



# Agenda

## AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACT AND RECOVERY

May 28, 2020  
1:00 P.M.

Supervisor Candace Andersen, Chair  
Supervisor Karen Mitchoff, Vice Chair

Present: Candace Andersen, Chair  
Karen Mitchoff, Vice Chair

Staff Present: Dr. Chris Farnitano, County Health Officer  
Julie DiMaggio Enea, Senior Deputy County Administrator

### 1. Introductions

*Chair Andersen called the meeting to order just after 1:00 p.m.*

### 2. Public comment on any item under the jurisdiction of the Committee and not on this agenda (speakers may be limited to two minutes).

*The following individuals spoke during the general public comment:*

- *Peter Connell spoke regarding the science behind masking during a virus and the risk of virus transmission at church, and was invited to hold his comments until later in the meeting when religious gatherings were scheduled for discussion.*
- *Joan Borchers spoke on behalf of young people involved in dance.*
- *Framework Fitness spoke with regard to fitness studios and the need for clear guidelines.*
- *Susan Morgan spoke on the need for education and understanding of the exemption from wearing face coverings by people with certain medical conditions, and how some of those individuals are suffering harassment due to that exemption.*
- *Gertrude Jeffries spoke on the harm caused by the lockdown in the county and that it outweighed the benefit.*
- *Joel Bryant asked the Board and County Health Officer to keep pace with the State Health Order and Governor's timeline.*
- *The person participating as "They Call Me Non-Essential" spoke regarding a spike in suicide deaths and how that should be a consideration in the pace of economic and social recovery.*
- *Robert Jackson commented on the need for clarity on providing outdoor exercise programs for those fitness businesses that have capacity to provide an outdoor venue*

- *Rick Campos spoke about his 44-acre outdoor venue and proposal to reopen certain activities on his property, requesting the County Supervisors to take a broader view than just the health effects of the virus.*
- *Patricia McBroom spoke about the co-housing community and how its pools should be in a separate category with different guidelines than public pools.*
- *Tricia commented about the need to reopen small businesses and how the focus on mental health has been eclipsed.*

*Dr. Farnitano discussed some of the issues and questions raised:*

*Facial coverings: He explained that it is now understood by the medical community that the virus is most often transmitted by individuals who exhibit no symptoms and thea the CDC and Dept of Public Health all recommend facial coverings as a way to mitigate transmission of the virus. He acknowledged the exemption from this requirement for people with certain medical conditions and agreed that more education is needed about this exemption.*

*Dance: He explained that due to high risk, the State is now allowing indoor activities such as dance or gymnastics but may permit such outdoor activity if compliant with social distancing guidelines.*

*Fitness studios: He appreciates that the risks could be much easier to manage in a small studio than in a large gym, but has seen no specific guidance for fitness studios at the State level.*

*Suicide rate: He commented that economic recessions in general cause financial stress which leads to mental stress. The SIP is causing unique stresses in addition to the economic stress. HSD is currently examining the number of suicides and suicide attempts across the county and considers it a definite concern. Chair Andersen reminded attendees about the 211 suicide hotline and other available mental health resources. Vice Chair Mitchoff advised that the Sheriff would be gathering 24 mos of data and a report is forthcoming.*

*Outdoor dining, wineries, tasting rooms/outdoor seating: He said that seated dining was part of the State's Phase 3. This activity isn't currently allowed anywhere in the state - even in small rural counties. He believes that the lower risk outdoor dining will be allowed before inside dining.*

*What's next, following two weeks from the last order?: He explained that the new order may address expansion of childcare, office-based businesses, businesses that don't involve close contact, outdoor/open space activities and, for the future, how to begin approaching religious gatherings and indoor retail, which the State is only just beginning to address. He said they've been issuing new orders approximately every two weeks so that they can assess the effect of the changes on the key indicators. If the indicators continue to move in the right direction, we may see a new order as early as Tuesday, Jun 2, but would probably not take immediate effect. He clarified that the current order does not have an expiration date.*

*Cooperative housing swimming pools: He committed to seek clarification from the State to see if there is any discrete category for a shared housing pool.*

*Playgrounds: The two concerns are transmission through hard surfaces and child-to-child transmission. If the evidence supports changing the rules regarding playgrounds, they will reconsider.*

*Housecleaning: He said that they would be looking at relaxing restrictions on certain in-home services that do not involve close personal contact between individuals.*

*High school football: He explained that certain outdoor conditioning activities that do not involve shared equipment and close contact may be allowed, e.g. calisthenics, tossing a ball back and forth, and tennis. However, touch or tackle football, for example, would not be consistent with the health order.*

*Vice Chair Mitchoff clarified that the Board of Supervisors does not have authority to override the County Health Officer during a pandemic.*

3. RECEIVE and APPROVE the Record of Action for the May 21, 2020 meeting.

*The Committee took no action on the May 21, 2020 Record of Action.*

4. CONSIDER the impacts of COVID-19 on religious gatherings and discuss pathways that may allow them to resume, if possible, within the limitations established by the County Health Officer.

*Chair Andersen introduced the topic by announcing that the Governor has adopted guidelines for reopening faith services and houses of worship and that even if we cannot yet move to the full 100 person limit adopted by the State, perhaps we can devise local guidelines that would permit some level of -in-person fellowship and fulfillment of certain religious ordinances that cannot be done virtually.*

*The following people commented on the health order as it applies to religious gatherings:*

- *Shawna Garvin spoke about the importance of sharing faith and perhaps allowing small stable church groups to meet in open spaces*
- *Wendy said it wasn't safe to re-open churches yet but agreed with Ms. Garvin about the importance of both religious and community fellowship, and requested the Health Officer to align our county with the State order.*
- *Chuck Jeffries said he is a member of a large church that has a large worship space. He said the 100 person limit is arbitrary and that people will begin to disregard the rule as unreasonable, which will create a more dangerous situation that adopting more sensible rules.*
- *Peter Connell said that several Sacramento restaurants were open last week. He spoke also about how certain science contradicts the health order guidelines on facial coverings. He perceives a contradiction between the rules applied to graduation ceremonies and church gatherings and wants to see churches reopened as soon as possible, following the State guidelines.*
- *Mike McDermott asked why the Health Officer must wait for Contra Costa data to determine when churches can reopen when data from surrounding counties that are ahead of us in recovery can provide that valuable contact*

*trace data. He asked if gatherings in excess of 100 could overflow to outdoor areas?*

- Joel Bryant cited an increase in residents reaching out for human connection and encouraged matching the county's recovery plan with the State's.*
- Jaren Thomsen thanked the County team and acknowledged their difficult position. He said the currently policies are too broad and don't allow religious leaders to properly support their congregations, and that the outdoor fitness model can be applied to religious gathering. Ditto with small home group gatherings. He asked for clarity on what he sees as discrepancies.*
- Barbara Csider commented about an uptick in the demand for free counseling services and how Zoom doesn't satisfy the need to human contact. She said that mental health impacts are being ignored in the pandemic environment and that church pastors should be given the discretion and responsibility for their congregations.*
- Michelle Campos commented that humans are created for connection and that adults can be trusted to make decisions for themselves. She believes that houses of worship should be classified as essential under the Health Order. She said if the County continues to prioritize science and data, then the number of suicides will outstrip the number of COVID-19 deaths.*
- Michael Wiseman spoke about the suicide rates and COVID-19 recovery and death rates. He asked the Health Officer to reconsider.*
- Kent Dresdow said that he has a 1200 person auditorium so the 100 person limit is overly restrictive in his case. He is looking for the 25% capacity of the room as a preferred standard. He is looking for a way to comply yet still consider his church's particular ability to comply with larger numbers.*
- Igor Skaredoff commended the Board of Supervisors on the open meeting process. He said it would be no trivial decision to loosen the health order and that the County's indicators are likely low due to the conservative approach to the virus. He thinks the stepwise fashion towards recovery is prudent due to the incubation period of the virus and that if we continue being prudent, we can all get through this without losing too many people along the way.*
- Stanley Gibson commented on the inflexibility of the rules and wanted to know how much discretion does the Health Officer have and who is being represented. He commented that under the rules, an outdoor athletic workout of less than ten is permitted but a religious gathering of the same number is not.*
- Robert commented about fairness between opening both churches and businesses. He wondered why allow mass gatherings of up to 100 but allow small businesses to flounder?*
- Denise Persa read a letter about the founding principles of the nation. She demanded protection of people's rights and that the government existed to serve the people.*
- Lisa spoke about the Supervisors' oath of office and duties to the people, and the Constitution as the supreme law of the land.*
- Paul Taylor commented that no act of government that is contrary to the Constitution is valid. He said the government is out of control and acting outside of its contract, and cannot force, no matter how good its intentions or under the guise of a pandemic, its people to wear masks, get vaccinated, close their business, etc.*
- Rochelle Conner asked if the County is knowingly acting under the*

*Constitution or some other power. She asked if County officials understood the penalties for violating constitutional law and their oaths of office. She demanded that County officials honor their oaths and desist in violating people's constitutional rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, including property.*

- Scott Bennett advised that the County was being served legal notice of deprivation of rights under the color of law, Title 18 U.S. Code 241 Conspiracy of Rights and Code 242, and threatened civil and criminal prosecution under 42 U.S. Code 1983 and 1985.*

*Vice Chair Mitchoff thanked everyone for their considered comments but said that any personal attacks on Dr. Farnitano were inappropriate and deconstructive. Dr. Farnitano is a public employee with no personal stake in the health order and is relying on his own qualifications as well as the advice of colleagues and other Bay Area health officials, and input from myriad business and community sectors in service to Contra Costa County. She explained that the Board represents all of the voices and not just the loudest voices or the voices in the room. She clarified that we are a representative government not a servant government, and the Board must take into account all of the information it receives and then make its best decision. People are welcome to disagree with the Board's decisions. She said the Supervisors are working very hard on behalf of Contra Costa County.*

*She commented that California is unlike any other state and we cannot simply rely on other states' data. She agreed that more consistency is needed among California counties with respect to attestations to recovery plan and its implementation. She said that the County doesn't meet three of the five indicators. Only 2/8 hospitals in the county meet the PPE indicator.*

*She feels personally the absence of church fellowship but must base her own decisions based on the welfare of everyone she represents. She committed to look at different ways to accommodate church services within the County's limited discretion under the State's current order.*

*Chair Andersen reiterated the importance of finding a way to allow faith-based groups to again come together sooner than later.*

*Dr. Farnitano thanked everyone who offered him their support and prayers, which he appreciates. He said that we passed two key milestones: 100,000 U.S. deaths with only 38 in Contra Costa despite the fact that Contra Costa's demographic is older; and 100,000 cases in California. If we applied the State per capita rate of infections to Contra Costa, we would have had twice as many cases -- 2,000+ cases instead of 1,000+ cases, despite the fact that we are more densely populated. We must look not only to our casualties but also the number of cases and deaths we likely prevented. The County is resuming and opening up services in a steady and methodical fashion.*

*He agrees that virtual worship services are not a great substitute for in-person services. He clarified and committed to updating the FAQs that one-on-one in-person spiritual counseling is permitted.*

*He said that he is looking seriously at indoor vs outdoor gatherings. While outdoor gatherings have less risk, there have still been outbreaks as a result of outdoor gatherings such as in Mendocino County.*

*He said that it is difficult to compare with other states' experience because there are so many factors that affect recovery. But they are studying other states and even other countries, trying to learn as much as possible about the virus and apply that knowledge to Contra Costa County.*

*He also mentioned that Contra Costa County's hospitalization and case rates may be understated because West County residents are often seen at Alameda County hospitals.*

*He also stated that while these decisions are ultimately his responsibility, he is not making them in a vacuum. He gets advice and input from forums like this committee, and from County Supervisors, city managers, a health department team, business owners, Bay Area health officers and State officials. We want to open up but do so safely.*

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5. The next meeting is currently scheduled for June 4, 2020.



*Chair Andersen concluded by saying that we're striving to find the new normal and feels confident that we can find a way to move forward safely.*

*The next meeting date was confirmed and the Supervisors discussed the next agenda topics, to include any new local health order and possible dance or of the businesses that have the least impact from the health perspective*

6. Adjourn

*Chair Andersen adjourned the meeting at 3:55 p.m.*

For Additional Information Contact:

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