

Boulder's Evolving Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

by Sam Weaver and Mary Young

As this opinion is being written, there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Boulder or Boulder County, though one CU-affiliated person who works in Boulder has a presumptive positive diagnosis. There are about 50 diagnosed cases in Colorado, so now is the time to prepare ourselves for what the World Health Organization has officially now deemed a pandemic. There is virtual certainty that this virus will show up in Boulder shortly. This piece is to inform our community about some of the preparations City Council and our City organization are taking and what impacts are anticipated.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said Tuesday evening during a White House briefing: "do real mitigation some time before you think you really need it."

Dr. Fauci also went on to say "We would recommend that there not be large crowds, if that means not having any people in the audience where the NBA plays, so be it. But as a public health official, anything that has large crowds is something that would give a risk to spread."

Mitigating the risk for spread of the 2019-nCoV virus is the approach that the city and county have been taking. The Boulder County Public Health department is the definitive local source of information, best practices, and governmental response in our region. The City of Boulder is also actively monitoring and preparing for an outbreak, which can be deadly for vulnerable populations. While government cannot tell private entities what to do, government can and should take heed of their own recommended actions. Tuesday, the Boulder City Council will consider emergency measures that will enable the social distancing that authorities recommend, such as public comment via teleconferencing and participation by Council Members in the same manner if needed. Public facilities such as libraries, recreation centers, and senior centers are closed until further notice. Prudence is also being demonstrated by community organizations such as the Dairy, the sponsors of the Conference on World Affairs and the St. Patrick's Day parade through cancellation of their public events. With an abundance of caution, the University of Colorado, Boulder Valley School District and St. Vrain Valley School District have all also heeded Dr. Fauci's professional advice, and suspended most public operations indefinitely.

It is important that our response as a community be compassionate, effective and pay special attention to the ways in which infection can exacerbate existing inequities. Boulder is more than the sum of its residents and businesses – it is a community of engaged and caring individuals, families, and organizations that can be called upon for support during challenging times.

Your City government needs and values your input and ideas about its role in supporting you, your family, and your organization as we move through this disruption. Times such as these are when our community has come together in the past and we anticipate a similar response from our community as we move through our upcoming challenges.

The Federal, state, county and city government bodies are collaborating on a daily basis to ensure appropriate responses. Together, we must balance the need to act with the equally important need to avoid creating unproductive panic.

This is an unprecedented situation. It is also an opportunity to build an even stronger community and emerge more resilient and connected than we were before the arrival of this epidemic.