



Julie Woodward

The City of Spokane

Weekly News Update for July 20

Information about COVID-19 is evolving rapidly, and our important work as a City is continuing. We want to make sure our City employees have up-to-date information on both COVID and employee news. We will provide this update, as needed, to communicate what you need to know, while we work to reduce the spread of this disease in our community and continue to provide critical public services.

A Message from Mayor Woodward

Individuals, families, employees, and employers have experienced significant physical, economic, social, and emotional turmoil over the past year and a half related to the pandemic. The City recently received the first half of about \$80 million in federal American Rescue Plan funds to aid in our community recovery.

As a region, about \$200 million is coming to the county, other municipalities, and schools creating unique opportunities for collaboration over the next three years. We appreciate the support from our regional government and community partners in finding ways to work closely together.

Public engagement is the critical first step to strong regional economic recovery. Everyone is anxious to get funds into the community and the smarter, more thoughtful we are about how we do it the better the outcomes.

Final guidance still coming from the US Treasury is needed before we can allocate funds, which gives us time to talk to the community and our partners about where the needs are and how we best collectively meet them.

We are proposing a comprehensive, three-part public engagement process that includes in-district drop-in style open houses, a telephone town hall, and virtual ThoughtExchange. The approach gives people multiple chances to engage in the dialogue, offers in person and in-home options, and considers how to collect feedback broadly from many different perspectives.

We are also working with the City Council to finalize a charter formalizing the process for evaluating proposals and allocating federal funds. These one-time federal funds are above and beyond our annual budgeting process. Allocating them requires a very intentional approach that begins with collaboration.

We only regained the ability to meet publicly less than three weeks ago and we are acting quickly to engage the community. I appreciate the urgency we all feel to accelerate the recovery process. Taking a moment at the front end will leave us set up for success in three year when the federal ARP funding ends.

Masking and Reopening Plan

City policies have been updated to comply with current state guidance and be as consistent as possible with other organizational practices locally and statewide.

- **Employees** – State Labor & Industries requires the City to have a process in place to accept *voluntary* verification of employee vaccination status. The updated City policy will allow employees who elect to confirm that they are vaccinated to go without a mask at work. Confirmation can happen voluntarily via one of several confidential methods, including an [electronic option on PeopleSoft](#) in the Employee Self Service section under the Benefit Details tile and COVID-19 Vaccination link on the left column. The Safety Team has also met with several employee groups who do not regularly access computers or email to discuss other options to provide voluntary confirmation of vaccination status. Records will be maintained confidentially by human resources.
- **Public** – Members of the public entering City facilities will be required to wear a mask if they are not vaccinated, as is common practice at organizations and businesses throughout the community. Masking will be optional for vaccinated members of the public. Updated signage will reflect that policy.

Bullying and shaming

The City will have a zero tolerance policy for bullying or shaming behavior related to mask wearing and vaccination status. Each person has their own reasons for the choices they have made about vaccination and many will choose to continue wearing masks to protect family members regardless of their vaccination status. Employees violating applicable City policy will be subject to discipline. Concerns should be reported to supervisors or via electronic mechanisms.

Return to work

City Hall and other City facilities that have been closed will reopen to the public on Monday, August 2. This date was selected to provide employees in areas that require onsite employee and customer support time to prepare and make child care, transportation, parking, and other arrangements. Employees can begin returning to work onsite sooner, if desired. The expectation is not necessarily to require all staff to be working onsite by August 2. In all cases, employees are expected to work with their supervisors about their work arrangements – whether they return to the office, work remotely, or create a hybrid approach – to determine how best to continue offering services to meet public needs and expectations.

Communication

Employees wishing to speak to the Safety Team regarding vaccination status are welcome to contact [Matt Lowmaster](#) with questions. Updated public signage will be in place by August 2.

More Information to Assist Our Employees

Here are some more resources from our Employee Assistance Program:

- [Practicing Listening Skills](#)
Listening is an art, a skill, and a discipline. Like other skills, it requires self-control. You must understand what is involved in listening and develop the necessary techniques to be silent and listen. You must ignore your own needs and focus attention on the person speaking. Hearing becomes listening only when you pay attention to what is said and follow it very closely.
- [Practicing Mindful Communication](#)
Mindful communication happens when you are truly present in the moment. It involves entering a conversation with curiosity, kindness, and compassion. You listen to your conversational partner with an open, nonjudgmental heart. You speak with intention, emotional intelligence, and honesty, and without harsh language or gossip-driven speech.

Employee Information Portal (covid19.spokanecity.org/)

Remember, this Employee Information Portal is a great resource for employees to stay current on what's happening with the COVID-19 response. The [Employee Information Portal](#) can be accessed from work or home, using a computer or mobile device. All of the emailed information we have sent to employees is archived here.