

**Mayor**  
Richard Beneville  
**Manager**  
Glenn Steckman  
**Clerk**  
Bryant Hammond



**Nome City Council**  
Jerald Brown  
Doug Johnson  
Mark Johnson  
Adam Martinson  
Jennifer Reader  
Meghan Sigvanna Topkok

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**NOME COMMON COUNCIL  
EMERGENCY SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA  
THURSDAY MARCH 12 2020 @ 12:00 NOON  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS IN CITY HALL**

- I. ROLL CALL
- II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
- III. CITIZENS' COMMENTS
- IV. NEW BUSINESS
  - A. Cancellation of Iditarod Activities Due to COVID-19 Threat,
- V. ADJOURNMENT

**MINUTES  
NOME CITY COUNCIL  
EMERGENCY SPECIAL MEETING  
MARCH 12, 2020**

The emergency special meeting of the Nome City Council was called to order at 11:58 AM by Mayor Beneville in Council Chambers of City Hall, located at 102 Division Street.

**ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Jerald Brown; Doug Johnson; Mark Johnson; Adam Martinson (telephonic); Jennifer Reader (telephonic); Meghan Topkok (telephonic)

Members Absent:

Also Present: Richard Beneville, Mayor; Glenn Steckman, City Manager; Bryant Hammond, City Clerk; Ken Morton, Assistant Utility Manager; Mike Heintzleman, NPD Chief; John Handeland, Utility Manager; Brooks Chandler, City Attorney (telephonic)

In the audience: Emily Hofstaedter (KNOM); Diana Haecker (Nome Nugget); Ralph Ray; Mike Smith; Deanna Stang; Ken Hughes; Kimberly Gooden; Chrystie Salesky; Cheryl Thompson; Calvin Schaeffer; Drew McCann; Terry O'Malia; Matt Barone; Karla Holmelvig; Samantha Longo; James Ventress; Neil Strandberg; Scott Crowe; Darcy Perkins Kristine McRae; Jessica Spindel; Dani Smithhisler; John Mortenson; Greg Smith; Panganga Pungowiyi; Brent Oesteritter; Carol Gales; Lance Johnson; Brandy Arrington; Joe Horton; Cheryl Thompson; Jana Hoggan; Shonie Evans; Thomas Penetac; Jim West, Jr.; Reba Lean; Sandra Martinson; Mariah Morgan; Charlene Saclamana; Barb Amarok; James Mason; Megan Mackiernan

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Mayor Beneville asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

A motion was made by C. Brown and seconded by C. D. Johnson to approve the agenda.

At the roll call:

Aye: D. Johnson; M. Johnson; Martinson; Reader; Topkok; Brown;

Nay:

Abstain:

The motion **CARRIED**.

**CITIZENS' COMMENTS**

- 1) Ralph Ray informed those present that 100 cots had already been ordered for a potential quarantine facility through the Alaska State Defense Force.
- 2) Dr. Mike Smith, citing experience with infectious diseases such as ebola, recommended the City cancel the basketball tournament.
- 3) Deanna Stang urged the City Council to postpone mass gatherings, citing the World Health Organization's recommendations.
- 4) Ken Hughes noted the timing of the COVID threat would put the community into dust season and asked that the City be proactive on dust control efforts.
- 5) Kimberly Gooden noted that cancelling the tournament wouldn't necessarily stop people from coming to Nome. She noted the recent decisions by some villages to not allow outsiders in were not easy decisions. She noted up to 400 players and their families were expected for the tournament.
- 6) Chrystie Salesky, understanding the health risk, conjectured canceling activities wouldn't stop people from coming and asked if the City was planning on closing businesses.
- 7) Cheryl Thompson said she would go along with the consensus and noted that shutting down some, but not all activities would only concentrate people at activity venues still open.
- 8) Calvin Schaeffer asked if the City was turning the dogs around, noting that the threat was coming from the outside and Iditarod participants were a part of the decision.
- 9) Drew McCann reflected on not traveling to a Seattle conference recently was the right decision and explained the travel cancellations, distancing and sanitizer protocols going into effect at Wells Fargo.
- 10) Dr. Terry O'Malia explained Norton Sound Health Corporation's official position, noting visitation restrictions at the nursing home, information dissemination and instructing those that think they might have a respiratory illness to call the nurse call line rather than coming directly into the hospital. He noted his support for the cancellation of major activities and that the hospital was donating hand sanitizer stations to City facilities.
  - Council Member Doug Johnson asked what the difference was between gatherings at the Iditarod Banquet and large gatherings at private businesses such as bars and restaurants.
  - Council Member Brown asked what prepared looked like, noting the scary mortality numbers coming out.
  - Council Member Mark Johnson asked what the testing procedures were.
  - Dr. O'Malia described the swabs and that resources were being allocated to where the infections are.
- 11) Matt Barone requested the City shut down Iditarod, turn the dogs around and isolate the town.
- 12) Mike Smith advocated for social distancing and getting rid of the crowds.
- 13) Karla Holmevig noted that presently masks were not recommended, citing a potential increase in risk to healthy individuals.

- 14) Samantha Longo noted the correlation of the race with a wide variety of activities and asked where the City would draw the line.
- 15) Neil Stranberg noted that Nome Kennel Club had several events planned for before and after Iditarod and was looking for guidance on whether to cancel.
- 16) Dianna Haecker asked the City to make a distinction between the crowds and the mushers, requesting the City not turn around the dogs.
- 17) Scott Crowe explained Bonanza Fuel's cleaning protocol.
- 18) Darcy Perkins noted the importance of prevention, arguing that a single death would be catastrophic here.
- 19) Kristine McRae explained her cleaning protocol and voiced concern that closing some facilities and events would just concentrate people in the places that remained open. She noted she was listening and open to recommendations.
- 20) Jessica Spindel requested another meeting to garner a larger audience, explaining there was a lot of confusion going around. She explained she was getting continuous questions at her office.
- 21) Dani Smithhisler stressed the number of people coming into town and creating pinch points at the stores.
- 22) John Mortenson explained the cleaning protocol for Nome Public Schools and that they were out of critical materials and unable to clean to protocol.
- 23) Dr. Mike Smith explained that bleach worked on Ebola and reiterated his suggestion to stop the crowds.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **A. Cancellation of Iditarod Activities Due to COVID-19 Threat.**

- Manager Steckman explained the postponements that had already occurred, the cleaning protocols the City was putting in place, the expansion of hand sanitizer stations donated by the hospital and early public messaging efforts. He noted that people were still coming, despite the public safety concerns, which would inevitably result in concentrations of people. He proposed continuing with the events alongside health recommendations.
- Mayor Beneville suggested screening people at the airport.
- Council Member Mark Johnson asked what parameters restrictions might have.
- Deanna Stang explained they weren't specific yet, but stressed social distancing and taking advantage of the relative isolation of Nome.
- John Handeland noted the Iditarod Finishers' Banquet would postponed and occur as a televised event. Banquet staff and non-essential staff would be turned around. He noted the City couldn't treat the mushers like a cruise ship, but that Iditarod Trail Committee would follow City of Nome mandates.

- Noting the inevitable congestion at the finish line chute, Council Member Mark Johnson suggested shifting the finish somewhere to the East to allow for social distancing.
- Mr. Handeland noted the suggestion, but reminded the Council that Chambers becomes a TV studio among other logistical issues of moving the finish line.
- Council Member Brown recognized the Iditarod was a major event for Nome that local businesses rely on, but weighed the potential impacts from the virus against it. Citing successful efforts by some villages during the Spanish Flu pandemic, he suggested stopping the events to spread the impacts out over time.
- Acknowledging the importance of the event, but also Nome's responsibility to the region, Council Member Mark Johnson suggested heed recommendations from the State and CDC and encourage people not to come altogether.
- Council Member Martinson noted the basketball tournament at Dimond High was just postponed as they could no longer use the venue.
- Council Member Doug Johnson noted that a 1/5 fatal case could likely be worse in Rural Alaska. He asked the City had enough time to stop people from coming and argued that if the crowds come, shutting down a few facilities would make no difference.
- Council Member Topkok expressed concern, stating she didn't feel it was worth the risk to Elders in the community. She noted she was only a few generations removed from family that had died in the Spanish Flu epidemic. She asks the general public to begin practicing social distancing and stress good hygiene.
- Council Member Reader agreed with Council Member Doug Johnson in that it might be too late to prevent the crowds. She also expressed concern with having a bunch of people in Nome with nothing to do. She questioned whether canceling would overburden services if people still came anyway.
- Mayor Beneville recalled polio and the Spanish Flu, noting the City didn't want to impede people from having a good time, but that it was incumbent on the community to act as role models and be diligent.
- Manager Steckman noted two choices: allowing some activities to go on or shutting it all down. He characterized the decision as a catch-22, noting that 38 missionaries had already showed up for Iditarod volunteer activities.
- Mayor Beneville clarified the present consideration of canceling the Lonnie O'Connor Iditarod Basketball Classic, the Finishers' Banquet, the musher signing event, and City facilities, while keeping City Hall and the Visitor Center open.
- Council Member Brown suggested an intensive external messaging campaign to discourage people from coming to Nome in the first place.
- Council Member Topkok called it a difficult decision, but agreed that the events should be canceled.
- Council Member Brown suggested a two-week closure of City facilities and re-examine at the March 30 Council meeting.
- Carol Gales asked if the City would be issuing any guidance on events at private establishments.
- Panganga Pungowyi, noting Safety Patrol scheduling, asked if the bars would be open to 5AM.
- Council Member Brown asked if that could be done by ordinance.
- Clerk Hammond noted Alaska Statute allowed for emergency ordinances to be passed in a single meeting and read AS29.25.030.
- Council Member Brown suggested voiding the section of the bar hours ordinance allowing them to stay open until 5AM, thereby making Iditarod travel less attractive.
- Council Member Doug Johnson argued that decision was the business owner's responsibility.

- Council Member Brown countered that the Council's responsibility was making decisions for the good of the entire community.

A motion was made by C. Brown and seconded by C. M. Johnson to enact an emergency ordinance to void section 3.05.040(c) of Nome Code of Ordinances.

Discussion:

- John Handeland noted an ordinance required a public hearing and asked if the business publicly noticed was broad enough to cover the action. He noted that AS 44.62.310 required business be posted in such a way as inform the public the potential action.
- Council Member Martinson asked if Jerald and Mark had enough votes.

City Attorney Brooks Chandler joined the meeting telephonically.

- Mayor Beneville brought Mr. Chandler up to speed.
- Mr. Chandler briefly explained the procedures for enacting an emergency ordinance and the time limit, noting the tension between the current motion and Open Meetings Act. He noted noticing requirements of five days still applied and suggested proceeding in a different meeting if the Council wished to move make an official act.
- Paul Kosto raised concern over such regulation of private business.
- Panganga Pungowiyi, noting the events that made the exception were going to be canceled, asked if the exception still applied.
- Brooks Chandler explained that the five day notice for ordinances did not apply, though the Open Meetings Act still did and asked how the meeting was noticed.
- Clerk Hammond explained the notice and the current motion on the floor.
- Mr. Chandler gave a reasonable argument that some members of the public might not have known of this potential action and suggested the matter be pushed to another meeting and noticed as such.
- Manager Steckman noted that the body didn't have a three quarters votes required to pass the ordinance.
- Mr. Chandler noting the multiple lawsuits against the City of Cordova after the Exxon Valdez disaster, suggested the Council not underestimate their responsibility to the public in terms of procedure. He expressed his concern that the proper way to act as elected officials would be to delay the matter and notice the agenda accurately.
- Jim West, Jr. reiterated that the exception goes away if the events are not held.

With consent of C. M. Johnson, C. Brown withdrew his motion.

A motion was made by C. Brown and seconded by C. M. Johnson to close to the public the Richard Foster Building, the Port Office, Old St. Joe's, the Rec Center, after-school events at Nome Public Schools, the Visitors' Center and to limit access to the Mini Convention Center as staff deems appropriate, effective Saturday March 14, 2020 through March 31, 2020.

At the roll call:

Aye: Martinson; Reader; Topkok; Brown; M. Johnson

Nay: D. Johnson

Abstain:

**ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by C. M. Johnson seconded by C. Brown that the meeting be adjourned.

Hearing no objections, the Nome Common Council adjourned at 2:44 PM

**APPROVED** and **SIGNED** this 27<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2020.

  
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**MARK JOHNSON**  
**Presiding Council Member**

**ATTEST:**

  
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**CHRISTINE PISCOYA**  
**Deputy City Clerk**