

City hears comments on mask mandate again

(KNZA)--For the third meeting in row, Tuesday evening's Hiawatha City Commission meeting was dominated by discussion on the city's mask mandate.

Five local residents addressed the Commission regarding the mandate, and the Commission also heard from local healthcare representatives as well.

Local resident Jason Dvorak said he believes local businesses should be able to decide for themselves how masks are handled, but added that if a business wants a customer to wear a mask they should.

His daughter, Joceyln, voiced her concerns that high school students were not being heard in their concerns about mask requirements. She noted the lack of masks in organized sports and in restaurants as proof that mandates were being enforced based on agenda.

Richard Schilling asked the Commission to keep an open mind in considering the opinions expressed by residents.

Staurt Aller, who had appeared at the previous Commission meeting to voice his opposition to the mask mandate, said a local business had since canceled services to his family for stating his opinion. He said residents should not fear retaliation for exercising their freedom of speech.

Jim Robidioux spoke in support the mask mandate. Robidoux stated his belief that many arguments being made for rescinding the mask mandate fail to recognize individuals' responsibility to the greater good of a community.

Hiawatha Community Hospital CEO John Broberg shared data supporting the opinion that the mask mandate is working. He also voiced concerns over the three new variants of the Coronavirus that have surfaced, including at least one variant that is present in Kansas.

Broberg and Brown County Health Officer Robin Downard both asked the Commission to continue the mask order until April 19 and re-evaluate it at that time.

Mayor Bill Collins said he has to rely on what the healthcare experts recommend, and thus believes keeping the mask mandate in place is necessary, at this time. Commissioner Becky Shamburg agreed.

Commissioner David Middendorf said he had heard from several local downtown

businesses thanking him for his support of the mask mandate.

Commissioner Evans Woehlecke shared that he has seen up close the effects of COVID deaths, and believes the community needs to do all it can to beat the virus.

Commissioner Brian Shefferd stated that the low number of COVID cases in the county should lead to a repeal or a sunset of the mask mandate. He said even if the mask mandate is lifted, people will continue to wear masks.

With no consensus to add an expiration date to the mask mandate, the Commission moved on to discuss re-opening City Hall to public traffic.

City Administrator Mike Nichols shared some potential guidelines if the commission decided to open City Hall.

City Clerk Tish Sims said her staff prefers keeping the building closed, but continuing to allow access to those who have appointments or knock on the door.

It was the consensus of the Commission not to make any changes at this time.

Many Signals Communications