



CITY OF CAÑON CITY

Office of the Mayor

P.O. Box 1460 • 128 Main Street
Cañon City, CO 81215-1460
(719) 269-9011 • Fax: (719) 269-9017

Dear Governor Polis,

As the Mayor for the City of Cañon City, I would like to make you aware of our economic plight during the COVID-19 stay-at-home mandate.

Fortunately, at the time this letter is written, we only have ten tested positive cases in Fremont County and we are working to keep our numbers as low as possible. The Fremont County Department of Public Health, City Hall staff, myself, and our many incredible stakeholders have been working diligently to ensure our hospital is ready and prepared, our homeless population is cared for with contingency plans for self-isolation, the elderly are being looked after, nursing homes are encased with extra safety precautions, grocery store and pharmacy deliveries are maintained, essential businesses are practicing social distancing and sanitation, the making, distributing and wearing of face masks are encouraged, and public education through PSA's, newspaper articles, weekly Facebook Live streams with the Mayor, Administrator and Police Chief are conducted, and more.

I feel confident, as a rural community, we are doing our best to comply with government standards to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and that we are prepared if those numbers, God forbid, increase dramatically. An important area where we seriously lack needed support is for our local economy and small businesses. Our small business owners started out frustrated when their doors were mandated to close. As time goes on, they continue to be devastated and emotionally wrecked and are now advancing to anger as their future prospects for business survival and personal income are quickly dying.

Before Coronavirus, Cañon City was on an unprecedented trajectory of economic growth and development. We were on the verge of seeing multiple "game-changer" investments that would kick-start our downtown and riverfront areas into a higher level of activity, vibrancy, and new sales tax revenue. Now those investments are on pause and according to the initial results of a local business survey 10% of our businesses may not survive the negative effects of COVID-19. Many agonize as they watch their major competitors, the big box stores, remain open and take away sales that could've been theirs. Many are generational businesses that are built on legacies of family, community, and a strong rural way of living.

To help combat this situation, we are aggressively working to address these issues locally. I have formulated a COVID-19 Business Leader Taskforce with representatives from: City Staff, City Council, Fremont Economic Development Corp, Fremont County Tourist Council, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Business Alliance, and business owners. I am very proud of this Taskforce and how quickly they came together to gather resources, personally walk owners through the EIDL and PPP application process, disseminate links to pertinent webinars, and launch a marketing campaign for a brand new virtual store for businesses to sell their products, services, and gift cards.

In the best case, most of our businesses are operating at 15% capacity or much less. Anticipated (and unsure) emergency funding is just barely starting to trickle in, but it's not as much nor as fast as the bills coming in. Hopeful hearts have dropped as funding on the national



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level will be insufficient to payout to all expected business survival needs. They are crying out to see a light at the end of this dismal tunnel.

My plea, Governor Polis, is for you to be fully aware of and sympathetic to our rural dilemma. Firstly, we need more tests! We have the capacity to conduct the required mass testing to open up our doors, but we need the tests in hand. Secondly, before the April 26/May1 opening date, we need to know how our businesses can and will open. We understand the need for continued stringent social distancing, frequent sanitation, face masks, and/or other precautions. Our small businesses are ready and willing to take responsibility for these important guidelines and even feel they can do it better than the fast food chains and big-box stores if given the opportunity.

We must work together, to open our businesses in a pro-active and health-conscious way. While Cañon City was on the brink of an economic boom just a month ago, we are now on the brink of seeing economic devastation if we cannot move onto the next phase by May 1st. This devastation comes with real faces and real stories of struggling single-parents and families with children juggling between paying life-sustaining or business bills to avoid bankruptcy. They have been our generous mom-and-pops who've freely given time and again to community causes and non-profits. We now need Colorado State to give back in a big and timely way. They are not asking for hand outs or more government funds, but the simple opportunity to unlock their store front, welcome a customer, and earn a living.

I sincerely thank you for your work thus far. May we continue to work through this trying time together. I am committed to staying the course and ensuring a balance between the health and well-being of Cañon City residents and the economic condition and survival of our local businesses.

Best Regards,

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