

Hiawatha mask mandate discussed again

(KNZA)--Hiawatha's mask mandate was a topic of discussion again at Monday evening's City Commission meeting.

Two local residents, Stuart Aller of Hiawatha and Chris Kroll of rural Fairview, addressed the Commission with their concerns about the mask mandate and asked that it be rescinded.

Aller called the mask ordinance a “rights violation”, and suggested that the toll the mask mandate has taken on the public is greater than any benefit it may lend.

Kroll, who said he does business in town, called the mask mandate an “infringement on liberty” and “political theater”, noting that it is not enforced.

Mayor Bill Collins said he is not interested in the politics of the situation, but in saving people's lives.

Hiawatha Community Hospital CEO John Broberg and Brown County Health Officer Robin Downard then provided an update.

As of Monday, Downard said there were 12 active COVID-19 cases in Brown County, with two currently hospitalized. She said the health department started vaccinating those on the high risk list last week and hope to vaccinate 100 more on that list this week.

Downard and Broberg both said they believe the mask mandate has helped to reduce cases and should be keep in place.

Commissioner Brian Shefferd said he doesn't believe there is any evidence that mask mandates are related to the lower active case numbers. Shefferd then made a motion to immediately rescind the mask mandate, which died due to the lack of a second.

Commissioner Becky Shamburg said her decision to stand behind the mask mandate comes from talking to medical professionals, educators and citizens.

Shamburg and Commissioner David Middendorf both felt the Commission should wait until the vaccination process is further along before considering lifting the mandate.

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