

Mayor Murphy Releases Statement on Community COVID-19 Response

The City of Valparaiso recently initiated several online forums to gather information and thoughts regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. We invited participants to share questions and concerns following the forums. From those responses, we found that many in our community share similar concerns. We'd like to share our response community-wide:

Thank you for reaching out to the City of Valparaiso. We share your concerns for the COVID-19 pandemic and are working closely with others, including the Porter County Health Department, Valparaiso Community Schools and the regional healthcare community. The challenges are real, complex and not unique to Valparaiso. Yet, we're working daily to address them.

We are asked numerous questions and we do our best to respond in a timely and appropriate manner. Citizens have asked why the City has not adopted masking ordinances, initiated plans for a shutdown, or reallocated police resources from traditional law enforcement activities to enforcing non-masking violators.

The simple answer to many of these questions is that the City does not have the authority mandate masks on private property, order businesses to close, or direct our police officers to enforce a Governor's Executive Order. I know that is not the answer some want to hear, but it is the truth. As a municipality, we are charged with delivering trash/recycling/leaf pick-up, water and sewer services, maintaining streets, providing police and fire protection, supporting our parks and encouraging the conditions that create a positive quality of life for all residents. These services have continued despite the pandemic. That said, the City has not been a quiet spectator during this pandemic. We have continuously communicated (and advocated) with local, regional and national agencies on behalf of residents and partnered with entities that have the expertise and authority to act.

We want you to know that we hear you - from those who wish for the city to close its doors to those who are unwilling to wear a mask - and everyone in between. Over the last few weeks, I have conducted several virtual meetings with local businesses and with the greater community to receive feedback and better understand the challenges our community faces. From parents balancing job requirements with the online education needs of their children, to restaurant owners having to furlough employees and wondering whether their businesses - which represent a lifetime of family sweat and sacrifice - will survive. Many have strong opinions. As a City, we are doing our best to maintain the services we're expected to provide and partner with experts to ensure our responses are grounded in fact; not emotion.

We are in regular contact with the Porter County Health Department who is leading the COVID-19 effort in our county. We have offered them our support and strong encouragement for added testing capacities, more rapid turnarounds and enhanced enforcement of masking. We know that they're currently working on doubling their testing capacity and are making their enforcement of masking more prominent and more visible. We support that wholeheartedly and have pledged support and resources to make this happen.

We have supported the statewide mask mandate. We support masking and wear them at City Hall. To project a more unified message, we have provided a Mask Up sign for local business use and encouraged all businesses to post them. We have made additional signs available at City Hall. Further, the signs include the phone number for the Health Department should businesses or customers need more information or assistance in enforcement. The Health Department is also listening to the many requests to increase enforcement and has introduced an online option where anyone may report non-compliance with masking requirements. We support this move. In fact, we have also encouraged local businesses to report non-compliance and to require all customers to wear face coverings before entering any business.

Businesses face unique challenges. They wish to protect employees, but they also depend on revenue to support their futures – for themselves and their staffs. We’re doing all we can to support our local businesses in their efforts to remain safely open, serving customers while enforcing the mask mandate, cleaning frequently, washing hands and maintaining distances. It’s a tall order, but as long as they’re willing to abide by these Porter County Health Department guidelines, we must support them. We are currently working on a public service announcement campaign to encourage residents to shop local.

Our schools are in a unique position in this pandemic. Closing schools completely is not a solution that serves our community. Many students rely on schools for their meals, for social interaction and social worker support, and for seeking important help, in addition to academic instruction. We also see data that transmission in schools is low. We support the efforts of the school systems and the efforts they’re taking to maximize safety. We recognize that they’re working to minimize closures, isolating classrooms or schools when necessary, but doing their best to serve students and families.

While we wish we had answers that could satisfy everyone, we’re doing our very best to incorporate differing views that ultimately seek the same outcome - a safe community and protection for all, especially those at greater risk. Above all, we continue to listen and we ask for your understanding and support as we continue to serve to the best of our abilities.

Should you wish to reach out, please do not hesitate to contact my assistant, Marci Palmer at mpalmer@valpo.us or call City Hall at 219-462-1161.

Sincerely,



Mayor Matt Murphy