

From: matt@walkavl.com <matt@walkavl.com>
Sent: 12/24/2020 3:04:20 PM
To: gwenwisler@avlcouncil.com, sageturner@avlcouncil.com, kimroney@avlcouncil.com, antanettemosley@avlcouncil.com, sandrakilgore@avlcouncil.com, sheneikasmith@avlcouncil.com, esthermanheimer@avlcouncil.com, dcampbell@ashevillenc.gov, terri.wells@buncombcounty.org, robert.pressley@buncombcounty.org
Cc: parker.sloan@buncombcounty.org, alfred.whitesides@buncombcounty.org, amanda.edwards@buncombcounty.org, jasmine.beach-ferrara@buncombcounty.org, avril.pinder@buncombcounty.org
Subject: Why are we reducing restaurant dining capacity?

Hello everyone

I hope you all take the time to consider my point of view and the massive effect your recent decision is going to have on thousands of service workers and their families over the coming weeks and months. I am a co-owner of both WALK and Pizza Mind in West Asheville. The pandemic has obviously been hard on everyone but the service industry has been especially hard hit. Myself and my business partners, as well as our employees have been incredibly proactive since day one in creating a space that is safe for our employees, our customers and ourselves. My wife and I are active owners so we are in the space everyday insuring we are doing everything we can to be safe and at the same time keeping our business going and keeping our staff employed.

Before I get to why your decision is the wrong one for our community I also want you to consider why this is wrong for our employees. Our staff is currently close to being back to what it was before March. We usually carry 90 employees and right now we are at 80. If you reduce the dine in capacity I'm guessing we will have to let 15% to 20% of our employees go because there won't be enough business to sustain their employment. I'm guessing that would happen at almost every restaurant in this town which would effect hundreds and maybe thousands of employee's livelihoods. We are already being as creative as we can be to try to keep all the employees we have and get to the spring and the other side of this pandemic. Our business is scraping by but part of the reason we are doing this instead of just closing until the Spring is so we can keep money coming into the homes and families of our employee's. Our staff has become our family over the years and it would be devastating for them and for us to have to choose who to let go. As you know there is almost nothing being done at the federal level to help any of them which has also made it impossible for the state or local government to offer much assistance to restaurant workers. If you all go through with this order you will be putting hundreds and possibly thousands of hospitality employees out of a job when we are so close to making it to the other side.

And it makes absolutely no sense to do that right now, especially at a time when most experts are saying the increased spread is coming from small gatherings inside of peoples homes. We have a very safe space to dine in at both locations and we enforce it 100% of the time. Why would you put more restrictions on us when the best I can tell, the current restrictions aren't even being enforced at the local level from any local personnel. My staff is the only one enforcing these rules and when we have called the police on people being threatening those people are long gone by the time the police even shows up. So by making the laws more strict you are again asking our staff to be the only ones to enforce them at their own peril.

And while I also hope that the infection rates go down drastically after the holidays you are taking the spread of covid out on restaurants alone even though there is no proof in Asheville that our restaurants are any more to blame than anywhere else. It makes no sense! I ask that you please continue to be in sync with the Governor's direction and guidelines instead of creating your own that will continue to make our lives harder while not necessarily make them any safer. Please reconsider your decision to further reduce our restaurant's capacity!!!!

Thank you for reading
Matt Johnston
Co-owner WALK & Pizza Mind