

# TOWN COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

To: Town Council  
From: Daniel C. Holler, Town Manager  
Meeting: October 21, 2020  
RE: Winter Operations – Staffing and Community/Trail Host Program

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## RECOMMENDATION

Staff is recommending the hiring of a full-time Public Works Maintenance Worker and holding one part-time snow removal position vacant in Public Works and the hiring of an additional part-time snow removal position in Parks Maintenance. The net cost for this staffing change for the current year is estimated at \$15,000.

Staff is recommending Council approval of the Community/Trail Host Program for this winter consisting of 6-10 part-time staff supported by the Town, Mammoth Lakes Tourism (MLT), and other partners to be managed under the Trails program. The program will use Town positions and contracted support positions through Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access (under current agreement). The cost is estimated at \$100,000 for 22-24 weeks from mid-November to mid-April, with final costs pending the number of personnel and days assigned. Funding is recommended from Town contingency account in the amount of \$25,000 and \$75,000 from the Tourism Reserve.

## BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

### Snow Removal

Staff has been working on winter operational preparations for the past several weeks. Our program is expected to be impacted from COVID-19 operating protocols and an anticipated influx of new visitors to our area, similar to our summer experience. Snow removal operations for Town roads will follow past practices utilizing current operational priorities. The most significant unknown would be the impact of a positive COVID-19 case among the workforce. To manage this staff has been assigned to defined teams (work partners and shifts) to reduce any disease spread and to limit the number of employees required to quarantine, should they be required to do so. Due to limited hours of part-time snow removal operators and the change in operations that extend beyond winter conditions, I am recommending that one of the current part-time positions be held vacant and the hiring of a full-time position. This will place part-time positions at three for the current year. The number of part-time positions will be reviewed going forward. The full-time position will add flexibility for the winter (i.e. no limit on hours) and provide added coverage for summer operations. The cost of a full-time employee is approximately \$80,000. The cost for the current year is estimated to be less than \$15,000. This is due to part-time staff savings, timing of hiring, and internal staff savings. This cost for the current year and for next year may be offset through agreements with CalTrans for snow removal on Highway 203 (Main Street). Agreements are currently being negotiated with CalTrans. Funding would otherwise come from the Road Fund reserves as is recommended for the \$15,000.

We are anticipating additional snow removal requirements for sidewalks and bus stops. We have seen additional use of the new sidewalks and with the anticipated new visitors expect increased usage. To provide for social distancing at bus stops there will be a need for additional space being clear of snow. This will require more time and likely hand work (i.e. shoveling) to provide space for waiting riders. We are working with the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) on the number of buses and scheduling to handle more crowded stops. To assist in these efforts an additional part-time position for Parks Maintenance is requested. This will provide additional support for clearing sidewalks, Town Facilities, and bus stops. The position also provides added support should we see any COVID-19 cases in this crew. We will be using the same protocols to have staff assigned to work in teams. The Parks Maintenance Budget will see a savings from the summer as the full number of authorized part-time positions were not filled. The program for the current season may be fully funded from departmental savings. To address significant snow fall, we will be bringing forward a separate item for an on-call shoveling contract as well to assist where needed. The cost for the part-time position is estimated at \$27,000.

#### Community/Trail Host Winter Program

This summer we rolled out a very effective Trail Host program. The program under the direction of the Trails Manager, provided direct engagement with visitors. This provided information, guidance on allowed trail uses (i.e. which ones allowed E-Bikes or not), directions, options for recreation, and other information. This effort was supplemented by Mammoth Lakes Tourism and others to staff an informational booth at the Welcome Center parking lot.

The need for information and the ability to engage visitors will extend beyond trail system information as we address needs of new visitors and even repeat visitors who may not be aware of winter operational changes in the Town and at Mammoth Resorts. Initial operational plans and going forward will be subject to change based on COVID-19 protocols. Our local businesses will continue to be subject to protocols dealing with COVID-19 positive cases.

As noted, we are expecting a larger number of first-time visitors and visitors looking for winter activities beyond those provided by Mammoth Resorts. This includes in town activities (shopping, dining, movies, bowling, ice skating, etc.) and those adjacent to Town such as snow play, cross country skiing, snow shoeing, walking, back country skiing, snowmobiling, and related activities. Having knowledgeable Community/Trail Hosts on the ground will provide needed information on activities and responsible ways to enjoy all that Mammoth Lakes and the surrounding region has to offer. Ongoing reminders and information on COVID-19 requirements will be one of the key factors for visitors.

The added elements for this program will be to have people available at sites other than just trail heads. The concept is to meet guests where they are. The concept includes having hosts at ESTA busses/stops, the Village, Vons, and other high traffic places. This effort will be limited to available staff and access to visitors by location. We are working with the Mammoth Ranger District on having access to the welcome center, which will depend on the operational needs of the District. We are reviewing options to provide information as part of any required use of chains and how to provide information as part of this process. All activities to be managed under COVID-19 protocols.

We are working on an updated winter recreational opportunity map to include locations across Mono County. Also, an update to the Mammoth Trails Website with updated information and ongoing status of

locations will need to be completed. These efforts will extend beyond just the Town. High priority areas in the Town include, but are not limited to the following:

- Shady Rest Park – (Snow play and access to the Blue and Orange Diamond trail system).
- Groomed non-motorized winter trails with access from the Visitor Center Parking area.
- Sherwins Trailhead – snow play area (sledding and snowmobiling) with potential site/road closures during storms.
- Tamarack – access for Mammoth Resorts ticketed activity and public access corridor; play area off of Lake Mary Road next to Tamarack (we have added parking area).
- Minaret Vista – public access for hiking/snow shoeing/snow play area plus Mammoth Mountain events.
- Mill City (Old Mammoth Road) – public access for hiking/snow shoeing/snow play area. Reviewing some expanded parking area.
- Town MUPS – Under review for enhanced clearing for walking/jogging paths for the winter. If snow depths allow potential for groomed trail (staff and equipment limited).
- Potential for Town “made” snow play area for kids – provision of a groomed (small berm/hill) at Mammoth Creek Park (subject to staff and equipment – low priority).
- Snow play areas off of the “Scenic Loop”.

The above sites do not include those in the County (i.e. spots along Highway 395, snow play area at Rock Creek and other locations). Not every potential site in Town is noted above. The development of a winter recreational map will include additional information. The above list is designed to note potential locations in addition to businesses that may benefit from the Community/Trail Host program. As part of the Host program a few of the more heavily used locations may have hosts assigned for defined days and hours. Actual assignments will depend on staffing, demand, and need. Alternating assignments to higher used areas as well as business locations will be adjusted as will staffing levels based on the overall program design.

Staff is looking at the use of a mix of personnel to assist with the Host program. This may include Town staff, contracted staff from partners (i.e. MLTPA, MLT, etc.), and volunteers. The program is currently being designed and funding from partners will be requested. The program is anticipated to extend from mid-November through mid-April depending on available staffing, funding, and demand.

I am requesting authorization for \$25,000 in Town funding for the program, which will provide 1200+/- hours of host time. Funding is recommended from the contingency fund. Additional funding of \$75,000 is recommended to come from the tourism reserve. The overall cost for the program will depend on the number of people and hours assigned but is anticipated to be in the \$100,000 range for 6-10 people for approximately 22-24 weeks. Hosts will be provided with a visible “vest”, name tag, and information to provide to guests. This assumes an average of eight people per week, four days per week, six hours per day, and \$20 per hour. The concept for the Host Program is being driven by the need to inform visitors of our COVID-19 protocols, anticipated high number of new visitors, and ongoing need to provide quality information for people to responsibly enjoy our region this winter.

## OPTIONS

Staff is requesting the Council consider approval of the following options:

### Snow Removal

1) To provide for enhanced snow removal and to take steps to continue to provide basic service levels staff is recommending keeping one part-time position vacant in Public Works and hiring a full-time position. The alternative is to retain the part-time position. The net cost of a new position is estimated at \$15,000 for the current year with a potential offset of additional revenues from CalTrans. To secure the position the use of funding from the Gas Tax Fund reserves is required. The net annual cost over the next two years is estimated at \$70,000 per year. The position will be part of the operating budget going forward. The new CalTrans funding is estimated at \$40,000 per year.

2) To meet anticipated additional snow removal demands on sidewalks, transit stops, and Town facilities an additional part-time position in Parks Maintenance is recommended. The cost of the position is estimated at \$27,000. The position may be funded from savings in the Parks budget for the current year. The position will be reviewed as part of the budget process to determine if it will be funded in the future. The alternative is to utilize previous staffing levels and allow for lower service levels.

### Community / Trail Host Program

3) To increase the level of direct engagement with visitors to Mammoth Lakes a Community/Trail Host program is proposed. The program is scalable depending on funding. A minimum funding level of \$25,000 is requested from Town contingency. Staff is recommending the use of \$75,000 from Tourism Reserve funds for the program. The goal is to provide an estimated 5,000 hours of staff time at an estimated cost of \$100,000. The Town Council may authorize the program and funding as presented or modified and direct staff to work with Mammoth Lakes Tourism on the use of the reserve funds.

## RECOMMENDTION

Staff recommends the following action:

1) Authorize the hiring of an additional full-time Public Works Maintenance Worker, leaving one part-time Maintenance Worker position vacant for FY20-21, and the use of additional funding of \$15,000 from Gas Tax Fund reserves.

2) Authorize the hiring of an additional part-time Parks Maintenance Worker to be funded from departmental savings estimated at \$27,000 for FY20-21.

3) Authorize the establishment of a Community/Trail Host Program for the winter season and provide minimum funding for the program of \$25,000 from General Fund Contingency and a recommendation to utilize \$75,000 in Tourism Reserves.