

Debra Thompson

From: Tim <gov-t@ridgefolkmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 2:03 PM
To: Assembly
Subject: Regarding the proposed amendment to the mask ordinance

Members of the Borough Assembly,

I would like to offer comments in regard to the proposed changes to the current masking ordinance. In short, I oppose those changes. Please allow me to suggest some points of consideration in this regard.

The proposed ordinance provides a rationale for instituting fines, that while some businesses are putting measures in place to protect employees and customers, some are not. Is it the job of businesses to keep people safe in this way? I would argue that it is not. With any other virus, we always assume it is up to each individual to take the precautions and make choices they believe necessary to preserve their health and safety. If someone is fearful of contracting the virus in a certain place, I see 2 options: do not enter said building, or do so and take the precautions that you can. This is the logic we use with any other virus. If a business wants to require masks, that is their prerogative, it is their business. However, I do not believe it falls within the Assembly's authority to demand such a thing of businesses or organizations.

The proposed ordinance also states as rationale that the Assembly believes instituting fines "will provide an incentive for compliance, to further aid in bringing this public health crisis under control." Question: has the Assembly considered the impact of this upon the businesses? Have the members considered the fact that many businesses are already short staffed and may not have the resources to enforce the mandate? Have they considered the loss in revenue that may occur? Has the Assembly considered that while public health is important, it is not the end all-be all or the supreme consideration in these decisions? Instituting measures that may bring economic harm to our community could potentially be more harmful than the fact that we had 92 cases. Or in other words, could the "cure" bring unconsidered harm exceeding the supposed seriousness of a virus? I would respectfully ask the members to consider this.

While the Assembly seems extremely concerned at the number of cases within the community, and cites statistics as to how many more cases we have than the rest of Alaska or the nation, there seems to be one glaring omission: how many are in the hospital? That seems to me to be the most important statistic. Why are we, wiggling out as it were, when the reality is that the vast majority who contract Covid nationally are not even hospitalized? The national numbers appear to show approximately 5% hospitalization. Has Petersburg even reached this? Has the hospital been at risk for running out of beds? I've not heard of it.

Why can we not trust people to take necessary precautions? If there is an outbreak of the flu, how would we respond? I realize that at the beginning of this pandemic, there was much we did not know. And people took precautions. We now know quite a lot more. We know who is at higher risk. We know ways that we can bolster our immune systems. We have effective vaccines, as well as effective treatments for those who get the virus. But if we were talking about a flu outbreak, I suspect that people would take the precautions they feel necessary for their health. If they are sick, they will stay home and minimize their interactions with others. If they are afraid of getting sick, they will stay home, and when they go out, they will keep distance from others, maybe wear a mask, wash their hands often, and take measures to bolster their immune system. As humans, we do risk assessments all the time and take the precautions necessary to avoid the risk. While Covid is not the flu, it is

currently more contagious for one, it is still like many other viruses we deal with. The flu can kill people and the flu can be very contagious at times. But both viruses are generally only dangerous for the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions.

And when people can clearly see that while Covid may be a bit more dangerous than the flu, for the large majority it does not cause serious illness or death, they are not likely to take the measures the Assembly is pushing. People see the general non-lethality of Covid and then put it up against the measures being taken, and for many the measures feel extreme for the reality on the ground. If we, as responsible adults, were to look at this situation, I think that for some or many, our risk assessment would lead us to take precautions similar to the flu. Perhaps, we would take extra precaution since Covid is not the flu. But when we see on-the-ground reality, and yet when the Assembly pushes measures that seem unnecessary given the reality, that gets people frustrated.

The Assembly also seems at risk of weakening their influence in the future. The more that the Assembly seeks to enforce these measures, especially as it seems to make less and less sense (dropping cases, extremely low hospitalization, generally non-lethal to the young and without preexisting conditions), the less many in our community will have any respect or trust for the Assembly in the future. They weaken the influence they have. If people see things being done that seem to make little logical sense, that generally does not lead to trust in other matters. Especially when it comes to public health, the Assembly may damage their influence in the future, and weaken their ability to ask things of the community because people may not forget this moment. I believe your credibility can and may already be damaged because the measures being taken do not seem to align with the reality of what we know about this virus.

That said, I do understand that you as the Assembly have a difficult task before you, balancing so many interests and opinions. I am grateful for your service in what may at many times feel like a thankless public service. I do not do so as often as I ought, but especially in this time, I ask the LORD to give you all wisdom to lead this community in a way that honors Him and promotes well-being at every level for those who live here.

I have great respect for our medical personnel and am sure they have felt taxed as most in this country have. I believe there are precautions we can and do take. I understand the Assembly's desire to protect the health of this community. However, I believe the current mask ordinance and the proposed fines are onerous (specifically in regard to businesses or organizations), perhaps not nearly as effective as we would like to think, and to some extent unreasonable. I believe that it will only serve to increase the division in our community. I, for one, have generally sought to follow the intent of the mask ordinance, even though I disagree with it. And I would respectfully and strongly ask that you vote against instituting these fines, and repeal the mask ordinance as soon as possible.

Respectfully,
Tim Ritter