



Open Letter to the Flathead City-County Health Board  
From Whitefish Mayor and City Council

Dear Flathead City-County Health Board Members:

We, the members of Whitefish City Council, are compelled to write to you regarding your recent decision to take no action addressing the increasing spread of COVID-19 in Flathead County. Your decision was in disregard of the health and well-being of the citizens you purport to represent. We ask you to reconsider and support our city in preventing the spread of this disease. We must unify rather than continue to divide.

In a proposal submitted October 9, 2020, the Flathead City-County Health Department provided you concrete, factual data regarding the seriousness of the situation we face in this county. That data included:

- 889 new cases in the two weeks prior to October 9
- 23 COVID-related deaths as of October 9
- Increase in the rate of COVID per 100,000 people from 19.2 per 100,000 for the first week of September to 51.1 per 100,000 for the week beginning September 28
- 10 long-term care facilities with outbreaks as of October 9
- The number of COVID-related deaths in the last seven months has exceeded the influenza deaths for the past four years
- The County is functioning at critical levels in responding to the rapid spread

The Health Department offered restrictions geared towards slowing the alarming spread, including limiting social gatherings, reducing the capacities of social gathering places, and closing certain businesses at 10:00 p.m.

In response, at your meeting held October 15, 2020, your decision to refuse to offer any discussion on the Health Department's proposal communicated to the public that you were electing to ignore the facts of your own public health experts. Pulling this discussion from the agenda without explanation left Flathead County citizens at a loss for how we can move forward to reduce our spiking cases. We are also disappointed you voted down the alternative proposal to limit social gatherings to 500. It is alarming that you did so despite extensive testimony from health experts, hospital representatives, and community leaders about the need to address these dire circumstances.

COVID-19 is real, and its implications are devastating our county. We ask for leadership and compassion as you make county-wide decisions. Your inability to enact vital ordinances to keep our county healthy puts communities such as ours in the position of having to consider enacting restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19 without any County support. Again, we must unify. We need a clear, coordinated approach to bring this surge under control rather than a patchwork of regulations and enforcement.

Please be assured that as a City, we will do whatever it takes to protect our residents and visitors. We invite you to step up to the plate, and look forward to productive discourse for the sake of community health and economic sustainability in Flathead County.

Sincerely,

John M. Muhlfeld, City of Whitefish Mayor  
Francis J. Sweeney, Deputy Mayor  
Ben Davis, Councilor  
Andy Feury, Councilor  
Ryan Hennen, Councilor  
Rebecca Norton, Councilor  
Steve Quenell, Councilor

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