

Vice Mayor Report

Give School a Chance

School is scheduled to open soon and the council should prioritize preventing the arrival of Covid-19 into Adak so that the kids can safely go to school. As the American Academy of Pediatrics states, “Schools are fundamental to child and adolescent development and well-being and provide our children and adolescents with academic instruction, social and emotional skills, safety, reliable nutrition, physical/speech and mental health therapy, and opportunities for physical activity, among other benefits. Beyond supporting the educational development of children and adolescents, schools play a critical role in addressing racial and social inequity.”

In Adak, a supermajority of families are essential workers and there is no formal childcare available. In the event of community transmission of Covid-19 in Adak and a subsequent school closure, parents will be forced to choose between supervising their children and their schoolwork or going to work. It is important not only to the wellbeing of the children that school remains open, but it is vital to Adak’s economy and infrastructure.

With all teachers new to Adak, it's even more imperative that the kids get off to a good and as normal as possible start. Teaching over the phone is challenging enough when one has the type of close relationships with the kids that the previous teachers had; it would be a completely different matter for a new person, no matter their skill level. While the ideal scenario would be that Covid-19 never arrives in Adak and school remains open normally for the entire school year, I believe that the council should at the very minimum allow school to be open for 3-4 weeks before introducing any potential loosening of the travel restrictions.

Widespread Community Transmission Throughout Alaska

Much of the state is experiencing widespread community transmission. The state had been describing the restrictions on out-of-state travelers as being largely successful, with few new cases being traced to those travelers transmitting it to residents. Due to concerns with the potential for shortages of Covid-19 tests, the state will be making entry into the state for non-residents even stricter beginning August 11. State health officials have been sounding alarms with increasing frequency and seriousness about how Alaskan residents are spreading it to each other in Fairbanks, Anchorage, and many rural areas both with and without roads. Numbers were concerning enough over the past weekend for the state to send a separate press release text message alert after the numbers were announced urging Alaskans to practice social distancing more strictly. The state is concerned that Alaskan hospitals will be full soon. No doubt many Alaska residents are itching to travel throughout Alaska due to the challenges of living a socially distant lifestyle and the inconvenience of traveling out-of-state. But at this time, because of widespread community transmission in the majority of the state, Alaska residents and in-state travelers pose a higher risk of introducing Covid-19 to Adak. I think that the council should wait for widespread community transmission to be under control before introducing any loosening of travel restrictions.

Minimal Economic Impact to Adak Residents

Tourism-related revenue is an extremely small portion of the city’s budget. Projected bed tax revenue in the budget does not differentiate between tourism-related bed taxes and work/project-related bed taxes. Thus, any loss of bed tax is only partially related to a decrease in tourism and also stems from numerous businesses and agencies who have their own employee-travel bans unrelated to Adak’s travel restrictions. This would also be impacted by fishing fleets scheduling same-day crew changes instead of booking overnight stays for their crew members. While some tourism-related businesses have invested in vehicles and property in Adak, these are resources that with proper care do not quickly degrade in the way that a perishable product would. Tourism-related businesses can mothball parts or all of their fleets/properties and wait, just like Adak residents have to wait for many things they may want to do. Additionally, tourism-related businesses are still permitted to do business with the many itinerant essential workers that travel to Adak. There are potentials for growth in this

area that I have not seen any business in Adak try to capitalize on, such as offering contactless support services to essential workers who may be willing to pay for food or sundry deliveries, for example, if such services were made available. There are no tourism-related businesses in Adak in which Adak resident owners entirely depend on business income for survival. It may be a popular argument against Covid-19 prevention measures to state that such measures are damaging the economy, but widespread community transmission in Adak would not only be more damaging to Adak's economy but risks an undefinable human toll.

Risks of Air Travel

Gone are the days that one traveled on an empty jet to and from Adak. With the stop in Cold Bay that provides connecting service to Unalaska, King Cove, Sand Point, Cold Bay, False Pass, Nelson Lagoon, Atka, Akutan, and Nikolski, the Anchorage-Cold Bay legs of the flight are now often as full as AlaskaAir will allow. AlaskaAir has currently committed to continuing to block middle seats in most circumstances through September 30, 2020, but there is no guarantee that this will continue. While some evidence points to the efficacy of airplane air circulation systems for minimizing the spread of virus particles, the fact remains that social distancing is impossible on these heavily populated flights. In addition, almost all Adak resident adults work at the airport, including at least one parent from almost every family with children in the school.

Testing Availability in Adak

Testing is not yet available upon arrival in the Adak airport. As evidenced by the success of the state's out-of-state non-resident traveler testing program, Adak could adopt a similar model. This will take time and resources to organize and operate. Additionally, the risk of testing material shortages as identified by Governor Dunleavy must be carefully considered.

Traveler Communication and Monitoring

Some island communities such as Hawaii and Guam monitor travelers upon arrival. Historically, a portion of tourists visiting Adak do not bring a functional method communication method with them, whether because their cell phone does not have service with a carrier that covers Adak or because they spend significant time beyond cell range. This is one difference between tourists and essential workers; essential workers all have communication capabilities and there are built-in safeguards because of their workforce safety plans and company infrastructure. It is imperative that the city, health officials, tourism businesses, and tourists all be able to communicate with each other while tourists are on Adak. Reasons this might be necessary include if a health official from another area needs to contact a tourist to inform them of a positive test or that they have been identified as a potential contact of someone who tested positive, if the clinic needs to inform a visitor of a positive test, to inform visitors if there is widespread community transmission in Adak, to facilitate communication between visitors and healthcare workers in the event of symptoms appearing, to facilitate communication between visitors and the city and other emergency workers in the event of emergencies whether related to Covid-19 or not, and to allow city or health workers to monitor the whereabouts of visitors and to ensure that they are complying with quarantine or other travel requirements. If the city decides to allow tourism, the city needs time and resources to develop policy and procedures.

Lack of Adak Resident Support for Opening Tourism

Finally, I reached out to a number of Adak residents and asked their opinion on opening up Adak to tourists and while I did not conduct a scientifically-structured survey, the resounding answer was, no, please don't. I welcome any Adak resident to communicate with me about their opinions on Covid-19 prevention policy at any time.

Respectfully submitted,
Carrie Plant

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