



N. Wallace
MARCH 5, 2020

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: City Manager, Nathan E. Wallace

DATE: March 5, 2020

SUBJECT: City of Palmer Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outlook

Given the level of discussion, concern, and uncertainty surrounding the spread and effects of coronavirus I wanted to take an opportunity to provide the Council and the community with what the City of Palmer is doing to prepare for any circumstances that might arise from an outbreak in Palmer of COVID-19.

The City of Palmer does not have a health and human services department or the resources to provide those services and the community should not expect the city to provide those if an event were to occur. That would include healthcare, quarantine facilities, sanitization services, or a related service in combating the virus directly or the treatment of those effected.

The city's responsibility in the event of an outbreak is to ensure public safety (police, fire and rescue), clean drinking water, solid waste collection, and sewage treatment, which is what we do everyday.

The city does maintain and operate several facilities as meeting or gathering places and does not anticipate closing any facility unless it becomes a staffing issue or if there is a sanitation issue that becomes too burdensome to maintain daily operations.

The greatest threat to city services being disrupted is if employees are exposed to (most likely) or contract the virus (less likely) and exercise self-isolation. The self-isolation of a family unit of an employee would have the same effect on the city as if the employee were exposed. The city does not have a lot of depth or back up in most of our positions. We are able to schedule planned absences extremely well and often are able to endure short-term absences with longer shifts and the ability to defer some work. A 14-day self-isolation period as a general guideline for a large part of our workforce is not easy to overcome, especially if workgroups, not individuals are out. The challenge is to control exposure within the workforce so that one doesn't put the others at risk. A majority of our workforce has daily contact with the public which puts them in a higher category of risk to exposure.

We are reinforcing good sanitary procedures and trying to mitigate exposure risk through safe practices. This includes washing hands more often, sanitizing surfaces/counters more often, keeping face to face contact at a distance, limiting close proximity work if possible (one person per vehicle), and overall health awareness to early symptoms and self-isolation if necessary.

The population of our workforce is generally not in the high risk category as identified by the Centers for Disease Control, so from a health standpoint to the workforce, the virus itself is not the greatest concern; although, we don't want anyone to be unhealthy or ill regardless of the fatality rate. We are encouraging anyone that feels ill or uncomfortable to remain at home and self-isolate, while we are also exploring the options of telework, even for some of our maintenance tasks where the expert can walk through inexperienced personnel on performing some critical tasks.

With COVID-19 being recently identified, the concerns are valid because of the unknowns. These include an unknown transmission source and rate, unknown test protocol to determine the difference between COVID-19 and any other illness, unknown fatality rate, and unknown vaccine.

Time has shown over and over again that as a community we can get through this with calm, deliberate and thoughtful actions. The City of Palmer is in good hands with its staff and the actions they take everyday to keep Palmer-"Alaska at its Best!"

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