

April 29, 2020

To:  
Supervisor V. Manuel Perez  
Fourth District  
Riverside County Board of Supervisors

Supervisor Perez,

On behalf of the Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce (GCVCC), I want to thank you and the County of Riverside for beginning the process of reopening the Coachella Valley economy. This is a positive development in what has been a long and on-going battle against COVID-19.

The GCVCC Board of Directors and associate advisors are made up of thirty local professionals representing industries that comprise the backbone of our local economy. Their voices are diverse and represent our business community from every corner of the Coachella Valley, from small business to hospitals, from independent contractors to tribal gaming. This Board met on Monday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, and agreed in principle on the necessary path forward.

It is time to start opening back up the Coachella Valley economy.

We understand Governor Newsom has put into place the framework for reopening the States economy. We also understand and appreciate that he has clearly stated he would take into consideration the unique geography and conditions that are vastly different within the State of California. We believe strongly that this is where the Riverside County Board of Supervisors must collectively lead.

Urban clusters along the coastal regions of California have population densities in the millions that lend to people being stacked on top of each other, literally. These types of factors are what must be considered when trying to mitigate pandemic spread and measure the effectiveness of PPE and social distancing, in an effort to control the curb of infection and manage the local medical communities ability to respond to case load.

The Coachella Valley is not San Francisco, and it is not Los Angeles.

There are factors that make us unique, as Dr. Cameron Kaiser, Health Officer for Riverside County has pointed out on many occasions. We do have at risk populations within our community that must be protected. We also have neighbors that of their own accord choose to take extra precaution to protect both themselves and their family. The positive news is we now seem to better understand how this virus interacts and spreads, which helps our community by giving them the information they need to make informed personal decisions about their public interactions. Our community, including our business community, must continue to be prepared to meet the needs of our neighbors that require additional protections under our current threat, including home delivery and mobile services that allow them to make the choices they require to stay safe. The local business community is prepared to do that.

For the last few weeks, we have observed big-box businesses that have been allowed to remain open, in many cases selling non-essential goods, the same goods many of our local retailers sell. They have taken basic levels of protection to help keep the population safe, including managing store occupancy, requiring mandatory space at checkout lines, and requiring face shields. In some instances, these steps go beyond what is required within government run facilities. Twice in the last two weeks I personally have observed individuals without protective facemask enter and receive service at the local post office. I bring this up not to disparage any particular agency but to bring to light a basic fact, private run business have always been held to a high standard of health and safety code and out of necessity and obligation to the community we serve, we collectively work hard to meet them.

The Coachella Valley businesses community is ready to reopen, but we need guidance from the Riverside County Department of Health. That guidance is urgently needed for two vital reasons.

First, whatever guidelines that are ultimately decided on will require preparation on the part of our businesses. For instance, will a particular business segment be required to have their employees utilize washable cloth protective masks, or will they be required to use disposable masks? The sourcing required for these two different types of PPE are vastly different and carry different cost and market accessibility. We need to know these things sooner, not later, so we can start budgeting and sourcing.

Second, we believe strongly that establishing safety benchmarks is the most important step to re-opening. Right now, it is prudent for the Governor to continue to direct businesses to remain closed, as there are no benchmarks in place that would say a business is ready to open. Working in conjunction with the Riverside County Department of Health, we need to establish those benchmarks to demonstrate readiness.

The GCVCC is recommending the following steps be taken over the next few weeks to move our economy forward.

Step 1 – Form a County wide task force that represents the local business community and is able to advise the County Board of Supervisors. This step has been done and we thank the County for their leadership.

Step 2 – Form working subcommittees specific to the industries vital to our local economy. Dr. Kaiser and the medical community are experts on contagions, and we respect their guidance and input. But when it comes to how a plate of food moves from the kitchen to a banquet table, our business community that directly engages in that activity has expertise and needs a voice. To that end, we recommend the following subcommittees be formed.

- Food and Beverage
- Hotel and Resorts
- Retail
- Service Industry (salons, massage, etc.)
- Large Group Gathering Industry (movie theaters, bowling, concerts, etc.)

There may be additional committees identified by the Task Force, in which case they can be opened as well.

Step 3 – Deliver the recommendations of the Task Force to the County Health Department. Allow them to approve or modify the recommendations based on current common practice (practices being utilized currently by big box stores and others) and their knowledge of pandemic mitigation.

Step 4 – Present the agreed upon recommendations to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors for consideration.

Step 5 – The Board of Supervisors then works with Governor Newsom, or when appropriate in place of, to reopen our economy.

These basic steps can be executed quickly and efficiently if we bring the proper experts to the table. With the working models being employed by national big box stores we already have a template for large portions of our economy, we can use existing best practices to build out what remains.

The County Board of Supervisors hold a key role in this process. While we fully expect them to coordinate with the Governor, we also recognize that they exercise a great deal of control over our local jurisdiction. We took notice that it was not Governor Newsom that reopened our golf courses, it was the County exercising their right to local control. It is also the County that exercises the enforcement mechanisms, from the Sheriff's department to the County Health Department.

We believe governance is a social contract between the democratic structures that constitute our State. We expect our County Supervisors to strongly communicate the needs of this community to the Governor, and we expect him to listen. To accomplish that, the business community is prepared to work with our local elected leaders towards practical, measurable steps to reopen our local economy.

The need is urgent. We believe our economy will suffer severe, irreversible damage if the current shutdown stretches into the summer months. Retail, food and beverage, hospitality, and more have already suffered major losses due to the shutdown. For now, our businesses look to re-open soon, and a return to some semblance of normalcy and economic activity that has been deferred to the Fall. But without quick relief, large portions of our small business community, essentially the backbone of our local economy, may not be around to see the Fall season. That is not hyperbole, that is fact.

Thank you, Supervisor Perez for your leadership and willingness to consider our input on this subject. The GCVCC Board of Directors, our six local chambers, and almost 1,400 business members are here to help support you. The entire community has followed direction and been the good soldier during this fight. It is time to put this economy back on a path to prosperity for all.

With kind regards,



Joshua R. Bonner, IOM  
President and CEO  
Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce

Cc:

GCVCC Board of Directors  
Cathedral City Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors  
Coachella Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors  
Desert Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors  
Indio Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors  
La Quinta Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors  
Desert Advertising Federation Board of Directors  
City of Cathedral City, Mayor Aguilar, CM McClendon  
City of Coachella, Mayor Hernandez, CM Pattison  
City of Desert Hot Springs, Mayor Matas, CM Maynard  
City of Indian Wells, Mayor Peabody, CM Freeland  
City of Indio, Mayor Miller, CM Scott  
City of La Quinta, Mayor Evans, CM McMillen