warrenton.

Councilor West believed the timeliness of this resolution was extremely important. The community has done a lot of work to be responsible and everyone was struggling. The City needs to take responsibility for keeping the community safe. This influx of people poses a threat, so the resolution is necessary. The hospital does not have the beds or the staff to deal with a larger population.

Councilor Brownson said he was struck by how so many people did not seem to be taking the situation seriously. When Europeans came to this country, they brought diseases to communities that had no immunities. Historic records show that millions of people died. This is the same thing. He was at Peter Pan park the other

day and there were groups of children playing basketball. There was no social distancing at the park. At one time, he was on an offshore race in his sailboat about 90 miles from the harbor with eight people on board. His rudder broke at night in high seas and high winds. Around midnight, one of his crew members came up seasick to relieve him from the helm so that he could get some sleep. He was responsible for making sure eight people got home, but he wanted to stay in bed and let someone else get him home. The bigger the issues are, the harder it is to make the right choices. Most people's impulse is to hide out and pretend nothing is happening. This situation is serious and people should take the time to seek expert information. The City is taking action because there is a segment of the population that believes this is not serious. This resolution is for the good of everyone. There will be a treatment and vaccines, but those take time.

Councilor Rocka noted that hand washing and social distancing seem too simple to be true. However, the evidence shows those work. Places that have good success have used those techniques.

Mayor Jones said the Council has received concerns from citizens about the unintended consequences of the resolution. The City is not closing hotels. The City is prohibiting vacationers from staying in hotels and other commercial lodgings. The resolution provides accommodations for delivery drivers, utility workers, maritime workers, many other critical workers identified by the federal government, and cancer center patients from outside Astoria.

Executive Assistant Benoit noted that about 210 people were currently watching the live stream on Facebook. The general consensus seemed to be that most people supported the resolution.

Mayor Jones read the resolution imposing emergency restrictions to ensure public health and safety.

Councilor Herman said that a local bed and breakfast operator contacted her through Facebook who rents to a worker for two days each week. She asked if that fit within the exceptions.

Mayor Jones explained that the intent of the resolution was to prevent vacationers from coming to Astoria on vacation.

City Council Action: Motion made by Councilor Rocka to adopt the resolution imposing emergency restrictions to ensure public health and safety; seconded by Councilor Brownson. Motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Mayor Jones, Councilors Rocka, Corcoran, Herman, and West. Nays: None.

Mayor Jones said just before this meeting started, he received a phone call from Congresswoman Bonamicci who expressed her support for this resolution. She also offered to provide assistance to Astoria's businesses and workers.

NEW BUSINESS, MISCELLANEOUS, PUBLIC COMMENTS


Executive Assistant Benoit provided a brief overview of recent changes to the City's website related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mayor Jones thanked the community for the sacrifices that individuals were making. The City's top priority is public health and safety and maintaining the readiness of medical providers to respond. He encouraged everyone to watch for updates on the following websites and Facebook pages; the City of Astoria, Clatsop County Public Health, Clatsop County Emergency Management, and the Oregon Health Authority.

ADJOURNMENT


There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:32 pm.

ATTEST:



Finance Director

APPROVED:



City Manager