



CITY OF KIRKLAND

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MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: Kurt Triplett, City Manager

Date: February 23, 2021

Subject: PROCLAMATION ACKNOWLEDGING THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE COVID OUTBREAK IN KIRKLAND

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Mayor read a proclamation on behalf of the Council acknowledging the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 outbreak that emerged in Kirkland on February 29, 2020 and highlighting the actions taken by the City and the community for relief, recovery and resilience. The proclamation is still being finalized and will be shared with the Council prior to the March 2 Council meeting.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

Saturday, February 29, 2020 profoundly changed Kirkland and the nation. Public Health – Seattle & King County reported three positive cases of what became to be known as COVID-19, including one death. Two of the confirmed cases were associated with Kirkland’s Life Care Center, a skilled nursing and long-term care facility located in the Juanita neighborhood.

That same day, 50 more Life Care Center residents reported symptoms. The City was launched into a Level One emergency, a dynamic and rapidly evolving viral outbreak. Twenty-five Kirkland firefighters/emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and two Kirkland police officers were placed in quarantine after answering various calls for medical aid at the Life Care Center. By March 2, Fire Station 21 at Forbes Creek was taken out of service and used as temporary lodging for quarantined first responders. Media swarmed the City, positioning themselves outside Life Care, at City Hall, and at Station 21. Kirkland found itself unexpectedly hurled into the national spotlight as the “epicenter” of COVID-19 in the United States.

Two Kirkland police officers earned national media attention as they discreetly dropped off groceries for the quarantined first responders. Personnel in quarantine rose to 13 police officers and 31 firefighters/EMTs at different times. But, thanks to the selfless commitment of Kirkland’s first responders, the City remained at full staffing throughout the frantic first few months.

Tragically, more than 60 people lost their lives in Kirkland since February 29, 2020, and over 500,000 have died throughout the nation. While this proclamation acknowledges the events that transpired in Kirkland last year and the heroic response of our employees, residents and businesses, the entire Kirkland community shares the terrible grief and loss endured by all of the families throughout America who have also suffered from the pandemic. The Council and staff also understand that while it is important to document the accomplishments of the past year, the pandemic continues, the lives of community members are still being impacted, and the City must continue all efforts in 2021 to help the community recover.

Some of the major impacts from COVID and the actions taken by the City over the past year to recover are described below. This high-level summary does not cover all that occurred in 2020.

Emergency Operations Center and Proclamation of Emergency

Kirkland activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on February 29, 2020, and the City Manager also proclaimed a state of emergency that was ratified by the Council on March 3, 2020. Although the EOC closed on May 31, 2020, the emergency proclamation remains in effect as the pandemic continues to impact the community.

Closures and Human Services Support

By March 5, 2020 as COVID-19 cases rose quickly, the City cancelled longstanding community events to prevent the spread of the virus. Many other closures and cancellations followed. Schools closed, City meetings were cancelled, gatherings were prohibited by the Governor, and the President declared a National Emergency. On March 16, 2020 City Hall and other City facilities were officially closed to the public and have yet to reopen. State restrictions became more stringent, and restaurants and bars were shut down entirely. Many community members faced job loss and economic hardship.

On March 17, 2020 the City built an online resource library on the City website, where residents could find reliable information and links to assistance programs meant to help with housing, utilities, food, healthcare and unemployment. A multilingual, informational postcard was mailed to every residential address in the city, to reach residents who might not have access to a computer or a smartphone. The postcard gave three critical phone numbers, one for information on COVID-19, one for the 24-hour crisis line, and the Kirkland Food Hotline for access to food. The City printed multilingual yard signs for the food hotline and positioned them throughout the City to ensure as many people as possible were reached.

The City partnered with the nonprofit Sound Generations to enhance call center capabilities, manage calls from residents and connect volunteer drivers with homebound individuals and families in need of food. The senior lunch program was successfully converted to a safe, socially distanced drive-through program and recently expanded so that Kirkland seniors can get free healthy lunches three days a week

On March 31, 2020 the City Council held a special meeting and approved several emergency actions to help our community members. The City suspended late fees and deferred utility charges and taxes. The Council also authorized the Human Services Stabilization Initiative, which made \$265,000 in grant funding available to human services agencies in Kirkland to extend their ability to help provide food, shelter, behavioral health services, domestic violence prevention and other critical human services.

As federal CARES Act COVID-19 relief funds became available to Kirkland from the state, the City allocated the CARES money to support city operations, small business relief, and human services support. By December of 2020, Kirkland distributed over \$1.2 million dollars to human service organizations in Kirkland, to increase food support, behavioral health programs, shelter, rental assistance, scholarship funding for families in need, and much more.

Despite the pandemic, in August of 2020, the City partnered with New Bethlehem Place, the Sophia Way, and Salt House Church to announce the grand opening of Kirkland Place for Families and Women. The opening of the shelter celebrated efforts dating back to 2012 to provide permanent 24/7 emergency shelters to replace temporary winter shelters for families and women. With this new facility, Eastside families and women struggling with homelessness now have a safe, nurturing place to call home as long-term housing is found. During their stay they are provided with constant support, integrated services and access to community resources all under one roof.

Funding for shelter construction and operations came from many sources including the City of Kirkland, King County, Washington State Housing Trust, A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), partnering East King County Cities, and private donors from the community, particularly Holy Family Church in Kirkland, St. Louise Church in Bellevue, and The Sophia Way donors.

Business Support

City leadership recognized the impact of the State's stay at home and cease operations orders on the businesses in Kirkland and the job loss experienced by Kirkland community members. The City partnered with public and private collaborators to help Kirkland's businesses survive. The City compiled and released the '*Business Resource Packet for COVID-19*' in four languages. The packet detailed health and hygiene practices for employees and businesses, key local, state and federal contact information, immediate business strategies for coping with the pandemic, a worksheet for documenting losses with the anticipation of future relief funding, and more.

The City also partnered with the Greater Kirkland Chamber of Commerce and the local branch of Banner Bank, to stand up the Kirkland COVID-19 Small Business Relief Fund with an initial \$250,000 dollar donation by Google's Community Grants Fund, operating through the Tides Foundation. The Fund distributed \$1,000 unrestricted grants to 250 businesses with the greatest need. Businesses used the funds to pay for rent, pay employees, buy supplies or buy groceries at their discretion.

The Greater Kirkland Chamber of Commerce Relief Fund distributed a second round of grants after raising another \$250,000 dollars in donations, including \$30,000 from the City approved by the City Council. These funds provided \$1200 dollar grants to an additional 175 small businesses. Several months later the City launched the Kirkland CARES Small Business Relief Fund, distributing over \$1 million dollars in CARES Act funding in \$5,000 dollar grants to 207 businesses and nonprofits in Kirkland.

Kirkland also enacted a temporary moratorium on commercial evictions and partnered with the cities of Bellevue, Redmond, Renton, and Issaquah, to make available free, one-on-one support for businesses and nonprofits as they navigated the complex landscape of federal, state, and local relief funding programs.

To help Kirkland restaurants and retailers weather state restrictions on indoor use, an emergency directive facilitated safe outdoor use of public and private space. Parking fees and time limits in City-owned downtown parking lots were suspended for significant periods of time. Standards and applications for 'streeteries' and parklets in public parking stalls, and outdoor uses of private parking stalls were implemented. The City waived nearly \$16,000 dollars in sidewalk café permit fees for 17 outdoor dining arrangements.

Over the summer of 2020, the City also closed the west end of Park Lane between Lake Street and Main Street to vehicles at night to create a pedestrian walking mall for socially distanced outings and space for outdoor dining patios.

Shop Local Kirkland

One of the central strategies created by City staff to support Kirkland's business during and after the pandemic was the creation of the Shop Local Kirkland (SLK) initiative.

Conceived as a "digital main street" where all local businesses can connect to customers, the ShopLocalKirkland.com website helps businesses adapt to the new normal. The Shop Local Kirkland initiative is primarily a recovery strategy that recognizes that business and consumer trends arising from COVID19 are expected to continue not just during the pandemic, but permanently. Reimagining the concept of an online business directory, Kirkland's model helps businesses get online and be seen online with a very low barrier.

The SLK initiative provides the community a single portal through which they can shop locally and help their community, friends and neighbors who are Kirkland's business owners. The website is a resource accessible to any Kirkland-based businesses.

Nearly 480 of Kirkland's businesses are now registered on the platform, and the City is helping drive traffic to the platform with marketing and social media efforts. Within only three months of launching, the Shop Local Kirkland platform has welcomed 50,000 site visits and has sent more than 2000 contacts to local businesses.

Parks Impacts

To prevent COVID-19 spread and comply with state restrictions, Kirkland closed all parks play equipment, the recreation pool, sports courts and fields, and cancelled all recreation programming in 2020. To help offset this loss, the Parks Department created virtual programming free of charge during the summer, including online instructional programs, art and science events, and virtual community-building social, cultural and athletic events. In July of 2020, Parks launched the Senior Hours program at five City parks to provide more vulnerable residents with the chance to get outside while minimizing potential exposure. City staff and former lifeguards were also reassigned to serve as park and beach ambassadors to provide free masks, encourage physical distancing, promote virtual programs, answer questions and share information in our public parks. The Parks Department continued to host creative community events including fun city-wide scavenger hunts and Kirkland's very first Holiday Lights Contest.

Throughout 2020, the Juanita Beach Park bathhouse and playground construction continued, and the project was completed just before the end of the year. Juanita Beach Park now offers two distinctive picnic shelters with up to 24 picnic tables, both all-season and seasonal

restrooms, outdoor showers, an enclosed lifeguard/life safety space, and new public art. Juanita Beach Park also now provides our first all-age, all-abilities playground.

Totem Lake Park also entered construction in 2020. In total, Totem Lake Park will be 20 acres. Of that, four acres will encompass Totem Lake itself and its surrounding wetland. When completed, the new Totem Lake Park will be an ecological centerpiece and a distinctive recreational destination and oasis for Kirkland. An especially intriguing feature of the new park will be a 10-foot-wide boardwalk that connects the park to the Cross Kirkland Corridor. The budget for the park is about \$9 million dollars, and the park is expected to be complete this summer.

In addition to building two new parks, the City continued with the redesign of 132nd Square Park, replaced the playground equipment at the Peter Kirk Community Center and added new play equipment to Windsor and Josten Parks.

2020 Fire and Emergency Medical Services Ballot Measure

Community safety has always been one of the City's top priorities. In 2019 the City Council convened the "Community Safety Advisory Group (ComSAG)" to recommend whether the City should propose a fire and emergency medical services (EMS) ballot measure to Kirkland voters in November of 2020. The ComSAG finished their work on February 26, 2020 and recommended both a capital bond and an operations levy go to the ballot. Given the financial and societal impacts of COVID that immediately followed, the Council asked the ComSAG whether to delay the measures. The ComSAG strongly recommended to proceed, stating that the investments in fire and EMS were more important than ever during the pandemic. The Council also did both an online survey and a statistically valid phone survey in April and May. The results from over 800 responses demonstrated that Kirkland community also enthusiastically supported going to the ballot, especially if the measure contained investments in personal protective equipment and firefighter/EMT health and safety.

With this community feedback, the Council placed Proposition 1, a combined Fire and Emergency Medical Services ballot measure, on the November 2020 ballot. The voters of Kirkland overwhelmingly approved Proposition 1, with 71.28% voting yes. As a result of Prop 1, the City will be able to hire 20 additional firefighter/EMTs by the year 2023 and improve fire and EMS response times throughout the City. Prop 1 also provides for on-going fire station maintenance and operations and allows the Fire Department to acquire pandemic response equipment, including replenishing and stockpiling personal protection equipment such as N95 masks, gloves, gowns, and other resources.

Kirkland will also construct a new Fire Station 27 in Totem Lake east of I-405, modernize and seismically renovate Fire Station 22 in Houghton, Fire Station 21 in Forbes Creek, Fire Station 26 in North Rose Hill, and fund a temporary fire station for firefighter/EMTs during renovations.

Employee COVID-19 and Epicenter All Star Awards

In November of 2020, in a virtual ceremony, the Kirkland City Council honored all City employees with Outstanding Service Awards for their unwavering commitment to public service during the pandemic. Additionally, City Manager Kurt Triplett highlighted City staff whose devotion to service and exemplary ability to navigate the challenging landscape of COVID-19 was truly extraordinary. The Council concluded the ceremony by recognizing key City leaders as "Epicenter All Stars."

The COVID-19 Awards presentation, including the names and photos of honored staff and a brief statement outlining their accomplishments, is found on the Kirkland COVID-19 website.

COVID-19 Informational links

Kirkland's website kirklandwa.gov has helpful links to COVID-19 community information including:

Main COVID-19 page : <https://www.kirklandwa.gov/Resident/Public-Safety/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Information>.

To find out when a person is qualified to receive COVID-19 vaccines, Washington State's **Phase Finder online tool** confirms eligibility and provides a list of possible vaccination locations. www.FindYourPhaseWA.org

For those who can't use the online Phase Finder tool, over the phone help is available from Washington state's **COVID-19 Assistance Hotline: Dial 1-800-525-0127, then press #.**

For Business: <https://www.kirklandwa.gov/Resident/Public-Safety/COVID-19-Support-Resources-for-Businesses>

COVID-19 Business Relief summary: <https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/city-managers-office/pdfs/kirkland-small-business-relief-summary-12.28.20.pdf>.

For Residents: <https://www.kirklandwa.gov/Resident/Public-Safety/Resources-for-Kirkland-Residents-Impacted-by-COVID-19>.

Conclusion

This memo is a high-level overview focused primarily on the events related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The proclamation is also focused on acknowledging the economic and societal impacts of COVID-19 that began one year ago in Kirkland, as well as celebrating the successes achieved. Several other dramatic and historic events occurred in 2020, including the racial justice movement reignited by the death of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. A much more detailed presentation of everything that happened in 2020 in Kirkland is included in the Mayor's "2021 State of the City" video that will be shown on March 1, 2021 at the virtual Greater Kirkland Chamber of Commerce luncheon. The video features all seven Councilmembers commenting on Kirkland's tragedies and triumphs of 2020.