



Special City Council Meeting - Monday, May 17, 2021, 5:30 pm
****VIRTUAL MEETING****
5/17/2021

BURLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

REMOTE MEETING WITH CALL-IN

BURLINGTON, VERMONT

SPECIAL MEETING

MINUTES OF MEETING

May 17, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Karen Paul

Max Tracy

Brian Pine

Jane Stromberg

Mark Barlow

Sarah E Carpenter

Zoraya Hightower

Jack Hanson

Ali Dieng

Perri Freeman

Joan Shannon

OTHERS PRESENT: Miro Weinberger

Jordan Redell

Brian Lowe

Eileen Blackwood



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1. CALL TO ORDER and AGENDA

The meeting was called to order by City Council President Tracy at 5:35 PM.

MOTION by Councilor Stromberg, SECOND by Councilor Pine, to adopt the agenda.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

2. PUBLIC FORUM

2.01 Verbal Comments

None at this time.

3. DELIBERATIVE AGENDA

3.01 Resolution: COVID-19 Emergency Order - Rescinding Face Covering Requirement for Vaccinated Individuals

Mayor Weinberger said that the City has attempted to ground its local actions during the pandemic in public health guidelines. He said that Burlingtonians have been following State and local guidelines with remarkable consistency, and due to that, the City and the state have been one of the safest places to be during the pandemic. He said that the City should continue to deserve the trust of its residents, organizations, and businesses, by issuing guidance in adherence to public health guidance. He noted that the science has shown that outdoor transmission has been exceedingly rare and that transmission among vaccinated individuals has been exceedingly rare as well. He noted that hospitalizations are increasingly rare and that the daily average of Covid-positive-testing individuals in Chittenden County has been around 5. He additionally noted that the vaccination rate in Chittenden County is one of the highest in the country. He said that he is strongly in favor of lifting mask mandates based on science and public health guidance from the state and federal governments, and that not doing so would mean that local businesses would need to enforce a local mask mandate that is stricter than that at the state or federal level, which could be difficult. He added that different rules between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals could compel more unvaccinated individuals to become vaccinated.

Chief Innovation Officer Lowe provided a presentation to lay out the current landscape in the county and community regarding Covid-19, define the current risk, and provides Councilors with the data they'd need to consider as they contemplate whether to follow state and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) public health guidance around lifting mask mandates across the state and country. He said that current guidance recommends ending the mask mandate



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for vaccinated individuals. He pointed out that Vermont is the most vaccinated state in the country by many measures, and that Chittenden and Addison Counties are the most vaccinated counties in the most vaccinated state. He provided a number of reasons to consider lifting the masking mandate. The first is that the City's decision should be data-driven and that there is no scientific justification to continue masking requirements for vaccinated individuals. The second is that differentiated rules for vaccinated individuals could be a material incentive for many unvaccinated individuals to get vaccinated. The third is that continuing to keep the mask mandate in place puts businesses in the position of enforcing a policy that is no longer supported by federal or state authorities. He spoke briefly about the risk posed by removing the current mask mandate. He defined the risk as an unvaccinated infectious person transmitting the virus to another unvaccinated person and causing a negative health outcome. He noted that in Chittenden County, more than 80% of individuals 30 and older have been vaccinated, which means the odds of someone being unvaccinated and infectious (given very low caseloads) are very low. He also noted that the risk of transmission is very low. He further noted that the likelihood of hospitalizations, given the proportion of the population that is vaccinated, is also extremely low.

Councilor Pine asked about the estimated date by which 80% of all age groups would be fully vaccinated. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that that would be a function of the registration rate and the time at which people are vaccinated. He said that it's difficult for Burlington, given the high number of 18-to-29-year-olds. Councilor Pine asked whether the University of Vermont and Champlain College offered vaccination clinics to their students who will remain in town. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that both administrations have encouraged their students to get vaccinated and that there had been at least one vaccine clinic. Councilor Pine noted the large number of retail, front-line, and hospitality workers who have not yet been vaccinated and asked how that can be mitigated. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that the risk, as defined above, is low. Councilor Pine asked about the level of efficacy of this approach when tourists are visiting and leaving and their vaccination status is unknown. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that the state had previously had quarantine requirements in place and that it seems as though they were well-adhered-to, which could also indicate that they would be likely to adhere to the masking requirement for unvaccinated individuals.

Councilor Paul said that one large organization reached out to her and stated that they will continue to require masks until June 7th, citing that a significant portion of that organization will not have been fully vaccinated (received their second dose) until that date. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that though the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses, the first dose is considered the critical dose in terms of health outcomes. Councilor Paul asked whether other organizations in Burlington have come out with guidance or changed requirements. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that many organizations have chosen to uphold a mask mandate, and that the resolution as proposed would give them the flexibility to continue to do so.

Councilor Hightower asked about the incentives to encourage vaccination even though there is no requirement to show proof of vaccination if one is not wearing a mask. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that the studies cited had examined what factors would encourage individuals to get vaccinated and that having differentiated mask mandates is one of them.

Councilor Dieng asked whether masks are required in childcare and school settings and summer camps. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that yes, masks are still required (even at the state level) in these settings. Councilor Dieng asked what actions will continue to be taken in terms of monitoring and requirements around containing the spread of the virus. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that wastewater testing will continue and that this resolution really gives businesses the flexibility to do as they see fit.



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Councilor Barlow asked how these changed requirements would be communicated for businesses and other public settings. Chief Innovation Officer Lowe replied that the governor's orders require the City to update its signage across the City to reflect the changed requirements.

MOTION by Councilor Carpenter, SECOND by Councilor Dieng, to waive the reading and adopt the resolution.

DISCUSSION:

- Councilor Hightower said she remains skeptical that this will incentivize vaccination, since it is not tied to requirements to show proof of vaccination. She additionally expressed concern that the 18-29 age bracket hasn't been fully vaccinated yet. She additionally said that asking businesses to enforce masking requirements could be more difficult for them than having a City policy support masking requirements on their behalf.

MOTION by Councilor Hightower, SECOND by Councilor Freeman, to postpone this item until its June 7, 2021 meeting.

DISCUSSION:

- Councilor Stromberg said that this proposed resolution
- Councilor Hanson noted that only 49% of the 18-29 age bracket has been vaccinated and that many of them are working in retail or other front-line occupations, which is concerning. He said he is, however, in favor of lifting the mask mandate in outdoor settings and private residences.
- Councilor Shannon pointed out that the mask mandate only applies to retail establishments, not to bars, restaurants, or offices.
- Mayor Weinberger said he is uncomfortable with the idea that the City of Burlington will make up its own public health policy.

VOTING (by roll call): Councilor Barlow – nay, Councilor Carpenter – aye, Councilor Dieng – nay, Councilor Freeman – aye, Councilor Hanson – aye, Councilor Hightower – aye, Councilor Mason – absent, Councilor Paul – aye, Councilor Pine – aye, Councilor Shannon – aye, Councilor Stromberg – aye, City Council President Tracy – aye (9 ayes, 2 nays, 1 absent); motion carries.

4. ADJOURNMENT

4.01 Motion to adjourn





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MOTION by Councilor Freeman, SECOND by Councilor Dieng, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

The City Council meeting adjourned at 6:36 PM.

RScty: AACoonrad