



City of Leavenworth

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May 12, 2020

Community Members,

Has anyone noted the increased traffic volumes and numbers of people in our downtown area this past weekend? Just kidding... of course you did... unless you live off the highway a ways and didn't venture out at all. Don't think many of you were in that boat, as it was just too nice to not at least go for a walk. I didn't go out a lot, but I did do my "normal" tour through town over the weekend. And while we are not yet into Phase 2, by the looks of things, it appears we are in Phase 3 (did I do a Rip Van Winkle and sleep through a couple of phases?). In my one sweep through town, I would say that the downtown parking spots were roughly 80% full. But with all those curious visitors doing lots of window shopping – it was pretty evident to me that we needed to take some steps to set a different tone and standard sooner than later. There were not a lot of masks visible, (some to be sure), and there were not a lot of attempts to social distance. Now, to be sure, social distancing is hard to do with two-way walking traffic on the sidewalk. That's not easy under the best of circumstances.

What this means is that we are stepping up our plans earlier than later. We had been drawing up plans to close the downtown core of Leavenworth to traffic and parking. This was done to allow more space for social distancing, as the entire street could then be a pedestrian walk. This would also allow us to let businesses "flow out" onto the sidewalk a bit – we know the advantages to this are that it allows for more products (whatever they might be) to be available when the numbers that can go inside will be limited. We also know that the virus gets passed in enclosed indoor spaces much more readily, and outside spaces, just due to air flow alone, are safer.

Because we are seeing so much activity downtown right now, we are planning to close down the downtown core starting this Friday morning – the 15th. (Front Street from Gustav's to 10th, and 8th from Front to Commercial, and 9th from the Highway to Commercial). Since we have not entered Phase 2 yet, this will be done without sidewalk use by businesses for now. But the plan would be to try to "recapture" the downtown core from bad habits, and begin to try to set a new "safe" culture. This means hand sanitizer stations spread around the core, and it means lots of masks available for our guests who forgot them, or did not realize how important they are. Remember, the masks we are wearing are not about keeping us safe. That is an illusion unless they are hospital grade N-95 type masks AND they are worn and fit correctly. The whole purpose of wearing a mask (I have cloth ones made by my wife, but it can also be simple disposable ones) in public spaces is to limit the amount of droplets we put out and the potential quantity of the virus we spread in the air if we have COVID and do not realize it because we are not symptomatic.

We know that there are tradeoffs with this approach. We know that many businesses had been serving people who would drive up to their location, and that will not be available in the core. But we believe that the trade-offs are worth it to try to set this new pattern of behavior. And we want to set that pattern before we REALLY get busy as things open up more. That does not mean that we have all the answers or that everything is set in stone. There will be tweaks, and new ideas to consider, and new problems we haven't anticipated. But what we do know is that we have to do something sooner than later, if we have any hope of opening safely and interrupting those bad habits we have been seeing.

Any businesses who want to start the process for having a space on the sidewalk, when we do open, can start the process any time with the City. We will not allow them until we are in Phase 2, but you can begin to prepare. And then all of us can help set that new tone, that new culture, by wearing our masks when we are out and about and coming in contact (hopefully just figuratively) with the public. Stay safe, and keep caring for one another!



Carl J. Florea, Mayor

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