

Dear Name,

On behalf of the City of Ashland, we are reaching out today to thank you for the role you have played in our economic health as the owner of commercial property within the City limits, and to ask for your help.

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived right when our local businesses were just emerging from the slowest time of the year – January and February. Many of our businesses struggle through the off-peak months, so there is relief when the peak tourist season begins.

Cascading economic impacts driven by the need for people to stay home to avoid transmitting the coronavirus are threatening the short and long-term viability of Ashland's visitor economy, which is a key driver of our larger local economy.

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival recently announced that it would cancel all shows through the summer and would re-open September 6th for a shortened theater season.

To make matters more complex, on April 2, the National Weather Service's Water Supply Outlook predicted severe drought for our area. Most of Oregon is expected to be between abnormally dry and severe drought this summer. In Ashland, dry summer weather means wildfires and wildfires mean smoke, which harms our visitor economy. According to the Oregon Department of Forestry, wildfire season could be underway as early as May.

The City is working in partnership with the Ashland Chamber of Commerce and other individuals and organizations to develop programs that will attract visitors to Ashland this summer in spite of OSF's hiatus. However, there are many unknowns regarding when restrictions will lift, how people will respond to being around others in the near term, and what may happen with smoke this summer. Regardless of our best efforts, this summer may be an economic disaster for local businesses.

Because of these massive near-term challenges, Ashland businesses that depend on summer visitors are severely stressed. Their challenges will also ripple to the businesses that do not rely on the visitor economy.

If your business occupies the commercial property you own, we want to make sure you know where to find resources to help you navigate this difficult time. The Chamber of Commerce is doing a great job gathering information about resources for local businesses. They update information regularly here: www.ashlandchamber.com.

With severely reduced revenue, local businesses are working hard to reduce expenses; rent is a major expense that does not usually fluctuate with economic disruptions. ***If you***

are a landlord, we ask that you work with your tenants to share the impact of these financial shocks so that our local economy can emerge later this year as strong as possible.

The City of Ashland is working with local businesses regarding utility and local tax payments, but the City does not have jurisdiction regarding rent payments. If businesses do not see temporary rent relief for the next several months, visitors may be greeted with empty storefronts in Ashland's downtown that will not be easily filled by new business starts in the post-COVID-19 economy.

We all have something to gain by cooperating and sharing the financial impacts of this crisis. By working together with your tenants, you can help ensure that they are still in business when restrictions are finally lifted. And that is a win-win for both of you.

There is no guarantee that Ashland's economy will recover in the near-term, but without active assistance from our commercial landlords, it is highly likely that recovery will be slow, painful, and incomplete for several years.

We will all do better if we can keep local businesses afloat during this incredibly difficult and complex time. Thank you for actions you have already taken and those you will take to share the financial risk with your tenants.

Sincerely,

Mayor John Stromberg

Councilor Dennis Slattery

Councilor Julie Akins

Councilor Stephen Jensen

Councilor Rich Rosenthal

Councilor Stef Seffinger

Councilor Tonya Graham