

BLUFFTON TOWN COUNCIL EMERGENCY MEETING MINUTES

ELECTRONIC MEETING

June 30, 2020

Mayor Sulka called the meeting to order at 2:00 P.M. Council members present were Mayor Pro Tempore Fred Hamilton, Larry Toomer, Bridgette Frazier, and Dan Wood. Town Manager Marc Orlando, Deputy Town Manager Scott Marshall, Interim Chief of Police Scott Chandler, and Town Clerk Kimberly Chapman, and Town Attorney Terry Finger were also present.

Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation were given by Mayor Pro Tempore Fred Hamilton.

Adoption of the Agenda:

Hamilton made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Toomer seconded. Roll call was taken, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Public Comment:

Public comment was open to be received until two hours before the meeting start time through the website and via email to the Town Clerk to be read aloud for the record.

Rick Hoel, 43 Heartwood Court, Bluffton: I wear a mask in public for three reasons. First, to increase the safety of me and my family. Second, to reduce the risk I may spread the virus to others if I have it but am asymptotic. Third, to contribute to the overall effort to shut the virus down in the community. Though guidance from authorities in the early days was unclear, experts today all agree that masks do help with all three goals above. Even if the aid a mask provides is small, the inconvenience is very minor. I myself am a Libertarian and I am very reluctant to blindly allow the government to take away my rights. But with freedom comes responsibility. In a time of a significant public health crisis, it is incumbent on the government to act but do so in a minimally invasive way. In light of the impact that wearing a mask can have on improving all of our lots, and the minor inconvenience imposed, it is clear that ordering masks to be worn is the right decision.

Darice Ahrnsbrak, 7 Sweet Marsh Court, Bluffton: The primary responsibility should be to preserve the health and life of our citizens. The increase in positive testing shows that this crisis is expanding and affecting people of all ages. I agree with the CEO of Beaufort Memorial Hospital: "The only way to slow this current surge is universal masking." Anything we can do to bring down our numbers should be implemented. We must look out for everyone, including our first responders. Since some people remain uninformed of the danger, it is up to officials to create requirements.

Bari Lee, 16 Hampton Lake Crossing, Bluffton: Please require masks. It is essential to our health.

Jan Horan, 181 Farnsleigh Avenue, Bluffton: Please protect us and make masks mandatory.

Nancy Golden, 20 Hampton Lake Crossing, Bluffton: I wholly support the need to create an ordinance to require everyone living in or visiting Bluffton to wear a mask, when out in public, to protect the residents of Bluffton. I also support ticketing those individuals, who are seen by law enforcement, who are not wearing a mask. If you don't have some way to enforce and punish, then there will continue to be non-compliance.

Arthur Lenehan, 102 Summerton Drive, Bluffton: Let's require masks in retail establishments before all the small businesses go bankrupt and half of us are dead.

David Abel, 4 Lansmere Place, Bluffton: It is very important to everyone, for people to wear masks inside public facilities. The number of Corona cases are spiking in SC and in Bluffton. This a simple way you can impact the safety of the citizens you represent. With the # of visitors that visit this area every year it is now wonder our cases and deaths are on the rise. Please vote yes on this agenda item and help keep you constituents healthy, safe and alive.

John Genovese, 68 Farnsleigh Avenue, Bluffton: The town must step in to provide the much-needed regulation requiring face masks whenever people appear in public, visit the restaurants, shops or other venues in this area. It is unfortunate that our governor lacks the political will to do so for the state as a whole. I would remind those objecting on the basis of their constitutional rights that free speech ends if you cry fire in a movie theater or announce a local bank is failing! In fact, you cannot shop bare footed or shirtless. Let common sense prevail. The first duty of government is to protect its citizens!

Mark Barnes, 25 Sherbrooke Avenue, Bluffton: Masks are a major deterrent to COVID we should be wearing them! Please make them mandatory.

Rich Schaltegger, 20 Lakewood Court, Bluffton: Please consider making the wearing of masks mandatory in all public buildings.

Emily Genovese, 68 Farnsleigh Avenue, Bluffton: As sorry as I am to learn that mandatory mask wearing may be a thing of the future, I predicted a spike in positive COVID-19 cases as soon as our area "reopened" to the public, locals and visitors alike. Therefore, I'm not at all surprised. In fact, I'm quite pleased. It makes me terribly uncomfortable to shop in grocery stores with people who believe that masks are useless and unnecessary. I recently witnessed two young women, one who was pregnant, with their little ones shopping in Publix without masks. It's frightening. There is a great deal of documented evidence from reputable medical sources that confirm that the wearing of masks is a huge benefit for both the wearer and anyone the wearer may come in contact with. Ignorance is bliss? Please help us all and make masks mandatory

when out in public as there are so many people that refuse to do so for reasons that have nothing to do with the health and wellbeing of our families, friends and community.

Faith Berger, 50 Shelburne Street, Bluffton: I am grateful that you are considering mandatory mask wearing in public. There should have been no easing of stay at home rules or opening of any business or service without strict orders to wear a mask in public. Please pass this ordinance and attach penalties for noncompliance. Countries who have gotten this virus under control have done this and more.

Patricia Summers, 25 Coventry Court, Bluffton: Mandatory masks without a good supply of masks NOT made in China is giving Chinese communist Party business from their personal onslaught on the world and America. I went to Kroger's every mask was made in China. Plus, children's lungs and respiratory systems are still forming. We are being subjected to unauthorized mandates. This is America not socialist Europe or communist China...yet. Stop, think and be sure we are not all being manipulated and losing our freedoms by unscrupulous politicians with dubious agendas. I am opposed to forced wearing of masks for several health and other reasons. But for this letter I will focus on only one health reason and point out constitutional applications. Please consider carefully that you are not medically qualified to make this call. If you mandate masks and it results in harm to anyone (and it will), you will be opening yourselves up to lawsuits. I will point out a few things I consider would be constitutional applications of the phrase below: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty..."

- 1) The government is here to serve us, NOT to enslave us.
- 2) Domestic tranquility is impossible to maintain if we encourage large groups of masked thugs who cannot be identified when they commit crimes.
- 3) Domestic tranquility is impossible to maintain when people are agitated, struggling to breathe, experiencing claustrophobia, and unable to read faces to determine friend or foe.
- 4) South Carolina's own law, SECTION 16-7-110, forbids masks to establish justice and ensure domestic tranquility. Yes, there are exceptions, but I caution you, do not abuse the exceptions. The Declaration of Independence affords us the right to pursue happiness.

1. It is impossible to be happy when forced to wear a mask. General pleasantries cease when we are not allowed to greet one another with a smile.
2. Deaf and hard of hearing people can't function at all without the ability to read facial expressions and lips.
3. Frustration leads to violence and you will be responsible for creating such conditions.
4. I could go on with examples, but you get the idea. PLEASE DO NOT REQUIRE MASKS IN BLUFFTON OR ANYWHERE IN SC.

Laura Rodgers, 207 Reston Circle, Bluffton: I'm fully in favor of requiring face masks inside all buildings.

Linda Lyons, 29 Anchor Cove Court, Bluffton: It is very important to everyone's health and wellbeing and to protect our economy to enforce the using of masks in public places. We had neighbors who were turned away from attending a wedding in New York because South

Carolina's COVID rate is abysmal. As someone with underlying health conditions and helping to take care of two-family cancer patients, I would like to have the freedom to LIVE and everyone wearing masks will contribute to that. Please vote for life, not death.

Thomas Noble, 172 Flatwater Drive, Bluffton: There are huge numbers of people who either live here or are coming in from outside the county who are not adhering to the advice to wear face coverings in public places. This is undoubtedly contributing to the spread of Covid-19. As there has been a marked increase in cases here over the past few weeks, there should be a requirement that all people wear face coverings in public places. This will be most difficult to enforce in bars and restaurants, where social spacing is even more important as masks are removed when eating or drinking. But there is good evidence that masks protect both the wearer and those around from transmission of the virus. There is no excuse for not protecting yourself and your friends/family!!

Rose Cofield, 151 Pinecrest Drive, Bluffton: Please vote to require masks in public places and retail stores. New covid-19 cases keep rising. Do something to contain it.

Jannine Mutterer, 5 Able Street, Bluffton: I am in support of a town ordinance requiring the wearing of masks in public spaces where distancing may not be possible.

Jim Curtiss, 10 Pettigrew Plantation Road, Bluffton: I would urge you to consider requiring masks in all public places, not just grocery stores and pharmacies. Compared to what both Hilton Head and the City of Beaufort have recently enacted, the narrow focus of Bluffton's proposal falls short of what will be required to stem the COVID levels in Bluffton. I am concerned that this narrow focus will not arrest the sharp increase in cases in Bluffton. Additionally, it will inevitably confuse the public, particularly Bluffton residents who travel back and forth to Hilton Head or Beaufort. The requirements should be aligned and adequate to the challenge.

David Barnum, 11 Moring Line Court, Bluffton: There is so much ambiguity in the data, the Mayor should NOT make this mandatory. I have read so much about how masks, not only are totally ineffective, but actually will prolong this issue. We all knew that the case load would go up, when you start testing more people, now 25+ million, while more people from highly infected areas come down here to get away from the repression, they have been facing in their home states. If you want to wear a mask, go ahead, I respect your decision, but don't make me wear one, and respect mine - this is abusive and uncomfortable for those that do not want to wear a mask!

Valerie Emerson, 141 Bainbridge Way, Bluffton: Please pass a requirement that residents of Bluffton wear face masks. We want to decrease the spread of Covid 19 so that our children can go back to classrooms in their school buildings. Long distance learning and at-home instruction is not providing the necessary education that our children need. Thank you for your service.

Todd Shea, 17 Maidencane Street, Bluffton: I will not be wearing a mask, no matter if a mandate is passed or not. Not because I don't care about the people in our community, I will not wear a mask because I put 100 percent of my faith in God!!!! I don't walk in fear, I walk in faith. It is against my God given right as an American citizen for the government that we elect to enforce me to wear a mask!!! I have the right to practice my religious beliefs, especially after President Trump signed EXECUTIVE ORDERS. Executive Order on Advancing International Religious Freedom!!!!!! Thank you and have a blessed day!!

Joel Lerner, 4 Reston Place: Please make wearing of masks mandatory all the time. No exceptions...all stores.

Jacquelyn Friedl, 45 Martingale East, Bluffton: Please consider a more inclusive response to mask wearing as our case numbers are still escalating. It is important for those towns with especially high escalations be consistent with one another. Hilton Head has passed a broader understanding of mask wearing for the public to include all commercial sites. Additionally, although it is important to regain a strong economic base, curtailing hours of places such as parks, beaches, and bars might not close, but could have reduced operating hours to decrease possible contacts. This seems like a viable compromise. It would be appreciated if my concerns and suggestions could be passed along and considered in your proposal.

Murray Sease, 56 Calhoun Street, Bluffton: I am one of the managing owners of La Petite Gallerie on Calhoun Street. We have begun requiring face masks in our gallery starting last Friday. We would feel so much better about it if it were a requirement for all people in public places or at least all retail spaces. I hear you will be discussing that in your town meeting tomorrow. I just wanted to let you know how we feel.

Brandi Talmadge, 42 Daffodil Farm Road, Bluffton: No masks - there's no evidence to support they work. The requirement to wear one violates my rights.

Rick Barton, 218 Waterstone Way, Bluffton: Unless the public locations where the masks will be required are also required to properly sanitize their location, it's all window dressing. Will Publix be required to sanitize the checkout conveyor and card reader after each customer, have all canned goods wiped down after someone puts it back on the shelf? How about the cashier behind me? If I turn away from the plastic barrier in front of me to sneeze, the cashier behind me gets the full effect of my sneeze, even if I try to cover up. While the increase in cases continues to rise, hospitalization and death rates continues to decrease. Destroying the economy over a death rate of less than 0.5% is foolhardy. And for full disclosure, I am 67 years old, and have had a previous medical condition that would put me in the higher risk group.

Bonnie Luchetti, 122 Pinecrest Circle, Bluffton: It is not the government's responsibility to protect us from ourselves. If you want to wear a mask, wear it; if you do not, don't. I do not think that we have the resources to cause our PD to enforce a mandatory mask law. The result will be to have hundreds of "citizen police" thinking it is their duty to enforce the law, and

publicly humiliating others. It would prudent to insist that retail & restaurants have Frontline employees wear masks...the store I manage already does that. If the guest is uncomfortable in a particular environment they should leave, or simply not go out. Businesses are going to great lengths to create safe environments for our guests but, in the end, it is all about personal choice.

Bill Walker, 137 Commodore Dupont Street, Bluffton: Please require masks to be worn indoors and outdoors unless medically unable.

Leonard Gaffga, 93 Heron Bill Drive, Bluffton: Bluffton should be wearing mandatory masks at this time and all during COVID19.

Catherine Gaffga, 93 Heron Bill Drive, Bluffton: We all need to wear masks for safety reasons during COVID19.

John Curtis, Westbury Park, Bluffton: My name is John Curtis. I am a 67-year-old resident of Estates at Westbury, and property owner of more than 3 years. I stand today in OPPOSITION to the proposed mandatory face mask proposal. There are no scientific studies or data present that confirm masks have any positive impact on the spread of disease. Recent studies published by Stanford University and University of Southern California were inconclusive showing that viruses and bacteria can and do escape masks and are masks are not effective safeguards to the public. However, they did show health risks to the public by forcing the wearing of masks, in particular that wearing masks is de-humanizing, and has negative emotional, mental and physical responses to both adults and in particular children who are traumatized. The WHO and CDC have been spectacularly, epically wrong in all their Projections, Estimates, Pronouncements and Guesses for the last 4 months – showing profound reversals when proved to be wrong. They are even counting “probable” cases and deaths where they don’t know – fudging the numbers. Drs Fauci, Birx and the Federal Surgeon General have all publicly stated and reversed and reversed again on the bad reasons for requiring masks – including minimal to zero benefit, false sense of security and in fact just “virtue signaling”. All the above Doctors, plus the WHO and CDC are on public record as not really knowing whether this virus is actually spread through the air or on surfaces and have issued contradictory statements - this indicates wearing masks is a farce. The SC Health Dept website as of last night records: Beaufort County has had 1148 cases of Covid-19, and 18 deaths from the last almost 5 months. Bluffton and Hilton Head Island are each less than one third of that number. As far as the SC State record shows – all but two of the deaths in the County were over 65 years old and all had multiple other co morbidities. There are currently 1047 sick people hospitalized in the whole State of almost five million people. “Cases” is the wrong metric – hospitalization and death are the correct metrics to control. Beaufort has .00009 deaths or 9/100,000. This is NOT a pandemic that is any worse than any previous year of disease in the recorded history of Beaufort County. Testing has escalated in the last 2 months which is why the “Cases” are rising – however we have never tested or counted cases in any previous years of any of the previous supposed

pandemics like H1N1 or previous SARS or Corona viruses that have been around for decades. Masks are not helpful. Masks are dehumanizing. Masks provide a false sense of any safety. We cannot sanitize the County. This is a political, public mind control exercise that is not a health standard. I stand in OPPOSITION to forceful wearing of masks in public. I urge the Mayor and Council to reject this proposal.

Michael Talmadge, 42 Daffodil Farm Road, Bluffton: No Mask. Creating an ordinance only to make people feel more comfortable from a homemade uncertified piece of fabric is frivolous.

Kelly Knight, 16 Baywood Drive, Bluffton: New England Journal of Medicine (5/21/20) and other scientific research has demonstrated that wearing masks other than fitted medical grade quality do little to protect self and others from Covid-19. WHO has determined that asymptomatic do not transmit the virus? Thus, if you are going to compel mask wearing, it should be on those who are symptomatic. Those with C-19 should quarantine. Those who are asymptomatic or free of the virus should be left alone with no mandated mask wearing. Please consider these facts when determining whether to impose useless requirements on the vast majority of the residents of Bluffton. Thank you. Oh, just FYI, the rate of increase of cumulative deaths from C-19 beginning 5/1/20 in SC is 278% with no mandatory mask wearing. In a random sample of 7 of the 16 states mandating mask wearing, that same rate of increase is 277%. Masks do little to stop the spread.

Shannon Roper, 257 Pinecrest Circle, Bluffton: We do not need a mask ordinance. I am not sure why everyone cannot see the number of cases is going up because more people are being tested. I am getting the antibody test today because I was sick back in April. I read if that test comes back positive, I will be added to positive case count, even though I am not an active case, thus driving up the number of "new" cases. A mask ordinance will hurt business in Bluffton as I and many other people will simply take our shopping and dining dollars to Hardeeville. I urge you to not trample on my rights. Allow people to protect themselves without the government getting involved.

Christine Taylor, 231 Montauk Avenue, Bluffton: Before I feel like the curve was kept down by social distancing and wearing mask. I still put on my mask when I enter a store and I am required to wear a mask at work. With everything open I believe the added protection cannot hurt. If you cannot be 6ft apart, please wear a mask.

Meg Engler, 75 Regent Avenue, Bluffton: Please pass a comprehensive mask ordinance that requires all employees, employers, and customers to wear masks, in any public building and gathering where 6ft outdoor distancing isn't possible. We must do this together and have to try to slow this down. I want to get back to work in person someday.

Ruth Gardner, 609 Argent Way, Bluffton: Please vote to require people to wear masks in public-with their noses covered especially in buildings. Thank you for keeping us safe.

Carol Kinsley, 9 7th Avenue, Bluffton: I am in favor of making masks mandatory but what about Restaurants and Bars? It's not possible to wear them at either location, so would that mean another possible shutdown? I don't think that would be a bad idea.

Marge Garvey, 196 Hampton Circle, Bluffton: Please mandate masks. Though I don't live in the Town I do all my shopping there. I wear a mask to protect others, and I want the same courtesy extended to me.

Trudi Nelson, 6 Traymore Place, Bluffton: Requiring face masks only in grocery stores and pharmacies is not enough. It's like putting on a band aid with adhesive only on one side. Pls follow the same requirements that Hilton Head has passed. If not, are you hoping tourists will come to Bluffton to eat and shop because the city wants their dollars over the health of it's residents???

Kathleen Watkins, Bluffton: As a 20-year resident of Bluffton, and as an "essential" employee at Kroger in Bluffton, I am writing to you to ask that Mayor Sulka and the town council pass a serious mask ordinance, that will protect employees as well as customers. EVERYONE always needs to wear a mask when in public places. This is not about money or politics; this is about doing everything possible to control this very serious health crisis and to keep EVERYONE safe. Please make it mandatory for everyone to wear a mask in all public places, when social distancing is not possible.

Sean Neuman, 52 Sugar Maple Street, Bluffton: I wish for the town NOT to make it mandatory to wear masks at public places. Please leave it for businesses to decide how they wish to address this matter.

Patricia Paidas, 195 Hampton Circle, Bluffton: We need to make the use of masks mandatory in this area to help control the spread of COVID-19. So many people are following the guidelines; however, an equal no. aren't which causes the no. of cases to rise. Please legislate this as Hilton Head has done.

Kay Lauener, 2 Water Tupelo, Bluffton: Please follow suit with Hilton Head regarding face masks. This virus will continue to spread unless people take it seriously and follow protective guidelines. It is imperative to wear face masks to reduce transmission. This is not a political issue. This is a commonsense survival issue. Make the right decision please.

Anne Cummings, 119 Spring Beauty Drive, Bluffton: I feel strongly that everyone should be required to wear face masks when in stores or restaurants and when not maintaining social distancing outside. Without this requirement the Covid-19 virus will keep spreading out of control till it can't be controlled. People of all ages have just thrown caution to the wind and are not following guidelines and so now it is time to make them mandatory with fines if failure to comply.

Norma Gourley, 69 Plymouth Lane, Bluffton: We need to lick this. Please mandate wearing masks.

Meg Engler, Westbury Park, Bluffton: Please pass a comprehensive mask ordinance that requires all employees, employers, and customers to wear masks, in any public building and gathering where 6ft outdoor distancing isn't possible. We must do this together and have to try to slow this down. I want to get back to work in person someday.

Tim Morrison, 601 Argent Way, Bluffton: As I travel through our community, I see more and more vehicles from out of state. The vast majority are NY, NJ, OH, IL, PA... All states with high infection rates of Covid-19. What is disturbing is that I watch these people leave their vehicles and go into stores with their children and NO ONE has masks. They are on holiday and they don't care if they spread a disease. Where are our leaders, the people we elect, who will stand up and stop this? Ironically the states whose people are invading us have declared a 14-day quarantine for visitors, but we allow their citizens to have free reign on our communities. Where is the leadership and courage to say ENOUGH!!!! We need leaders, real leaders, who are protecting our health, not cowards. Where are you???? PLEASE Stand up, be bold, do what we need you to do. Most importantly protect us from the invaders.

Maryann Liikala, 10 Sanders Court, Bluffton: This is a necessity.

Lori Ferguson, 16 Golden Eagle Drive, Bluffton: Yes, to ALL Individuals required to wear face coverings in all commercial business establishments equal to the request on Hilton head Island

Mark Trenske, 357 Rolling Marsh Lane, Bluffton: Vote NO for masks. I WILL NOT wear a mask. I hope fines are given to individuals that are not wearing them correctly if this is passed. They don't belong under the nose, covering your chin or hanging off one ear. Also, when a mask is recommended because of an outbreak and people want their mask to match their clothing or have a statement it is no longer about an outbreak.

Judith Ponder, 82 3rd Avenue, Bluffton: Please vote for approval of masks being worn to protect our residents, including yourself.

Theresa Quirk, 470 Col. Thomas Heyward Rd, Bluffton: Please vote to make wearing of masks mandatory.

David Brune, 250 Pinnacle Shores Drive, Bluffton: Please make mask wearing in public mandatory - this will allow me to enjoy the outdoors 'shared' amenities as well. Else I have to stay home as most people appear to think that being outside that it is ok to be unmasked - it's not when you get too close or are downwind from me.

Patti Smith, 8 Knotweed Ct., Bluffton: I am hoping that the decision will be mandatory masks.

Kathy and Ken Lindner, 17 Whitebark Lane, Bluffton: We support any Bluffton in favor of mandatory masks.

Sandra Miller, 206 Hampton Circle, Bluffton: Masks should be made mandatory to control COVID19 in our fine town of Bluffton!

Joan Cowan, 22 Thomas Bee Drive, Sun City: Please mandate masks in Bluffton. It will save lives and it is the socially responsible thing to do. We need to take care of each other.

Theresa Graves, 15 Maple Court, Bluffton: We can no longer wait for people to act responsibly on their own. They are not wearing masks! It is now time to mandate the wearing of masks in public to protect our population. PLEASE vote for face masks.

Cherry Underwood, 27 Whitebark Lane, Bluffton: Please pass a mask ordinance. We need to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases.

Doreen Cubie, 95 Coburn Drive West, Bluffton: Please make masks mandatory in ALL indoor spaces and stores in Bluffton.

Beth Mitchell, 124 Ninth Avenue, Bluffton: I do feel in the current state of the pandemic if someone enters a public building a mask needs to be required. Legally businesses currently cannot force someone to wear a mask, only ask them to leave and make a scene. This is putting working citizens in a precarious position when consumers ignore signage and friendly requests. Consumers with negative opinions of the pandemic are also often the ones disregarding public health and 6-foot social distancing in my experience. Even consumers with masks are forgetting to stay 6 feet away. Businesses who have already suffered greatly can only do so much to circulate air, maintain cleanliness with scarce supplies and continue to change procedure to help their employees feel safe while continuing to conduct business. A mask inside businesses will relieve so much anxiety for other consumers trying to patronize the same establishment and the employees trying work and stay safe. All businesses have been exponentially affected by the pandemic. The stress of protecting their employees' and consumers' health while trying to not lose business due consumer opinion needs to be taken off their plate. This is not politics, this about public health and economic recovery. Employees should not have to risk their health to keep their job. This virus is very real and there's now 500,000 deaths to prove this throughout the world. Yes, testing has improved, yes, the hospitals are prepared, yes most will survive. But most families have suffered financial loss, and businesses have absolutely suffered, and if too many employees catch it, the business suffers more because they may have to cease operations while their team recovers. The American Lung Association and many respected organizations state factually the risk to ones' health with a mask is faint if even possible. A doctor's note for those with legitimate respiratory problems relieves all citizens who truly cannot wear a mask. Throughout the world mask wearing has been accepted and proven effective. We as a community desperately need to make this step to protect our fellow citizens, our economy and our reputation as a caring, friendly society.

Ruth Brenner, 16 Dawn Sky Court, Bluffton: please make our community safer. Require masks in restaurants, stores, drug stores NOW SAVE LIVES.

Kay Long, 12 Sanders Court, Bluffton: Since the COVID-19 cases are increasing it behooves the City of Bluffton to make mandatory the wearing of masks in a public building and inside restaurants.

Irene Reed, 1 Debeaufain Drive, Bluffton: Please for everyone's health, we need an ordinance that everyone in Bluffton wear a mask. If it is mandatory, people will do it- they are like children they do as much as they can get away with.

Sherry Lee, 20 Dawn Sky Court, Bluffton: Please vote to require masks as did Hilton Head and Beaufort. We need to save lives.

Chris Trezza, 4 Anchor Cove Court, Bluffton: I do not want a mandatory mask ordinance. It is unnecessary and anti-constitutional. People can be responsible for themselves; we don't need government overreach. The "rise" in cases is normal to the re-opening of the state and being handled with treatment we did not have before. Deaths are 90% lower than earlier in this pandemic. Exposure is necessary to build immunity. People can determine whether to go out or not if they are vulnerable and they can choose to wear a mask on their own. Suggestions and advice is all we need, So, NO mandatory mask ordinance is wanted.

Kathleen Cronin, 2225 Blakers Blvd., Bluffton: I fully support passing a mask requirement in Bluffton retail shops, restaurants, and other indoor public places to help curb the spread of covid19.

Charles Vasilakis, 18 Stable Gate, Hilton Head: I strongly urge the passage of this ordinance. It may not have been necessary two months ago. It is critically essential now. The numbers tell the story. SC is on the national news for all the wrong reasons with its Covid cases skyrocketing. And the Bluffton 29110 area has the most cases in the county. It's not a personal rights or constitutional issue. It's a health issue. A visit to the Promenade any evening of the week is all one needs to see. People with total disregard for anyone but themselves...putting others at risk. Let's not wait til Bluffton becomes another Myrtle Beach and is sullied with the reputation of a COVID-19 hotspot. This step should not be taken lightly. It should be enacted only because social distancing isn't being adhered to and because more measures are needed. It's time for action. Follow the lead of The HHI Council. Our health (and lives) are at stake.

Julia Parrish, 715 Palmdale Lane, Bluffton: I support the mandatory wearing of masks in Bluffton public places.

Caroline Taylor, 440 Gardners Circle, Bluffton: Please consider passing a stringent mask ordinance to require masks in all public places. Our town is in danger with everyone, especially visitors, doing as they please. Masks can help prevent the spread of COVID drastically, please

keep your citizens, children, and the vulnerable safe by passing an ordinance requiring masks in ALL public places, and for all employees in public places. Thank you.

Jacqueline Fitzgerald, 42 Bahr Mill Lane, Bluffton: I am a Bluffton SC resident and an RN of 30 years and a Certified Case Manager for 10 years. I'm writing to ask you to consider medical criteria regarding masks and to consider NOT succumbing to pressure and nonsense. And hopefully to try to understand that we are not in control and cannot control everything in nature. Please read OSHA guidelines on all types of masks. Very accurate. This is a respiratory virus such as flu and cold and we have never reacted this way. We have to stop the unhealthy and unhelpful way we are stopping our immune system. We have to exist with this like we do other respiratory viruses. Those who need protected, elderly and sick, need to wear masks to try to eliminate chances of catching the virus. You should never mask healthy and vibrant people. We need to protect the vulnerable and mostly nursing home residents. Please use common sense and see that we cannot continue this cycle and prolong the inevitable. We cannot destroy this country further and kill more people by suicide, abuse, etc. that this type of reaction can cause. We need hand washing and outdoors. We need to be mindful of personal space as in 3 ft. We need to be mindful of coughing and sneezing and touching our face. Same old and gold rules we learned a long time ago.

Michelle and Jim Fraser, 30 Stoney Court, Bluffton: Please pass face mask ordinance. Both SC and Bluffton are in crisis

Yvonne Tidwell, 18 Pioneer Point, Bluffton: Please do not approve the bill to make masks mandatory. We do not believe it is necessary. Most people at the grocery store already wear masks anyways. It should be a person's choice whether they choose to wear one or not.

Heidi Hinnenkamp, Bluffton: I'm not sure how this works and I'm home with my 5 little ones, but I do know I need to attempt to get my voice heard in this "mandatory mask" vote today. I understand many citizens and Town leaders believe the COVID numbers are rising and there's different opinions on every side. I understand there's a lot of fear in these days and pressure to listen to government powers, however I believe with every ounce of my mother instinct that allowing this vote to pass through would be detrimental to my children and the future of our town. This cannot and should not pass. The numbers are never going to come down as long as testing sites are open. The numbers do not reflect any actual threat or death rate. There is no threat. Are we to be required to wear a mask for the rest of our lives? Are we to live in fear until the day we die? Are we to give into a dictatorship and expose our children to this way of life? As a mom with 5 children all under the age of 7 years old, I cannot comprehend a future for these sweet ones where they see mask wearing robots all around town. They cannot see people smiling behind the masks. They cannot breathe behind the masks. Please God have mercy if not on our country then on our town. Let this madness stop. Let truth come forth. Please I beg you hear my mother's heart cry and put an end to this never-ending nightmare.

Tovah Villobos, 563 Mill Street, Bluffton: I'd like to encourage a vote AGAINST a mask ordinance for Bluffton. Please let people decide what is best for their own health.

Johnnie Hamlin, Bluffton: I know that there will be a vote on mandatory masks here in Bluffton this afternoon and I'd like to put in my two cents. I do not think that masks should be mandatory. If businesses want to do so I completely understand but I do not feel like I should be forced to do so. I have complied when asked but I do not want to be forced to do so. Thank you for your time.

Chris Short, 157 Pinecrest Drive, Bluffton: Mayor Sulka and council members...While I fully understand the severity of COVID 19 and the need to take precautions...like limiting persons in a building, social distancing etc...I STRONGLY feel that telling the public how they must dress and what they must wear to be able to freely live crosses a line that no government should cross. Despite all of the hand wringing, number hawking and scare tactics of the media (especially social media users) activities like grocery shopping are LOW RISK. The CDC states that close contact, high risk interactions occur when an infected person spends AT LEAST 15 minutes in close proximity (less than 6 feet) of another person. I've shopped at the same Publix in Bluffton for almost 11 years. I cannot recall when I've had an interaction with anyone that came close to matching that description. Never unless I stopped to have a conversation with an employee I've come to know or a friend I've bumped in to. If you are wearing a mask to protect your health, my wearing a mask provides minimal risk reduction. If you want to mandate masks be worn in confined spaces, like restaurants, why not just mandate a lower occupancy percentage? There's a loophole in the HHI ordinance that exempts people who are eating and drinking...which is an environment where people are both close together, even with mandated spacing and indoors. How is that less risky than going to a grocery store? I follow social distancing guidelines, I shop when it's later in the day and less crowded, I avoid stores like Home Depot unless absolutely necessary, don't have people over and keep my distance from anyone. I would have less issues with having my rights infringed, and that's what it is, if I felt that I could trust government to reverse course expeditiously. However, I am firmly convinced that this ordinance, once enacted, will be with us until a vaccine is found. I also question governments willingness to stop there. What's next? Please vote no.

Earle Lockhart, 19 Sugar Maple Lane, Bluffton: Please pass a law about wearing masks that is consistent with the rest of Beaufort county.

Karen Bartlett, 3 Orchid Lane, Bluffton: Please vote yes for people in Bluffton to be required to wear masks in public businesses.

Formal Items:

Consideration of an Emergency Ordinance of the Town of Bluffton, South Carolina, Requiring Individuals to Wear Face Coverings in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic; and Matters Related Thereto; and Severability – Scott Marshall, Deputy Town Manager

Marshall stated that on June 22, 2020, in response to an increasing number of positive COVID-

19 tests reported by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC), the City of Greenville enacted an emergency ordinance to require the wearing of face coverings in certain social situations and by employees of certain establishments who come into contact with the public in the performance of their jobs. The ordinance went into effect in Greenville on June 23, 2020. On the same day, the City of Columbia enacted a similar emergency ordinance requiring the wearing of face coverings in public settings. On June 25, 2020, the City of Charleston also passed an ordinance requiring the wearing of face coverings.

Since the adoption of these emergency ordinances, the mandated wearing of face coverings has become a topic of discussion among South Carolina political sub jurisdictions. In response to that discussion, SC Attorney General Alan Wilson issued a statement on June 24, 2020 regarding his view of whether passing such ordinances is lawful. While this statement was issued by Mr. Wilson, it should be noted that it is not an official SC Attorney General's Opinion. The bottom line of his statement, however, is that he believes it is lawful for a municipality to pass this type of ordinance. The following is an excerpt:

“The only question before my office is whether a city can lawfully pass this type of ordinance? The short answer to that question is – yes, a city can pass this type of ordinance. Our state constitution and state laws have given cities the authority to pass these types of ordinances under the doctrine of Home Rule. The basic premise behind the Home Rule doctrine is to empower local governments (i.e., towns, cities and counties) to effectively govern themselves without interference from state government.” – SC Attorney General Alan Wilson

Marshall presented a proposed ordinance, that outlined definitions, requirements, penalties, severability and the effective and expiration dates. During a discussion/live workshop session, edits were made to the original ordinance that staff presented, and Council was in consensus of an Emergency Ordinance requiring face coverings (Ordinance 2020-10).

Hamilton made a motion to approve an Emergency Ordinance of the Town of Bluffton, South Carolina, Requiring Individuals to Wear Face Coverings in Certain Circumstances in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic; and Matters Related Thereto; and Severability. Wood seconded. Roll call was taken, and the vote was unanimous.

Town Council Discussion:

Toomer stated that this vote was tough and the questions he asked were due to him wanting to make sure that Council is doing the “right thing” and making the best decision. He stated that he has listened and researched throughout the pandemic and that no one really knows what is going to happen. He stated that he understands and respects everyone's opinion, but that if one life can be saved, he is in support.

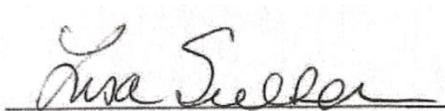
Wood stated that he would like to know what the COVID-19 numbers are in Bluffton once the Ordinance expires to know if the mask requirement was effective. Wood also stated that this was a difficult decision but that this decision boiled down to a health issue. He stated that he wants to keep everyone safe.

Frazier stated she applauded her fellow Council members, as this is been a very difficult task. She stated that her main goal is to protect all citizens. SC has had approximately 40,000 cases, and many of those cases include people who have had to be quarantined and don't have access to healthcare or affordable housing; they are going out as essential workers to provide take-out, groceries, etc. and many of these citizens don't have the option to not work. She asked that everyone understand that this difficult decision has been made to protect everyone. She stated that she does not want any business to shut down because Council did not make the right decision.

Hamilton stated we are in a place where doing nothing has proven that we are not in a better place than we were in March through May. Over the past month, things have gotten much worse and doing nothing has driven up the positive cases. No one should die or suffer from this situation; therefore, we cannot continue to look the other way. We must have quality of life and love and care for each other.

Sulka stated that Council is trying to keep residents safe and that Bluffton businesses for the most part have supported the face mask Ordinance; she hopes that once sixty days have passed that things will go back to normal.

Hamilton made a motion to adjourn at 4:12 p.m. Frazier seconded. The motion carried unanimously.



Lisa Sulka, Mayor



Kimberly Chapman, Town Clerk