

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Submission for July 17 City Council Meeting on COVID and Masks By Law

From: Kate O'Brien

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To: Pilon, Janet <Janet.Pilon@hamilton.ca>

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City Council

Thank you for the opportunity to make my voice heard on the issue of mandatory masks. I watched the recent Board of Health meeting on line, and extend my appreciation to our Medical Officer of Health and her team for a solid and clear submission to Council, and her plain language and thoughtful responses to their questions. This is probably the most significant issue that Council will face this year, and decisions require a well informed and serious Council.

I am strongly in favour of mandatory masks. I do not frequent any establishment that does not have staff wearing masks properly, does not have hand sanitizer available, and I avoid any situation in an indoor space where others without masks do not maintain that 2 metre distance. It is disrespectful to not do everything possible to follow those simple guidelines. I was in Italy when the pandemic started and various measures were put in place. We have no idea what lock down means, and we have been fortunate so far. A real lockdown, as was enforced in Europe, if COVID surges here, will have debilitating consequences. We should consider ourselves fortunate to only be asked to keep a social distance and wear a mask.

We are past the time of education. If a few citizens of Hamilton don't get it yet, then no amount of further education will help. We are in month six of this as a national and global concern. Perhaps the only education needed is that the mask should be worn properly, to cover both the nose and mouth, should not be worn to cover the chin only, and is a mask, not a fluffy scarf.

Masks are the only tool left in the tool box to prevent the spread of this virus, beyond a significant lock down. Most Municipalities in Ontario have already put a mandatory mask by law into effect. Hamilton is in fact late to the table on this.

Masks are essential for our seniors to feel safe leaving their homes, to open businesses, including movie theatres, for religious institutions, and for Generation Xers and Millenials to be out and about, and not be faced with peer pressure to not wear a mask, which could cause themselves or others harm.

With respect to religious institutions, it may be instructive to note that the Vatican signed an agreement with the Government of Italy making masks and social distance mandatory in order to resume religious services in the Catholic Churches in Italy. The link to that follows at the end of this email. If it is good enough for the Catholic Church to do the right thing, then in my view, there are no reasonable arguments that other religious institutions can make to not follow by-laws to protect their congregation.

As for those who suggest that we are over the risk from this virus, one only has to look to Florida, Arizona and Texas to see what happens when you think that you have no risk. As for Canada being in a good place, well, Canada ranks 39th in terms of global population, and we are not densely populated compared to most nations. However, and despite the wide open spaces that we enjoy, we rank 20th in terms of COVID cases, and sadly 14th in terms of COVID deaths. We should be 39th in both those numbers.

We share a border with the USA, and what is happening there is a direct result of inaction and lack of enforcement of things like social distancing, mandatory masks, and a careful phased reopening of businesses and activities. Although that border is currently closed until July 21, 2020, there is substantial American pressure to reopen that border. At some point that border will reopen. When it does, it will be impossible to enforce masks for Americans and not for Hamiltonians. Neighbouring Municipalities have unanimously voted in favour of a mandatory mask by-law. That is the right side of history.

We have by-laws for dog licences, snow shovelling, noise levels, parking, dogs on leashes, tobogganing and who knows what else. Surely a mandatory mask during a global pandemic ranks among a dog licence or tobogganing. By-Laws are in place to protect the vast majority of responsible citizens from the few who refuse to behave properly in civil society. These are not infringements on any Constitutional rights.

Finally, at during the Board of Health meeting there was a suggestion from one Councillor that there should be a by-law on hand washing. I assume that that was intended as a joke. It is unfortunate that any member of City Council views any aspect of a global pandemic that has resulted in the deaths of far too many of the most vulnerable citizens of Hamilton as a joke. Front line workers, health care workers, who wear N95 masks all day, every day, face shields, and other PPE, sometimes being asked to reuse PPE due to critical shortage, faces bruised from wearing PPE, as they risk their lives to keep us safe, deserve better.

This is a serious issue. City Council's Vision is that we aspire "To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully". Council should accept the advice of our Medical and Scientific experts, and do like other Municipalities, vote unanimously in favour. That's the Vision, isn't it? Or were those just platitudes on the City website?

Kathleen OBrien
Ward 7 Resident.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-05/public-masses-in-italy-will-resume-on-18-may.html>