

**CITY OF PARK RAPIDS  
CITY COUNCIL EMERGENCY MEETING  
APRIL 21, 2020, 5:00 PM  
Park Rapids City Hall Council Chambers  
Park Rapids, Minnesota**

Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes 13D.021, Subdivision 1(1), the City of Park Rapids has determined that in-person meetings of the Council are not prudent during the COVID-19 health pandemic/peacetime emergency declared by the Governor's Executive Order No. 20-01 under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 12. As such the following City Council meeting during such state of emergency was held by telephone, and the presence of the Councilmembers and the public at the meeting was not feasible.

**1. CALL TO ORDER:** The April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, Emergency Meeting of the Park Rapids City Council was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Mayor Ryan Leckner.

**2. ROLL CALL:** Present: Mayor Ryan Leckner (**in person**), Councilmembers Tom Conway, Erika Randall, Liz Stone, and Robert Wills (**by phone**). Absent: None. Staff Present: Administrator Ryan Mathisrud (**in person**), Planner Andrew Mack and Clerk Margie Vik (**by phone**). Others Present: Robin Fish from the Park Rapids Enterprise (**in person**), Hubbard County Commissioners Char Christiansen and David DeLaHunt (**by phone**).

**3. GENERAL BUSINESS:**

**3.1. Authorize a Letter to Governor Walz, Requesting More Clarification Concerning the Reopening of Minnesota Businesses, and in Particular Minnesota Seasonal Businesses:** Mathisrud stated we received a request from the Mayor and the Hubbard County Board to consider approving and authorizing Mayor Leckner to sign a joint letter to Governor Walz to request more clarification concerning reopening of Minnesota Businesses, and in particular the Minnesota seasonal ones here in Hubbard County.

Mathisrud stated the Hubbard County Board of Commissioners met today and discussed this at length. In your packets you'll see a draft of a letter that was approved by them today and they sent off to Senator Paul Utke to present to Governor Walz. The letter goes through and discusses some of the background of Park Rapids and the Hubbard County area and community and some of the challenges that we have being in a seasonal area. There is essentially a ten to fourteen week window where most of the businesses up here generate the majority of their revenue. We are very dependent on this upcoming summer season. That's basically where people derive their income. We are very sensitive to that seasonal economy. The letter requests clarification when the governor expects to reopen the economy.

Mathisrud stated there is a resolution in your packet that goes into that further and asks Governor Walz to consider recalling the order of the closure of bars, restaurants, and other places of accommodation. There was lengthy discussion at the Hubbard County Board meeting. They did unanimously recommend forwarding that to the governor. Tonight before you is that information. You are considering making that a joint letter and a similar resolution and sending that to Governor Walz in support of that initiative.

Leckner stated the reason for this emergency meeting is because the Commissioners had their meeting today. We listened in and gave our input too. They voted at the end. Tomorrow, Senator Utke is going to meet with Governor Walz face to face. He wants to put these on his desk showing support for these businesses to open, at least to give it consideration. Everybody talked about safety. We're not just talking about going hog wild and doing it any old way. We want to be real thoughtful on how he does it. We just want to let him know that we are in different circumstances in Northern Minnesota than down in the Twin Cities.

Leckner stated I did ask the County Commissioners if they could be on the line to give their input of the reasoning behind this. Commission David DeLaHunt stated this has been summed up pretty good so far. We certainly understand the position that the governor is in. I don't envy that position. I'm sure none of us do. But we wanted to make it clear to him how different our economy is up here and how critical the summer is to our economy up here. My family has been in business here for fifty-eight years. I think I know a thing or two about the engine of the economy in Park Rapids. If we don't get our resorts and businesses open by Memorial Day at the latest, they potentially will lose half or more of their summer revenue and will struggle to survive to next year. That is the big difference between our economy up here. We have seventy days to make or break it. We generally don't get really strong winters like we have had in the last couple of years, so you need all of that cash from that seventy days in the summer just to make it to next spring and to hopefully have another decent summer. If we lose that revenue in the summer, it would be very similar to being closed for the entire year, basically. How do you do that?

DeLaHunt stated everybody understands the struggle with the pandemic and worrying about the health implications of it. We've been on lockdown now for going on five weeks. At some point in time we can't keep doing this. It's not sustainable to continue like this. If we go beyond mid-May, it's going to devastate our summer economy. That will have a direct effect on government. I don't know how to convey this any different than if we have businesses that go out of business, if the businesses can't make their tax payments in a timely manner, that's going to have a domino effect on all of us, county, city, and school governments. Then the day of reckoning is going to be coming to us all where we will be looking at really tough choices on the government side of things. How do shut that off?

DeLaHunt stated there's only one way to fix that problem and that is with free enterprise. You have to have a healthy private sector generating tax revenue or there is no government. It's a real struggle. I don't know what the answers are directly. All I do know, in my mind, I believe with the passing of the county resolution that we are beyond a point where it can be one or the other. It has to be a combination of both. In the near term most probably would agree that social distancing and CDC guidelines, and even the stay at home order, up to now have been appropriate measures to flatten the curve and provide time for our health care facilities to prepare. But moving forward now I don't think it can be one or the other approach anymore. We should stay diligent on social distancing and the

CDC guidelines but we must also get our economy up and running to some reasonable degree.

DeLaHunt stated I for one trust the vast majority of our citizens that they will do the right things to protect their customers and the vulnerable, and I believe we can do this and still have some semblance of livability that we don't destroy our livelihoods. From my family's standpoint, being in business here for fifty-eight years if we lose a significant part of our revenue this summer which we are already starting to see there's no grant, no loan, there's nothing that the government can give to you to make up for that lost revenue. It would be really hard to sustain that long term. At some point the decision has to be made and for us up here in Hubbard County there's a much different timeline than the metropolitan area or any other community that has a year round economy. For us if we miss our window of our seventy day economy we'll be in real trouble.

Leckner stated at the county board meeting there were some resort owners that spoke. Everyone is willing to do the job of protecting and changing their way of doing business to protect that social distance. The other things about this resolution are we're just asking them to consider not just one approach but to get creative and look at other options and know how important the economy is. We need to protect both health and the economy.

County Commissioner Char Christiansen stated one other thing that came up this morning was the resort owners are involved in community and Minnesota Resorts. They have thought through safe ways to run their resorts. They aren't just haphazardly by the fly trying to figure this out. They have specific steps that they have put into action to show that they can keep their businesses running in a safe manner while still serving the public.

Randall questioned if the proposal is for this letter in our packets, have there been any modifications to the letter? Leckner stated the proposal would be to entertain a motion to approve the form of the county resolution adapted to the City of Park Rapids and execute it and get the letter to Governor Walz. Basically, we'd take that same resolution, which we have permission from the county to do, and make our own resolution, along with a letter to Walz also. Mathisrud stated that is correct, if the Council moves to approve the resolution it would be adapted to the city, same with the letter. I understand that the board has already sent their letter to the governor. The city would have to draft a new one, which would essentially echo the same sentiments. The Council could also change the wording of the letter too if you have parts and pieces that maybe don't fit the sentiments of the Council.

Randall stated I understand the resolution would be very identical, but the letter needs to be on our own letterhead. I do think it needs a little tweaking of the wording. It's not very fluent. I want to make sure it's reviewed and has our names on it. Leckner stated we could do that. We'd have to set a deadline for what you want in the letter, E\even if we want a short and simple letter saying that we agreed with the county commissioners, because time is of the essence. We're hoping to get it to the governor by tomorrow morning, and Utke would deliver it. Mathisrud stated I can get something ready tonight if the Council is supportive of this.

Randall stated if you want to essentially use the same letter from the county I'll leave that to you. I'll be blunt. I'm not a fan of this letter. I'm not a fan of the wording of a couple of the sentences. If you are fine with it I'll leave it to you to send. I understand time is of the essence.

Conway stated I think the letter needs to be reworded before you put your signature to it. I'm not completely convinced. I do understand the county in this area, but I do believe we also have a larger than average portion of citizens in this county that would be at risk if we start introducing any more risk than we already have. To that point, I'm not sure, right, wrong, or indifferent, that we, or I, have the resources to be able to say how much of a medical risk is there if we open this economy up. I'm not quite sure I'm convinced that we want to take too strong of a stand. I do think this letter is worded too strong for what we are trying to accomplish.

Randall stated I too think it's a little strong. We have to recognize as a city that we have the groceries stores here that these folks are going to come in and use. We have the hospitals here that's going to get overloaded should something happen in this town. It's going to tax city resources which are a lot smaller than the county resources. I don't know where I stand on this. It's definitely a very tough issue. I just don't know if there is a resolution that I want the city's name on at this point because the risks are so unknown. That's what's so hard about all of this. I feel for the resorts owners and hair salons, the list goes on and on. It's tough.

Conway stated I think there are more resources at the state and federal level to make the proper decisions. I don't know that we have the resources and advisors to be able to give us the information that we need to make a decision of what to do with this economy. I do realize it's having an impact, believe me. It's having an impact on the businesses that we are operating too. We also have an obligation to protect the health of our citizens.

Liz Stone stated we have an obligation to protect our citizens both economically and as well as their health. I realize the fear. But as was pointed out at the meeting this morning, we're getting to the point where we have to pay attention to the fear of business owners, of all community members. While I understand of wanting to reword the letter, I do think it's important to show our support. The letter is basically doing just that. It's showing our support. We're not demanding anything. We're just requesting that please give us some consideration because we aren't like the metro. Up until just recently he hasn't been giving much consideration to the rural areas.

Stone stated there was one minor suggestion in regards to changing the wording of the letter, to change it from snowbirds to seasonal residents. If we are going to change the wording of the letter lets have that discussion so we aren't wasting anymore time.

Wills stated as a business owner we're really concerned about how the economics are going to go, but, we're also very concerned about the clients walking in the door and not being exposed to anything coming up here. We're kind of going both ways, but we'd like at least some recognition and what are some of the other factors going into this decision. Leckner stated what we're doing is giving support, if we decide to, to give support to the county for what they did, and passing on that we are in the same community as the county. That's a decision we can make or not. We're not asking them to open everything up, it's just a suggestion to think outside of the box as far as the metro areas and the northern areas.

Randall stated I have trouble with the phrase "simply telling us sometime in early May that the order won't be extended is really of no use at all". It seems like we are being disrespectful in that paragraph. I don't know how much thought has gone into the governor treating us differently than the cities. I can't speak for the governor, but I don't want to be

disrespectful in any sense. I'm pretty sure that none of us would want to be the governor of any state right now making these decisions because they are incredibly difficult every single day. I want to believe that he has weighted a lot of pros and cons. Maybe he hasn't given enough thought to how we are different, but I think there are a lot of things in that second paragraph that are disrespectful.

Conway stated I agree with Randall. The paragraph starts out requesting guidance, but by the time it gets to the end of the paragraph it sounds pretty directive. That's the paragraph I'm struggling with. I don't mean asking someone to consider starting the local economy. I do think that they have more resources, and better knowledge, than we have as a Council to make these determinations. We want them to consider us and I think that paragraph needs to be softer.

Leckner stated the wording in there was for the fact that if they are going to reopen, they are asking for an advance notice. The resorts might need some time to get ready. Maybe it came off a little strong. We can change that. Conway stated given the letter that Hubbard County has sent I don't know that I would support it as written.

Randall stated I don't support the letter. The resolution is one thing, and if you want to do a very short letter. If Ryan Leckner is signing his name to it I don't think it should be identical to the county. I think Leckner and Mathisrud could come up with a very brief letter that would say we passed a resolution and we're asking you to consider this when you're making decisions in this difficult time and consider the seasonal businesses of rural Minnesota. Keep it very brief. Leckner stated that's what I was thinking too, a brief letter to go along with the resolution.

Mathisrud stated we can soften and shorten up the Park Rapids version of this letter to get the point across of the stress that we are feeling and we'd like a better handle on when the economy would be opened up, and to show our support for the county.

Stone stated it's important to recognize that the thought behind the letter was to convey the desperation that small business owners are feeling. While I respect the thought of softening the letter I think somehow or another we need express urgency of some sort.

Randall stated I certainly never used the word soft, because that isn't my approach to many things, but I do think that a couple of the lines in there are disrespectful. I'm all in favor of being very direct and to the point and of the urgency, but it's almost sarcastic, that comment "that it's really of no use at all". I get they are frustrated. But in my opinion, I think that saying this to a governor who is also frustrated with having to make these very difficult decisions. I don't think in anyone's mind that he is trying to harm the economy. I think the board can express the urgency of this without being sarcastic.

Andrew Mack stated in thinking of the next steps down the road, I totally support an emotional kick start of the economy, big time. I think this is a great thing for the city and county to do. I was wondering down the road what we are going to do with some pretty big city events that are going to occur, like the music events, and the Fourth of July. We'll have large crowd gatherings, those things that they would normally expect to do when they are up here. Are we going to deploy some practices for safe distancing and how we might market that to the community and the support system that we might have for various volunteers that we have active here during the summer months?

Leckner stated that is definitely something that we'll have to consider. We've said businesses have to provide safe practices. People will have to practice that. We've heard that the fireworks are starting to collect donations. They want to keep looking forward to

events and hope for the best. That's the other things with opening this back up. You can close back up. We've been closed for a while and it's not working for the economy. So, we might try something different. You can always close back up if we see it taking off. We might have to cancel events. It's an unforeseen thing. We have to keep that stuff in mind.

Stone stated I would like to make a suggestion. I would like to omit all of the second paragraph but I think it's important to keep the first sentence. It's respectful. It's something to consider when you're rewriting, restructuring it. The first paragraph describes well what we are working with up here. We're asking for some guidance. I think the third paragraph did a good job of pointing out how fragile we are. We'll be more fragile if we don't have some type of opening. We need to support that and let our constituents know that we recognize that.

Conway stated if we are going to approve the resolution are you are going to try to draft a letter tonight and get it to the governor's office tomorrow then the point of the conversations that we are having around the wording, we're going to have to have a mechanism in place. We're struggling because the Councilmembers aren't agreeing. I think everybody is okay with sending a letter depending upon what the letter is actually going to say. We're going to have to figure out what we are going to fix in that letter first.

Randall stated we have to trust Mathisrud and Leckner will draft a letter incorporating that stuff in the first paragraph, the first sentence from the second paragraph, and some of the last paragraph. I struggled with the second paragraph. My preference on how things are worded I can get over that. I would have preferred not to have this letter from the county. I'd have preferred that we would have taken a crack at it first and then we would have had a more efficient discussion. I'd like Mathisrud to take the things that we are okay with and draft his own letter. I don't want to rubber stamp a letter that came from the county because we are not the county board of commissioners. Our letter should be independent.

Leckner stated we will do that. Mathisrud stated we can work through this tonight if the board wants to approve it. Leckner called for a motion.

**A motion was made by Conway, seconded by Randall, and unanimously carried to approve Resolution #2020-80 Response to Minnesota Governor Walz Continued Stay At Home Orders During the COVID-10 Pandemic, and that the City of Park Rapids draft its own letter for the Mayor Leckner's signature, to be submitted along with the resolution to Governor Walz, taking into consideration the things that were discussed tonight.**

**3.2. Review Opting Out of Off Sale Liquor Sales for Bars and Restaurants:** Mathisrud stated this item came up on Friday, and the Governor signed it. This piece of legislation allows for temporary off sale liquor sales for bars and restaurants (who currently hold an on sale liquor license). The intent is on a temporary basis and will allow restaurants to sell up to a six pack of beer and a bottle of wine to people who order take-out food. This is something that cities don't allow, but to support these bars and restaurants that have a lot lower sales volume this would help them make up some of that lost revenue. Our liquor store doesn't anticipate this type of legislation would have a large impact on their sales, but maybe it would be a show of good faith to allow them to continue to sell that alcohol along with their food. If a restaurant chooses to sell liquor they do have to abide by the liquor hours and requirements, like carding people. If the Council is okay

with our bars and restaurants doing that we don't have to take any action tonight. If the Council would like to prohibit that they have the option to opt out of this legislation. It is temporary through the duration of the emergency order. At this point staff is recommending not opting out, but it is the Council's decision to take whatever course of action they feel is appropriate.

Randall questioned if we support the take-out to sell in the interim, we don't do anything tonight? Mathisrud stated that is correct. Randall stated I support them being able to do that. Conway stated I also support it. Wills stated I support it. Stone stated I support it. Leckner stated I'm in support of it. These restaurants are struggling, and since it's temporary, it's going to be fine.

**4. ADJOURNMENT: A motion was made by Conway, seconded by Randall, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 5:43 p.m.**

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Mayor Ryan Leckner

ATTEST:

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Margie M. Vik  
City Clerk