

City of Reno orders non-essential businesses to start closing



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Coronavirus

Economy



Reno City Hall (David Calvert/The Nevada Independent)

The plan was changed at the last minute.

Going into a press conference Monday afternoon, Reno Mayor Hillary Schieve intended on requesting all non-essential businesses — mainly bars, restaurants and gyms — begin preparing to close on Tuesday in an effort to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

But shortly before the press conference, Schieve received information from the Washoe County Health District that led her to believe that the district favored mitigation measures with more urgency. And Schieve said the closures

would be mandatory, effective at 10 a.m. Tuesday, and they would apply to casinos. Businesses were caught off guard.

After the press conference, the city backed off, but only slightly.

The city [released a statement](#) clarifying that the closures applied specifically to bars, nightclubs, gyms and restaurants, excluding takeout, delivery and drive-thru. Casinos can keep their gaming operations, but their bars and restaurants have to shut down. Businesses can continue operating this week, the city said in the statement, but should aim to close by Friday at 5 p.m.

They will have to stay closed until at least April 5th.

With the announcement, Reno became the first jurisdiction to announce the mandatory shutdown of businesses, placing more pressure on Las Vegas to do the same. It also placed added pressure on Reno's neighbors, Washoe County and Sparks, to close businesses.

"At this point, we have to make the decisions that are tough for the city of Reno," she said.

In an interview Monday evening, Schieve defended her decision to close bars and restaurants, saying the cost of not doing so would be far greater by allowing the virus to spread. She said the action, which

states across the country have taken, has loomed over discussions about how to contain the coronavirus and that "everyone has been talking about it in a roundabout way."

"It has to be on everyone's mind," she said. "If you are an elected official, it has to be."

Schieve said that it was one action the city was taking under its [emergency declaration](#).

"Everyone needs to do all they can right now," Schieve told reporters on Monday. "We are under some strict timelines when it comes to this virus. That's why we are taking the measures that we are. We are doing this to save lives. I think everyone needs to understand that first and foremost that we are doing this to save lives. If that's not enough, I don't know what is. I don't."

Essential businesses, including doctor's offices, gas stations and grocery stores, will be allowed to remain open. College campuses can also remain open for regular business, but restaurants on campus must close or transition to drive-thru and pick-up orders only.

During the press conference on Monday, Schieve said the Washoe County Health District had sent a text saying "we need to make [the closures] mandatory," a direction the city of Reno was already going in. But on Monday evening, the health district [clarified in a statement](#) that it had not called for mandatory action, though it supported business closures and event cancellations.

Washoe County and the city of Sparks have not directed businesses to close.

Responding to a tweet Monday afternoon, the [city of Sparks said](#) that its "managers are in meetings and we are working closely with our regional partners to determine the best approach while following the recommendations by the [@WashoeHealth](#) and the CDC."

Small businesses could be hit especially hard by business closures.

Ann Silver, CEO of the Reno-Sparks Chamber of Commerce, said she was torn when she heard the news because "the intent is very pure and sincere" but the fallout could be "astronomical."

"It is tragic in terms of the impact on small businesses that are desperate to stay alive," Silver said, noting that many small businesses cannot weather a closure if it extends for months.

Schieve said the decision was challenging, especially in a state like Nevada, where hospitality businesses often operate around-the-clock and employ a large percentage of the workforce.

"This is hard," she said. "We're not used to this. For a lot of us across the state, this is really challenging because we can go anywhere at any time of day, night and find just about anything you want here in Nevada. For us, to be restricted is even that much more challenging."

The leader of Northern Nevada's top economic development agency wasn't surprised by the decision, but he also didn't sugarcoat the financial toll it will wreak.

"Most small businesses, especially in the retail space, are in for some rough days," said Mike Kazmierski, chief executive officer of the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada.

Even so, Kazmierski said the region has a "vibrant economy" and should be able to weather this significant, albeit unexpected, situation in the long term. He said a company considering a relocation to the Reno area is still planning a visit this week.

There are currently nine confirmed cases of coronavirus in Washoe County, where officials have noted the occurrence of community spread. The Southern Nevada Health District has confirmed 35 cases but has yet to make a recommendation about the closure of bars and restaurants.

At a press conference Monday afternoon, Michael Johnson, a community health director for the health district, said an action could be likely but that it would be the governor's decision to make.

Las Vegas city spokesman Jace Radke said late Monday that the city continues to monitor the situation but that Mayor Carolyn Goodman was "not considering a business shut down at this time."

In an email she sent to the "city family" on Monday, she expressed confidence that "our great scientists and medical professionals are working diligently on solutions which shall in time, prevail."

"As we assess the strange situation in which we are living at this time and with the day-to-day plans being dictated by others who are in positions of greater authority, please be assured that we in the City, too, are ever-vigilant in a time-sensitive manner, are being extremely cautious but are not being blinded by the fear and panic that is resulting," she said. "Now, we must continue to rely on each other to remain calm, wise, and be diligent bearers of what Las Vegas has come to be. This is our City, our home, our future, and one-by-one, all together, we will overcome."

Update: This story was updated on Monday, March 16 at 10:04 p.m. after the city and the Washoe County Health District sent out clarifying press releases.

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