



Jennifer Wyness, Ward 2 Councillor

## **Pandemic Face Covering Bylaw**

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At the February 15th City Council Meeting, Councillors discussed whether the City of Calgary should align with the provincial government to end the mandatory mask bylaw on March 1st. As you may know, Calgary has been following its own Pandemic Face Covering Bylaw 63M2021 that came into effect on September 2021. After considerate debate in Council and hearing recommendations from Administration and CEMA Chief Sue Henry, Council opted to solidify an end date to mask regulations in a vote of 13-2. I voted to align with the province, and I would like to share my rationale as to why.

With the recent removal of the Restrictions Exemption Program, I believe masking, social distancing, and vaccinations will have the largest effect on our ability to keep each other safe and healthy. COVID-19 has touched all of us, and the vast majority of people are doing the best they can, given the challenging circumstances.

Unfortunately, the Government of Alberta does not share its health metrics and statistics with the City of Calgary. Consequently, we at the municipal level do not have access to the updated data that encouraged their decision to end the mandatory mask bylaw on March 1st.

As such, I proposed an amendment to the main motion requesting the extension of municipal mask requirements until March 31st. I believe my proposed extension would provide Calgarians with a phased approach towards the removal of protections, as well as a balanced compromise between the desires of those on both sides of this discussion.

I felt it would be prudent to provide Calgarians with additional time to adapt to the changes and to allow Council to have further conversations with constituents on this matter. Furthermore, we must think about the impact the removal of mandatory masking will have on small businesses and frontline workers who may not have the flexibility to work from home. I felt that adding a specified date would provide additional time for both local business

and community members to prepare themselves for a transition towards a mask-free environment. However, my amendment to extend masking rules to March 31st was defeated in a vote of 8-7, so Council moved on to the third and final reading of the bylaw.

In the final vote, the motion passed to align with the province in a vote of 13-2. Chief Henry and Administration recommended that Council align with the province on this matter and felt this was an appropriate compromise for Calgarians. I voted to support this motion, but I still encourage individuals to wear masks in public if they choose to do so.



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