

## Staff Report

**COVID-19 MEETING POLICIES**

January 11, 2022

**BACKGROUND:**

In light of increasing COVID-19 case counts both locally and nationally, City staff has begun meeting regularly again with our local institutional and public health partners, including ISU, Mary Greeley Medical Center, McFarland Clinic, and Story County Public Health. These discussions are an opportunity to share information regarding staffing shortages, hospital system capacity, and policy changes.

At the most recent discussion on January 6, significant concerns were raised among these partners about the impacts of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website on January 7 reported 404 COVID-19 cases in Story County and a positivity rate of 16.87%. However, these figures are likely to be undercounted due to the use of self-administered testing kits and the lower efficacy of rapid tests in detecting active Omicron variant infections. Based on this data, the CDC is recommending the wearing of masks in all public, indoor settings in Story County.

**Given the concerns of our partner organizations and our desire to minimize or eliminate the potential for workplace exposure of COVID-19, City staff has taken the step of requiring all employees to wear a mask in settings where six-foot distance cannot be maintained. Staff is additionally encouraging moving staff related meetings to larger spaces to accommodate distancing. This masking/distancing requirement will be in effect the week of January 10, and is expected to be a temporary measure until the local cases become more manageable (this could take place perhaps as early as two months from now).**

Within City facilities, visitors are also expected to comply with this masking requirement, and signage will be placed at the entrances to City facilities to indicate this. Additionally, supplies of masks are available at the front entrances of many City facilities.

**OPTIONS:**

Although staff is implementing these measures for City staff and visitors to the facilities (masking where six-foot distancing cannot be maintained), the City Council has the responsibility for setting any policies pertaining to City Council or Board and Commission meetings. **Therefore, staff is requesting direction as to which of the following options the Council wishes to pursue with regards to City Council and Board/Commission Meetings:**

**Option 1:** **Require masks to be worn at City Council, Boards, and Commission meetings.** It should be noted that it is not possible to maintain six-foot separation at the meetings, and therefore requiring masks is the only way to maintain consistency with the staff's policy.

**Option 2:** **Move City Council, Board, and Commission meetings to 100% virtual via Zoom, effective Monday, January 17.** This option involves the least additional staff and technology resources to implement, and staff is familiar with operating meetings in this format.

**Option 3:** **Implement a hybrid structure, with in-person attendees wearing masks and others participating virtually.** This may require board/commission meetings to be moved into the Council Chambers to utilize the most effective technology for hybrid discussions. Additionally, this option requires more staff to be on hand for the meetings to manage the technology.

**Option 4:** **The City Council could exempt City Council, board, and commission meetings from any masking or distancing policies.**

**STAFF COMMENTS:**

If the City Council chooses option 1, 2, or 3, staff anticipates that, as with the City employee masking/distancing policy, these measures would only be necessary until the current surge in cases subsides (perhaps as soon as two months from now).

Assuming the Council wishes to maintain consistency with the staff and building policy for masking/distancing, and given the challenges with implementing hybrid meetings; it would be City staff's recommendation that the City Council adopt either Option 1 or Option 2.