



January 17, 2022

Honorable Members of the Milwaukee Common Council,

I write on behalf of the Commercial Association of REALTORS Wisconsin, representing commercial real estate interests in Milwaukee and throughout Wisconsin. We encourage you oppose the proposed mask ordinance that would require masks in City of Milwaukee public places through April 10, 2022. This ordinance has many issues including enforceability, credibility, and effectiveness. In addition, this ordinance places The City of Milwaukee on an island as the only municipality in the region taking this unpopular approach to combat the COVID 19 virus.

Businesses within the City of Milwaukee have been working to bring employees back to Downtown offices for more than a year now. Workers are the source of vibrancy, momentum, and energy that we all need our city. More people Downtown results in open retail and restaurants, commerce, and greater safety. For two years now, the virus has been stifling that momentum and at this point, to stifle it further with a mask mandate, would be a disastrous mistake.

We are at a time in our real estate cycle when businesses have extended their leases for one or two years to get through the pandemic. They are deciding to sign on for a longer period and a government mandate on masking may make them reconsider because of the added uncertainty. In addition, companies touring the market may view this mandate as out of touch and decide to locate just outside the City where there are no government mandates. We implore our elected leaders to show support for businesses and work with them to educate – not mandate – around vaccines and personal responsibility.

A mask mandate is a step backwards – it is an old solution to an evolving problem. We need to be more creative in our thinking – and you, as leaders, can do that. Mandates create fear, contempt, and distrust because of how they may or may not be legally enforced. In addition, it is a distraction from our primary focus on education to ensure our community members are vaccinated.

A mask ordinance will discourage workers from coming to their offices and deter patrons from coming downtown because the city will appear to be such an outlier in its approach to COVID 19. Loosely enforced mask rules and fear and confusion over the process to ‘report’ an infraction, will have the chilling effect on business. Businesses have enough struggles with staffing and culture shifts. Adding a mask mandate will create unnecessary work and stress on employers.

At this point, this is not about the virus itself, but how we as a community, respond to the challenges it presents. A Citywide mask ordinance will not solve our problems, and in many ways, it will make them worse. I look forward to engaging with you and others on how to move forward to ensure our City’s vibrancy now and in the future.

Sincerely,

Tracy Johnson, CAE
Commercial Association of REALTORS® Wisconsin
President & CEO, CARW