



STAFF REPORT

To: Summit County Council
From: Tom Fisher, County Manager
Janna Young, Deputy County Manager
David Warnock, Personnel Director
Date of Meeting: April 28, 2021
Type of Item: Overview of County Government Emergency Recovery Efforts
Process: Work Session

Requested Council Action

None

Introduction

Since March 2020, the Summit County government has been operating under an emergency declaration and has served on the front lines of the COVID-19 public health emergency. At this point in the emergency, the County is in incidence decline and has surpassed the target of 75% of all adults (age 18 and older) who live in the County vaccinated with their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (as of April 21, 2021, the County's rate was 80%). It is now time to shift our focus to the recovery phase of the emergency.

Included in the transition to recovery are several planning efforts, such as a demobilization plan for the Utah Film Studio mass vaccination clinic, community economic recovery, and plans for how the County government returns to providing in-person services. The demobilization plan also includes when and the process for standing down the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), releasing the individuals staffing the EOC to their normal jobs and responsibilities.

This staff report focuses on the elements of recovery for the County organization, guidance for bringing employees back to the office, and the return of in-person services.

Elements of Recovery for County Government

Return of Employees to Offices

Since last spring, most County employees that have the ability due to job duties have been working remotely either 100% of the time or periodically,

spending some time in the office. Recovery plans for the County organization involve more employees returning to in-person work. However, it would be unwise to bring everyone back to the office at the same time organization-wide as the COVID-19 virus is still prevalent and active within the community. Additionally, IT and Facilities staff, who support in-person operations, are still tied up in the vaccination distribution. Finally, we want to build upon the benefits gained and lessons learned from employees working remotely over the past year.

County Administration has encouraged department heads and office holders to consider phasing their teams back into the office while still allowing remote work for positions that can operate remotely. Department heads and office holders have also been asked to look at the functions in their area of the County government and decide which ones can and should be administered in-person, which functions can be administered virtually, or a hybrid of in-person and virtual service delivery, and the staffing needed to carry out the duties in each of these scenarios.

County Administration is not looking for a one-size fits all approach or a countywide protocol for returning to the office. Instead, we are relying on each department director and office holder to establish plans that work best for their offices, taking into account the unique nature of their functions and staffing. These plans, hours of operations, and service provision will be shared with the public and published on the County's website.

Opening Facilities to In-Person Services

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, many of the County's in-person services were either suspended or offered on a virtual platform. Fortunately, the County had set up systems prior to COVID that facilitated virtual or online transactions that were more heavily utilized during COVID. For example, individuals can pay taxes and fees online, business licenses are applied for and managed entirely online, dog licenses are acquired online, and individuals can apply to serve on a volunteer board or commission online, among other online services. As the COVID-19 public health emergency was declared, the County was in the process of moving to an online platform for administering WIC and SNAP benefits.

As we look to recovery, there is strong interest from the community and many of our employees to open County facilities to in-person services. Planning is underway in each department for how to do that safely and efficiently.

For example, starting May 3, all three of the County's library branches will open to patrons who want to browse the collections in person or use the

computers or study spaces. Some of the measures the library staff have taken to limit COVID-19 exposure risk include requesting patrons limit their visit to the library to one hour, continue to socially distance inside the library, and encouraging patrons to wear facemasks. Staff will continue to sanitize materials before they are recirculated to other patrons and offer sanitizing materials for patrons to wipe down their workspaces. All three branches will also continue to provide curbside service for patrons who do not want in-person services and all three branches offer extended wi-fi that allow patrons to have an Internet connection outside the library facilities.

All three senior center locations will open to in-person congregate meal service the week of May 10 with limited capacity in the facilities. Additional precautions the staff will be implementing include touchless hand sanitizer dispensers throughout the facility, plexiglass between members and those serving the food at the food stations, round tables to facilitate distance between members while eating, and opening doors and windows for added air flow during nice weather. Staff and board members will also encourage members to wear masks when not eating, to get vaccinated, and to stay home if feeling ill.

Opening Facilities to Rental/Meetings/Events

Conversations are ongoing about when to make County meeting spaces available for the public to rent for their meetings and social events. The County's Facilities Department receives requests for use of County spaces almost every day.

Currently, the Ledges Event Center, County Fairgrounds, and conference room spaces at the Courthouse, South Summit Services Building, and Richins are open only to local government trainings and meetings. We are anticipating opening these spaces to the public sometime in June. County Administration wants to first prioritize employees returning to the offices and allow Facilities and IT staff to adjust to the additional work resulting from that transition before adding the responsibility of servicing meeting spaces for the public. We also wanted to wait until after demobilization of the mass vaccination clinic to free up staff capacity before opening meeting spaces to the public. Additionally, the County is still not comfortable encouraging large indoor social gatherings at this time.

Innovation and Technology

As we look to recovery, it is a high priority of County Administration to harness lessons learned and to build upon benefits gained from the past year when we were forced to work remotely and utilize technology to administer County services. We have placed an emphasis on hybrid options when possible and encourage departments and offices to use innovation and

technology solutions to try new service delivery models or to improve the customer and employee experience.

Some of the benefits gained through this new way of working are increased efficiency as staff move from one virtual meeting to the next without driving between different areas of the County; improved quality of life and flexibility for employees to take care of their families and non-work responsibilities during the workday; decreased mileage on personal and county vehicles due to reduced commutes; and improved communications, among others. We have heard that several employees have also improved their physical and mental health and reduced stress levels from the time at home, and we have witnessed increased community participation in our public meetings by hosting them virtually.

Below are two specific examples of areas where the County will see operational changes due to lessons learned this past year:

Telework Policy

Prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, Summit County did not have an official telework policy. Department directors and office holders were given the latitude to establish alternative work schedules with their employees as they saw fit. During COVID, the County has operated under an emergency declaration, which involved many employees working remotely.

In October 2020, County Manager, Tom Fisher, issued an Executive Order officially adopting a telework policy. As the emergency winds down, departments and offices now need to come into compliance with this policy.

First, department directors and office holders will need to look at the positions in their department/office and decide which ones are eligible for telework. They then need to update those position descriptions with language that allows the position to work remotely. If the individual holding the position wants to take advantage of the telework option, they need to sign a telework agreement with their supervisor, which must be renewed each year. The agreement spells out the days and times the employee will telework, how the employee and manager will communicate while teleworking, and other expectations. Under an official policy, employees who telework are also responsible for ensuring their remote workspace is OSHA compliant.

We are in the process of working with departments to update positions and assist with agreements. We are also working on developing and

issuing training for both employees and managers to provide them tools for staying engaged, motivated, and accountable when teleworking.

Hybrid Public Meetings

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the County's public meetings, such as Planning Commission and Council meetings were conducted virtually over zoom in a webinar format. The County witnessed an increase in community participation by allowing this virtual option. It also made it easier and more efficient for County staff to attend the meetings and present at them as they could complete other work or eat dinner with their families while they awaited their turn to present.

The IT Department is working on a system to conduct hybrid public meetings, allowing individuals, including County staff and Council members, to watch or participate in the meeting either in-person or virtually. This system is currently being tested with the plan of going live with the first hybrid meeting at the first Council meeting in June. It is possible we will try a hybrid Planning Commission meeting before then.

The first hybrid meetings will be held in the multipurpose room of the Ledges Event Center at the County Fairgrounds in Coalville because it has a newer AV system and wi-fi network than the Council Chambers in the Courthouse and more room for in-person participants to socially distance. As we gain experience about how to conduct hybrid meetings effectively, we will enhance the systems and equip other meeting spaces in the County with the means to go hybrid. This information will become even more valuable as we remodel existing facilities or build new facilities as part of the County Facility Bond program.

Shoring up Budget/Funds & Utilizing ARPA Opportunities

Recovery also involves shoring up the County budget and funds that supported the COVID-19 emergency response and vaccination efforts. Federal funds received from the CARES Act, and what is anticipated by the newly enacted American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), along with state provided grants to the Health Department, have gone a long way in helping the County recover financially from the responsibility of responding to the emergency and delivering COVID-19 vaccines to the community.

As we start to phase down the emergency and have financial performance data to analyze, we are looking at the County's budget and discussing options for restoring some of the cuts made in 2020 in reaction to

anticipated revenue shortfalls from COVID, primarily in the areas of employee pay and hiring “frozen” positions. We are also focused on restoring money to funds that were used for materials, supplies, contracts, and personnel to respond to COVID and administer vaccines.

ARPA especially provides a significant opportunity to restore what was lost and what was spent, while also investing in infrastructure and other forward-thinking, aspirational projects with a direct impact nexus to COVID that will greatly advance the County’s policy goals and have long-term effects on the community. We are meeting internally to discuss impacts and opportunities, as well as hiring an ARPA Coordinator to develop and implement expenditure plans, apply for grants, and track everything. As plans are further developed and more information is provided to counties from the US Treasury, we will fully brief the Council on the opportunities we would like to pursue and the projects we propose to implement with ARPA funds.

County Events

Recovery also includes plans to host an in-person County Fair this August. We are not yet sure exactly what that will look like but planning and discussions are underway between staff, the Fair Board, organizers, sponsors, and key stakeholders.

Feedback from Employee Committee & Department Managers

Summit County’s Personnel Director, David Warnock, convened an employee committee to provide a recommendation to the County Manager regarding how and when employees should return to offices and restart providing in-person services. It was important to County Administration to understand employee viewpoints on this issue, knowing there would be a mix of emotions among the workforce both excited to return to working in-person and anxious or fearful of returning to the office.

The County Manager also wanted to understand employees’ feelings about mask mandates and what needed to be done to our facilities to help employees feel more comfortable returning to the office and interacting in-person with other employees and members of the public.

Feedback from the employee committee included:

- A cautious, judicious reopening process – do it slowly to avoid any spikes in COVID cases
- Emphasis on making sure all employees had the opportunity to receive the vaccine before reopening offices
- Be cognizant of employees who still have risk factors and/or family members with risk factors or not yet vaccinated

- Provide advance notice (30 days before being asked to return to the office) so employees can arrange childcare or other needs as necessary
- Preferred late May-early June return to office timeframe with hybrid schedules

In addition to the employee committee, Mr. Warnock also polled Department Directors and office holders to get a sense of how they would phase their departments and offices back to in-person services and the proposed timelines.

Proposed Plan and Timeline for County Organization

As mentioned previously, there will not be a countywide plan or date for reopening County facilities and asking employees to return to the office. Instead, each department and office will have the flexibility to develop their own plans that work for their specific functions and staff. However, County Administration has provided the general guideline of a late-May, early June timeframe.

Utilizing CARES Act funds last year, the Facilities Department implemented measures to make County buildings safer for employees and the public, such as installing touchless appliances in the restrooms and plexiglass between cubicles, constructing service windows so the public does not have to enter office spaces, and upgrading HVAC and filtration systems.

Department heads have all submitted staffing plans for reopening. All those plans take into consideration the feedback from the employee committee noted above with hybrid, structured schedules. These plans will be provided to the Communications and Public Engagement Department to share with the public. Departments are also starting to discuss telework agreements with employees. Employees have already begun to return to the office.

County Administration, in partnership with the HR Department, is planning a "Welcome Back" event (June timeframe) to kick start the return to office as well as acknowledge the work, accomplishments, commitment, and sacrifices of employees during this past year.

Conclusion

It is remarkable that after 13 months since the COVID-19 public health emergency was declared, we are discussing recovery plans and reopening County facilities. It is even more incredible that the COVID-19 vaccine was manufactured and distributed to our community in a shorter period of time. These achievements warrant pause and reflection as we celebrate from where we have come, what we have learned and accomplished, and where

we go from here. It will be a transition as employees become comfortable and accustomed again to working in the office and in-person with individuals outside of their households. It will also take time to move our focus away from the emergency and towards the future.

We acknowledge and thank the countless County employees, especially those in the Health Department, volunteers, medical professionals, cities, business owners, community partners, and residents who contributed to the COVID-19 response and vaccination efforts. It is due to the measures taken, sacrifices made, hard work, and support, that everyone collectively contributed to protecting the community, especially those most vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus, kept the economy going, and administered vaccines during this emergency.

We are excited to now turn our focus on the opportunities that lay ahead and the work before us to help the community recover and once again, work on advancing our strategic priorities.