



**Highland County Chamber of Commerce**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**The 62nd Highland County Maple Festival Postponed Until Further Notice**

Monterey, VA – The Highland County Chamber of Commerce has made the decision to officially postpone both weekends of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Highland County Maple Festival, originally scheduled for March 14-15 and 21-22, 2020, until further notice due to safety considerations regarding the coronavirus.

Since Friday, March 6<sup>th</sup>, The Chamber of Commerce has been in constant contact with local and state health and emergency services professionals to determine the safety precautions needed to be in place for the health of everyone at the Maple Festival. Initially, the Chamber was following extra safety precautions as guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) for the safety of all involved without a need for postponement. However, concerns and recommendations escalated as more information was gathered in the afternoon on Wednesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>. These included the World Health Organization declaring the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, concerns from local EMS department and Highland Medical Center professionals about the health of the elderly population in Highland County, considerations from the VDH about cancelling events with populations especially vulnerable to higher risk for serious illness from the coronavirus like older adults above 60 years-old, vendors deciding not to attend out of safety concerns, regional events being cancelled, and an official recommendation from the Highland County Board of Supervisors to cancel the Maple Festival. The Chamber of Commerce held an emergency Board meeting on Wednesday night, March 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss steps of action. A motion was made to table a decision until Thursday morning, March 12<sup>th</sup> to continue gathering relevant information, based on the magnitude of the implications of such a decision. On Thursday morning, Superintendent of Highland County Public Schools' Dr. Schott recommended that the school system not serve pancake meals or hold their bazaar out of safety concerns during the Maple Festival. The Chamber of Commerce weighed all these decisions and more at another emergency meeting on Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup> at 10:15 a.m. to make this difficult decision based upon all the evidence presented, with safety being the top concern.

The Chamber will advise its vendors, located at the Highland County Public Schools, Monterey Courthouse Lawn, Ernie's Market in Monterey, some of Monterey's Main Street, Monterey's North Water Street, and many at the Stonewall Ruritan Club in McDowell that the festival has been postponed until further notice and to not attend both weekends.

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The Highland County Chamber of Commerce fully understands the immense and overwhelmingly negative implications that will occur to the local economy, businesses, school system, nonprofits, civic organizations, churches, individuals, vendors, and visitors, as well as the Chamber of Commerce itself, based upon this unprecedented and undesirable decision, especially given the timing. The Chamber of Commerce will actively be looking at next steps regarding the future of this year's festival, but we want to make clear that we are looking at holding the Maple Festival in 2021 as usual. There is a difficult time for the world, country and Highland County, but we believe in the resiliency of our community to come out of this better than before.

The Chamber of Commerce advises the public to continue to follow the safety guidelines outlined on the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/> and the Virginia Department of Health at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/>.

***The Highland County Chamber of Commerce is a 501(c)(6) membership nonprofit organization with a mission to lift up local businesses and entrepreneurs, promote Highland County, and champion economic prosperity and quality of life. For more information, please visit [www.highlandcounty.org](http://www.highlandcounty.org).***

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