



Jennifer Wyness, Ward 2 Councillor

## Municipal Vaccine Passport Bylaw

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On February 9th during the Community Development Committee, Councillors discussed whether the City of Calgary should implement its own vaccine passport program, now that the provincial government has removed its Restrictions Exemption Program (REP). The Committee voted against this amendment in a vote of 10-4. I was one of the votes against, and I would like to share my rationale.

The REP was implemented to encourage Albertans to get vaccinated against COVID-19; it was needed as vaccination rates had plateaued. It worked, and currently nearly 9 out of 10 people are vaccinated, and in various age brackets over the age of 40, 90% - 98% are vaccinated. In addition, there is a high likelihood the unvaccinated have been exposed to COVID-19 themselves. The program was successful in improving vaccination rates, and it was never meant to reduce transmission beyond improving vaccine uptake. Now, with universal understanding that the vaccinated are a vector of the Omicron variant, using the program to reduce transmission of COVID-19 will provide a false sense of security as both the vaccinated and unvaccinated may carry the virus and infect others.

As a society, it is important for everyone to remove the political polarization of COVID-19 and show awareness, empathy, and an understanding of each other moving forward.

Vaccination rates have now plateaued, and I believe that keeping the REP in place won't necessarily encourage more vaccinations. During the Committee meeting, I asked CEMA Chief Sue Henry, with all the public health measures in place, why was the peak of the fifth wave so much higher in infections than previous waves. She responded that it's largely due to the extreme transmissibility of the Omicron variant, plus a significant volume of breakthrough cases.

I also had concerns regarding the legal, logistical, and enforcement challenges that the implementation of Calgary's own REP program could create without the support of provincial resources. When I asked Administration what viable program we could create, the response was that the most likely option would be printed paper cards, as the City would not have the capacity to build an app at a similar level to the provinces. The province has already removed access to download the app. Paper proofs of vaccination could easily be doctored, which would defeat the overall purpose. Furthermore, without access to the provincial health data and metrics, we as a city would have no way of determining the appropriate time to end the vaccine passport program if enacted.

I believe masking, social distancing, and vaccinations will have the largest effect on our ability to keep each other safe and healthy. Science has shown that whether vaccinated or not, transmission can still occur between individuals, however, COVID-19 vaccines have done an excellent job in enabling us to lower the numbers of severe cases and hospitalizations. Our collective focus should now be shifted towards strengthening our healthcare system, attracting more doctors and registered nurses, and advocating for additional University facilities to assist with training health experts and practitioners.

COVID-19 has touched all of us and the vast majority of people are doing the best they can, given the circumstances. It has undoubtedly been a fearful time, but we must remind ourselves to hold onto our humanity and take a pause before taking hard stances on issues surrounded by so much ambiguity. Let us all lean in with empathy, and remember to be kind to each other, be safe, and choose to respect each other's choices.



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