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◀ BUSINESS BOONDOGGLE?

Some retail now being allowed but is it too little too late?

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TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Dr. Wilkinson's Hot Springs owners were granted permission on Wednesday to expand.

Commission OKs additional 5 rooms, cafe at Wilkinson's

By Pat Hampton

Tribune Publisher

The Planning Commission gave a thumb's up to the expansion and modification of the iconic Dr. Wilkinson's Hot Springs Resort this week, approving a use permit and design review application with a 5-0 vote.

Chartres Lodging of San Francisco bought the 68-year-old resort last year from the Wilkinson family with the intent of modernizing the resort and its two-acre site at the corner of Fair Way and Lincoln

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County votes to close fairgrounds

■ Fails to notify current tenants about its plans

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted 4-1 to close the Napa County Fairgrounds in Calistoga to all but contract parking for PG&E crews.

Diane Dillon, the city's representative on the board, was opposed to the decision, but her motion to reject the staff recommendation and keep the facility open died for lack of a second.

"In the upper half of the valley, this is the only place for community activities – they don't have an expo; they don't have a Yountville Community Center; it's citizen effort that developed the place; that made it happen," Dillon told her

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Budget reserve plunges to below \$500,000

■ Council directs staff to further reduce expenses to create reserve fund of at least 20 percent of operating costs

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

In the span of just four years, Calistoga will see its General Fund reserves drop from a high of \$8.5 million at the end of 2017 to a near all-time low of \$488,370 on June 30, 2021, the City Council learned last week.

The hit to the city's revenue sources due to the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to be nearly \$4 million, wiping out most of the \$4.5 million expected to be left in the reserve fund at the end of this fiscal year on June 30.

"I'd just like to say that an ending fund balance of \$488,370 is unacceptable," councilman Gary Kraus said during the special bud-

get study session held on May 7. "That puts us close to where we were in 2008. All it would take is for something else to go sideways around here and we're sub-zero."

In the draft 2020-21 budget, which must be adopted by the end of June, operating revenues are projected to be \$7.5 million, down 23 percent over those in the 2019-20 budget while expenditures remain nearly the same at just over \$10.9 million.

All city department heads were directed to trim their individual budgets as much as possible prior to the budget study session. At the end of the meeting, however, they were asked to do more.

"I would like to charge staff to come back

to us with a minimum of a 20 percent reserve," mayor Chris Canning said. If we're taking a 23 percent hit to our revenues, that's gotta be expressed [in expenses]."

A 20 percent reserve would mean a fund of about \$2 million, said finance director Gloria Leon. The projected 2021 ending reserve of \$488,370 represents just 4.5 percent of the city's operating budget. The city's goal, which it has met or exceeded every year since 2014, is a 50 percent reserve.

"Our budget is based on the fact that we assume shelter-in-place will continue into

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Information highway



PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

"I heard that Ventura County is taking people (with corona virus) out of their homes – imagine if they came for your son! I'm protesting the media scaring everyone. I want people to wake up, do their own research and make their own

decisions. I've been getting a lot of positive reactions – a few negative ones too," said local resort caretaker Nick Stone as he stood Thursday morning at the corner of Highway 128 and Petrified Forest Road in Calistoga.

Some shops now open for (limited) biz

■ Local merchants frustrated by restrictions of curbside retail model

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

Eva King, co-owner of Calistoga Roastery, adjusted her colorful cloth face mask as she waited behind the counter for the next customer to come into the popular coffee shop that, normally bustling with regulars and conversation, was empty Wednesday morning.

Closed since March 20 with the shutdown of non-essential businesses to curtail the COVID-19 pandemic, the Roastery was reopened last weekend by King and partner Clive Richardson after state and county guidelines were relaxed to allow curbside and walk-in service.

The two owners aren't earning any wages, said King. They're only making enough money to keep the lights on and to pay the \$500-a-month electric bill to keep the walk-in cooler operating. Ten employees have been laid off, including themselves, and she worries about how they are faring and what the future will bring.

For now, the coffee shop is open Monday through Friday from 6:30-11:30 a.m. offering coffee, tea, scones, breakfast sandwiches, muffins, bagels and other walk-away treats. People can enter the business to order and pick up, but they can't stay – the antithesis of the shop's personality.

"You know what's funny, is business was really, really good at the start of the year," King reflected. "But this [pandemic] took away however much we had ahead, and then we'll soon have fire season. I'm going to be really surprised if we survive this."

Last week's modified county order allows shops such as clothing, book, music, florist and sporting goods stores to reopen for curbside sales and pickup.

Dina Gray, manager of hip clothing store, West of Poppy, said social media websites have helped keep her sales up. She spends hours

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