



May 25, 2020

Janel Heinrich, Director  
Public Health Madison & Dane County

Joe Parisi, County Executive  
County of Dane

Satya Rhodes-Conway, Mayor  
City of Madison

Dear Ms. Heinrich, Mr. Parisi and Ms. Rhodes-Conway:

We were relieved and grateful that you issued the May 13, 2020 order adopting the bulk of the state's Safer at Home order and that in your Emergency Order #2 of May 18, 2020, you reasserted the message for residents to stay home and for all but essential businesses to remain closed. We think the approach laid out in Emergency Order #2 protects the health and safety of our residents while allowing them to enjoy a basic level of recreational and economic activity. Thank you for using your authority to protect Dane County residents and workers.

In light of such protective measures, the press release announcing the Forward Dane plan this past Friday afternoon came as a big surprise to us. This plan calls for a broad reopening of all businesses and allows for mass gatherings indoors for up to 50 persons. It is particularly concerning that the plan lacks information about measures for the increased contact tracing and case management that will be needed with reopening. What facts changed between May 18 and May 22 to lead to such a major shift in our public policy?

In his email to us this morning, Dr Greg Gelembiuk notes that researchers from the Imperial College of London [rank Wisconsin as the 10th top state](#) in the US for uncontrolled community spread of COVID-19. For the past week hospitalizations and positive cases have been increasing in Dane County. The rate of new cases has been climbing steadily with a 5-day average at or above 10 cases per day since May 17th. More importantly, we are far short of having the testing and contact tracing capacity required to address every new positive case within a day or two. Absent these and other data-based criteria recommended by the [COVID local plan](#) developed by international epidemiology and public health experts, allowing indoor businesses to open seems to increase risk significantly and threatens the health and lives of both workers and customers.

We are also extremely concerned that the Forward Dane plan does not anticipate any worsening of the spread of COVID-19 in our community in the future. While the plan acknowledges the possibility of increasing restrictions in the future, it fails to set objective and measurable criteria that would drive the decision making.

Community members are looking to Public Health Madison & Dane County for accurate information about how to best protect their health and safety. Unfortunately, the Forward Dane plan sends the message that it's safe to be in indoor spaces such as gyms, salons, churches, and laser tag facilities with up to 50 people for prolonged periods of time as long as we stay 6' apart. Science, as well as an increasingly large body of data, indicate that those activities are not safe so long as the spread of the virus is uncontrolled as it currently is in Dane County. Twenty-three percent of new cases in the last two weeks had no identified source.

Reopening risks a resurgence of the virus, which is disproportionately affecting poor, uninsured, low-wage workers who have no alternative but to go to risky jobs that make them vulnerable. Multiple studies have shown that the pandemic has been devastating economically, especially in black and brown communities where people may live with extended families and are more likely to be employed in public-facing occupations such as food service, transportation, and home health care where they are more susceptible to become infected.

Since the Board of Health has only met once during this pandemic and did not include any item on that agenda related to COVID-19, there has been little opportunity for Madison Alders, Dane County Supervisors, and the public to be involved in the hard work of balancing health risk mitigation against the economic pressures faced by employers and social interests of our residents. All public health decisions have been made at the executive level with policy makers being informed after the fact by press releases and expected to carry the message to area residents having not been consulted in the process.

We urge you to consider the potentially devastating consequences of initiating an economic recovery plan in the context of uncontrolled community spread of COVID-19 and insufficient public health resources to handle it.

Moving forward, we ask for your consideration and response to the following:

1. What is the basis for the Forward Dane metrics related to infection rate? How do those levels compare to the recommended criteria listed in the COVID-Local plan for Phase 3 - Economic Recovery?
  - a. Continued decline in daily cases
  - b. Fewer than 3% of tests conducted are positive
  - c. Current estimate of less than 1 case per 100,000 population per day
2. What is needed in order to get a majority of test results returned within 24 hours - the level suggested by COVID-Local for Phase 3 - Economic Recovery?
3. What is needed in order to get our contact tracing capabilities to the level suggested by COVID-Local for Phase 3 - Economic Recovery?
  - a. 90% of close contacts are elicited, located, tested within 24 hours
  - b. At least 30 contact tracers per 100,000, as well as case managers, care resource coordinators, community health workers
  - c. At least 80% of new cases from identified contacts

4. Can you provide information regarding our ability to protect at-risk populations? Do we meet the recommended COVID-Local criteria for Phase 3 - Economic Recovery?
  - a. Sufficient testing, quarantine, and isolation in long-term care facilities
  - b. Fewer than 10% of new cases are reported from long-term care facilities over last 28 days
  - c. Local rapid response teams are available to respond to outbreak hotspots within 24 hours with sufficient PPE
5. What is our current Inpatient and ICU capacity in the region? When will PHMDC begin publishing capacity and utilization like Milwaukee County does?
6. What metrics will PHMDC use to determine when a retightening may again be needed? What will that look like? What should residents and businesses expect?

Again, thank you for the leadership you showed very early in this pandemic and for your continued work over the last three months. We understand there is significant pressure from many sides to help bring things 'back to normal' as soon as possible and to address the harmful economic impacts resulting from the pandemic. While we share this desire, we have also been urged by our constituents to put safety first. Many are willing to continue to do whatever is needed to avoid continued loss of life and permanent disabilities associated with this disease.

Sincerely,

Patrick Heck, Alder District 2  
Marsha Rummel, Alder District 6  
Max Prestigiacomio, Alder District 8  
Syed Abbas, Alder District 12  
Tag Evers, Alder District 13  
Grant Foster, Alder District 15  
Samba Baldeh, Alder District 17  
Rebecca Kemble, Alder District 18  
Heidi Wegleitner, Supervisor District 2  
Elena Haasl, Supervisor District 5  
Yogesh Chawla, Supervisor District 6  
Michele Ritt, Supervisor District 18

cc: all Alders, all County Supervisors