

City loosens up: Dog park opens, some events resume

June 5, 2020



As the state's COVID-19 stay at home order continues to relax, Crescent City has followed suit and will allow limited reopening of the Cultural Center and Dogtown.

The City Council revisited its lockdown emergency order Monday and voted unanimously for the changes. The vote allows Castle Rock Charter School a safe venue for its graduation ceremony and the Downtown Divas to resume the Crescent City Farmers and Artisans Market, which kicked off Wednesday. Lastly, pending approval by County Public Health Officer Dr. Warren Rehwaldt, Dogtown at Beachfront Park will be allowed to admit up to 10 people.

"I've never seen more than 10 people there at one time anyways," Mayor Pro Tem Heidi Kime said.

The council's vote authorized City Manager Eric Wier to grant permits on a case by case basis, using California Department of Public Health guidelines and approval from Rehwaldt. Staff also recommended that Wier may cancel events if COVID-19 guidelines become more restrictive.

The City Council declared a state of emergency March 16, suspending all special events and closing city offices, parks and the Fred Endert Municipal Pool to the public.

Since then, the city has heard from a lot of pet owners.

“There was a huge community outcry to allow pets to be outside,” said Holly Wendt, Director of Recreation and Events. “The weather has been wonderful.”

Wendt said in addition to reopening Dogtown, Castle Rock Charter School can use the Cultural Center’s atrium for a graduation ceremony for 15 of its eighth-graders and about 40 high schoolers. Wendt explained that parents will drive up to the first entrance, their student will walk inside, receive a diploma, have a picture taken and leave from the facility’s second entrance.

Councilor Jason Greenough wanted to know if CDPH has issued guidelines regarding playgrounds and public parks.

Wendt recently attended a virtual League of California Cities recreation directors meeting where they discussed dog parks, playgrounds and other concerns.

“As of right now, it’s not open for playgrounds just because of sanitation and group gatherings,” Wendt said.

Wier added playgrounds are in Stage 3 of California’s Roadmap to Recovery.

Rehwaldt told the City Council that most of California is still in Stage 2 of a four-phase reopening plan, but Del Norte County and several others have received variances to move through the phases more quickly.

“We applied to enter Stage 2 a little bit ahead of much of the rest of the state along with other counties that are similarly situated — small, rural, remote, not a lot of disease activity,” Rehwaldt said. “But we had enough in place to cope with a disease outbreak if it happened.”

Rehwaldt added that Stage 2 allows retailers to reopen statewide and for counties with variances to reopen limited services from barbershops, salons and churches.

Rehwaldt then recapped the key points in Gov. Gavin Newsom’s press conference last week on the state’s progression through its four-phase Roadmap to Recovery, which can be read online at <https://covid19.ca.gov/roadmap/#top>.

The state is leaving it up to local public health officers to approve what is reopened and how quickly, he said. He expects the CDPH and the governor’s office to release guidelines on other categories of reopening.

“Some of these things that seem so innocent from our perspective, they’re kind of a high-risk environment — face-to-face contact or a big group of people in a relatively small space,” Rehwaldt explained to the City Council. “If they’re not using precautions it’s a recipe for someone to get sick and to transfer it to people all at once. We’ve had enough changes in this county. We need time to measure the effect and see what happens.”

Rehwaldt has spoken with several pastors who have indicated they're not resuming in-person services until about mid-June. He added that those who have submitted reopening plans are doing a good job.

"Most of them are hitting the high points and getting the idea down pretty well. Most people are going to be protected most of the time," Rehwaldt said. "We just don't have a good way of knowing in advance how much ramping up activity will move the virus around in a way that's hard for us to handle."

Rehwaldt said there were no cases identified over the weekend. The one that was identified on Monday was related to an earlier cluster from two weeks ago.

As of 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, out of 1,448 tests administered for the COVID-19 coronavirus, there have been 47 confirmed cases, 1,195 negative results and 206 pending results. There have also been 26 recoveries. Rehwaldt explained to the council what recovered means.

"From our perspective, they have progressed long enough in their healing from their case of COVID-19 that we don't consider them infectious anymore," Rehwaldt said. "If you need to go back to work, you're able to do that at that point as long as you're not having any complications from anything related to COVID-19."

"We expect more activity," he added. "It's slowed down for at least a couple days. We're watchfully waiting and see where this goes and how fast it rises and that's really what a lot of other counties around the state are doing."