

Advisory Committee Meeting
Concerning Face Coverings during COVID-19

Present: Councilwoman Webb (Chairman), Councilman Dykes, Chief Littleton, Chief Tollison, Business owner Jerry Garrett, Heather Seabrook (Nurse) Attorney Brian James, County Councilman Chris Bowers, Citizen Brett Williams, City Administrator Stephen Steese. Lisa Chapman, City Clerk served as the recording secretary.

Councilwoman Webb called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for coming. She explained the reason for the committee and they would be making a recommendation to the full council on Monday. Council members have received a lot of emails and phone calls about wearing masks. Some are for it some are against it. If we decide on an ordinance it would be an enforceable law whereas a resolution would be a suggestion with no enforcement. This can also be done on an emergency temporary basis.

Mr. Steese gave some data on the number of positive cases in our area and how they have increased. We have peaked at about 500 cases since the first of June. As of right now there are no scheduled drive up testing sites for the month of July. Statewide positive results are up about 20%. The group discussed how testing is done, the demographics, age, race, location, etc. Pickens County has about 1000+ cases and over 500 of those are in the Easley zip codes.

A lot of the places that have passed resolutions and/or ordinances are in the tourist areas of the state. There is no way to test people that are coming from across the country for vacations, tour colleges, visit family, etc.

Councilman Chris Bowers commented that a large portion of the Hispanic community will not get tested at any DHEC/State sponsored events because the majority are illegals and do not want the government to know where they are or their information.

Councilman Dykes stated that we could discuss it all day long but out of the entire United States SC is growing in cases and the top areas are Columbia, Greenville/Spartanburg, Anderson and the Coastal area. Over the last 14 days the average is way up. We need to do something to curb it in our area. If it is not slowed down schools will not open and sports will not happen.

Heather Seabrook (a nurse that works directly with COVID patients) commented that what we do now will affect this running total in the next 14 days. The best thing is washing your hands, wearing a mask, and keeping social distance.

Chief Littleton commented that as a fire fighter everything they do revolves around respiratory protection. The concern about a mask ordinance is just one piece of the puzzle. It is hand washing, proper use of the mask. The public will need to be educated on the proper mask to wear and the proper use of it. We are giving them a false sense of security. Young people are getting it from not social distancing. Wearing a mask will help but it will not prevent getting the virus.

Chief Tollison stated that everyone has an opinion either for it or against it and they will find data to support their opinion.

Heather Seabrook asked if we have any data on health care professionals that have the virus? Councilman Bowers stated the he worked 12 out of the last 14 days and two of his coworkers tested positive and they are not sure where they contracted it.

Chris also suggested we need to encourage people to wear a mask, even if they have no symptoms, wash their hands, and if they are sick stay home. He had talked with a business owner and she was encouraging the city to do something so she would not have to be the bad guy and require her customers to put on a mask.

Attorney Brian James commented that an ordinance would call for enforcement and a resolution would not. He asked Chief Tollison to comment about enforcement. The model ordinance from the State says that it is an employer's responsibility for their employees. Businesses could refuse customers that do not want to wear a mask. As a police department we do not have the man power to respond to businesses because someone is not wearing a mask. If we do the ordinance will the City be responsible for supplying mask? It can also cause problems with the police identifying criminals.

Mr. Williams stated that when people work for big corporations sometimes the stay at home if you are sick is not possible. You have to go to work or lose your job.

Chief Tollison asked if wearing a mask lowers your immune system. Ms. Seabrook stated that she is on the frontline taking care of patients. She has to wear two masks, goggles, face shield and complete PPE. So far, she has not seen any indications that it bothers the immune system.

Councilman Bowers commented that you can't wear a paper mask for days, it is contaminated. If you wear a cloth mask and do not wash it, it is contaminated.

Chief Tollison stated that based on what law enforcement would have to do a resolution should be done. It should be up to individual businesses to require what they want in their business.

Ms. Seabrook commented that enforceability would be a challenge. People have to be responsible and go out at their own risk.

Mr. Garrett commented that he would recommend a resolution with education. As a business owner being charged with making people wear a mask in his business and then they are opposed to it he has just lost a customer. He doesn't see it as an arrestable offense.

Councilman Dykes stated that it is putting a burden on the businesses.

Mr. Steese commented that one of the reasons for the spike in cases is that there is no stay at home order and people are not social distancing.

Councilwoman Webb called for a pole on an ordinance or a resolution.

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Mr. Garrett, Mr. Williams, Chief Tollison, Chief Littleton, Ms. Seabrook, Councilman Bowers all agreed that a resolution would be best. Councilman Dykes said he would like to go with an ordinance but would go along with the others for a resolution to get something in place.

All agreed that education for the public would be key.

Councilwoman Webb asked Mr. Steese to draw up a resolution for Monday's Council meeting. We can always revisit this based on the numbers.

There was no further discussion and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Lisa Chapman

City Clerk