

AN ORDINANCE FOR THE THIRTY-THIRD DECLARATION OF A LOCAL STATE OF EMERGENCY RELATED TO COVID-19; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

WHEREAS, like much of the world the United States, the State of Georgia, and the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, (“ACCGov”) are currently responding to an outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus named “SARS-CoV-2” and the disease it causes named “coronavirus disease 2019” (abbreviated “COVID-19”); and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 is officially a global pandemic according to the WHO; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 can spread from person to person, and can result in no symptoms, minor symptoms, or serious illness causing permanent organ damage and death; and

WHEREAS, individuals age 65 or over or living with certain medical conditions identified by the CDC (members of Vulnerable Populations) and members of other populations identified by the CDC (“Other Populations at Risk”) are at risk of severe and lasting harm to health or death from COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 also has been reported to cause severe and permanent damage to some children; and

WHEREAS, the CDC has noted that COVID-19 spreads very easily and sustainably when an infected person (who may not exhibit symptoms at all, or only minor symptoms) talks, sneezes, or coughs in close proximity with others (within six feet); and

WHEREAS, on March 16, 2020, the Mayor and Commission of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia adopted an Ordinance for the Declaration of Local State of Emergency related to COVID-19;

WHEREAS, on March 19, 2020, pursuant to their authority under the Athens-Clarke County Emergency Management Ordinance, the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission adopted a Second Declaration of Local Emergency activating certain emergency powers in order to allow Athens-Clarke County to quickly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and renewed that declaration on April 21, 2020, June 2, 2020, July 7, 2020, July 30, 2020, August 18, 2020, September 15, 2020, October 6, 2020, November 4, 2020, December 1, 2020, January 6, 2021, February 2, 2021, March 2, 2021, April 6, 2021, May 4, 2021, June 1, 2021, June 15, 2021, July 20, 2021, August 3, 2021, September 7, 2021, October 5, 2021, November 2, 2021, December 7, 2021, January 4, 2022, February 1, 2022, March 1, 2022, April 5, 2022, May 3, 2022, June 7, 2022, June 14, 2022, and again on July 19, 2022; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 Omicron variant and its progeny (e.g., BA.2 and BA.5), which are even more transmissible than earlier variants, are on the rise globally and in the United States; and

WHEREAS, CNN reported on July 14, 2022, that a highly-transmissible new variant, BA.5, has become the leading cause of COVID-19 in the United States in just two months and that immunity from vaccinations or previous infections does not appear to provide much protection from BA.5 (even where someone was recently infected with variants like BA.1 and BA.2), and that experts continue to be concerned that at-home testing obscures the data and that true case increases may be as much as seven to ten times higher; and

WHEREAS, NPR reported on July 15, 2022, that the Mayo Clinic has described BA.5 as “hypercontagious” and that Dr. Gregory Poland, the head of the Mayo Clinic’s Vaccine Research Group, has warned that “Whether you've been vaccinated, whether you've been previously infected, whether you've been previously infected and vaccinated, you have very little protection against BA.5 in terms of getting infected or having mild to moderate infection," although "You have good protection against dying, being hospitalized or ending up on a ventilator"; and

WHEREAS, the CDC indicates that a person’s risk of exposure to COVID-19 infection is directly related to the risk of exposure to infectious persons, which is largely determined by the extent of COVID-19 circulation in the surrounding community; and

WHEREAS, CDC currently recommends using a combination of three metrics – new COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population in the past 7 days, the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, and total new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 population in the past 7 days – to assess the COVID-19 Community Level indicating the current level of community transmission; and

WHEREAS, as of Thursday, July 28, 2022, the CDC reports that the COVID-19 Community Level in Athens-Clarke County is high;

WHEREAS, according to the Georgia Department of Public Health COVID-19 update on Wednesday, July 27, 2022, (the “GDPH Update”) Georgia now has 2,126,403 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 28,266 confirmed cases in Athens-Clarke County; and

WHEREAS, according to the GDPH Update, 32,396 individuals in Georgia have died and 119,705 have been hospitalized after contracting COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, Georgia earlier experienced a significant surge in COVID-19 cases due primarily to the Omicron variant, having recorded on January 7, 2022, its highest single-day total of new COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began; and

WHEREAS, the White House released a statement on March 3, 2022, indicating that (1) COVID-19 “continues to pose a risk to the American people and our health care system,” (2) that we must “be prepared for possible future variants,” and (3) that terminating the national emergency at this time would “unnecessarily and abruptly curtail the ability... to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic;”

WHEREAS, the Center for Disease Control (“CDC”) has issued guidance on the emerging and rapidly evolving situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, including how to protect oneself from this illness; and

WHEREAS, social distancing is recommended by the CDC to prevent the continued spreading of this illness in the community; and

WHEREAS, the CDC also advises that the use of masks or cloth face coverings will slow the spread of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, on April 2, 2020, Governor Kemp signed an Executive Order to Ensure a Safe and Healthy Georgia (Governor’s Executive Order 04.02.20.01) to address the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing temporary actions necessary and appropriate to protect the health, safety, and welfare of Georgia’s residents and visitors; and

WHEREAS, subsequently, Governor Kemp issued a series of Executive Orders which amended and revised the temporary action necessary and appropriate to protect the health, safety, and welfare of Georgia's residents and visitors, the last such Executive Order expiring on July 1, 2021; and

WHEREAS, nevertheless, because of the continuing negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the State's economy, supply chain, and healthcare infrastructure, on June 30, 2021, Governor Kemp issued an Executive Order declaring there to be a State of Emergency in the State of Georgia and ordering that all resources of the State of Georgia shall be made available to assist in activities designed to address this emergency and aid recovery and response efforts and subsequently renewed that declaration on July 22, 2021, August 19, 2021, September 20, 2021, October 21, 2021, November 19, 2021, December 17, 2021, January 18, 2022, February 18, 2022, and March 21, 2022; and

WHEREAS, on April 14, 2022, Governor Kemp signed an Executive Order declaring a State of Emergency for Supply Chain Disruptions to address the continuing economic harms caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently renewed that declaration on May 10, 2022, May 26, 2022, and July 1, 2022; and; and

WHEREAS, on February 18, 2022, Joseph Biden, President of the United States, issued notice stating that the national emergency declared on March 13, 2020 (and later extended on both February 24, 2021 and February 18, 2022) concerning the COVID-19 pandemic is to continue in effect beyond March 1, 2022; and

WHEREAS, on July 19, 2021, Xavier Becerra, Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, renewed his determination (and that of former Secretary Alex M. Azar II) that a public health emergency exists and has existed since January 27, 2020, such prior renewals having been executed upon April 21, 2020, July 23, 2020, October 2, 2020, January 7, 2021, April 15, 2021, July 19, 2021, October 15, 2021, January 14, 2022, April 12, 2022, and July 16, 2022; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the authority of O.C.G.A. § 38-3-28, local governments are specifically empowered to enact such orders, rules, and regulations as may be necessary for emergency management purposes and to supplement the carrying out of Articles 1 through 3 of the Emergency Management chapter of the Official Code of Georgia, but such orders, rules, and regulations shall not be inconsistent with any orders, rules, and regulations promulgated by the Governor or by any state agency exercising a power delegated to it by him; and

WHEREAS, this emergency order is authorized by O.C.G.A. §§ 38-3-4 and 38-3-28, which authorize the Mayor and Commission to use emergency powers in O.C.G.A. §§ 38-3-1 through 38-3-64; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 38-3-6, during an emergency, O.C.G.A. §§ 38-3-1 through 38-3-64 are supposed to be liberally construed to effectuate their purposes; and

WHEREAS, on July 27, 2021, the CDC issued new guidance pursuant to which it recommends that to maximize protection from the Delta SARS-CoV-2 variant and to prevent possibly spreading it to others, persons, including those who are fully vaccinated, should wear a mask indoors in public if they are in an area of substantial or high transmission; and

WHEREAS, the CDC issued guidance (most recently updated on March 24, 2022) continuing to recommend mask wearing in public indoor spaces regardless of vaccination status in areas with a high community level (and in a medium community level when around those who are at high risk for severe disease) to maximize protection from COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, requiring the use of masks is a targeted response that can combat the threat to public health using the least restrictive means, and if people follow this requirement, more extreme measures may be avoided; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 1-104 (d) of the Charter of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, the Mayor and Commission have the right, duty, power, privilege and authority to exercise and enjoy all other powers, duties, functions, rights, privileges, and immunities necessary and proper to promote or protect the safety, health, peace, security and general welfare of said government and its inhabitants and to exercise all implied powers necessary to carry into execution all powers granted in this Charter as fully and completely as if such powers were fully enumerated herein and to do and perform all of the acts pertaining to its property, affairs and local government which are necessary or proper in the legitimate exercise of its corporate powers and governmental duties and functions; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Sub-Sections (36) and (39) of Section 8-114 of the Charter of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, the Mayor and Commission have the following additional powers:

(17) Health: To prescribe and enforce health and sanitation standards; and

(36) Emergencies: To provide for the determination, proclamation and combatting of emergencies; and

(39) General health, safety, and welfare: To define, regulate and prohibit any act, practice, conduct or use which is detrimental to the health, sanitation, cleanliness, welfare, and safety of the inhabitants of the unified government; and

WHEREAS, the United States Supreme Court has previously held that “[u]pon the principle of self-defense, of paramount necessity, a community has the right to protect itself against an epidemic of disease which threatens the safety of its members; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to this declaration, the Mayor and Commission of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia have determined that it is necessary to continue the previous provisions of its Twenty-Seventh Declaration and to additionally provide that persons within the jurisdiction of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, shall wear a mask over the nose and mouth indoors in public as described herein; and

WHEREAS, the following actions related to outdoor restaurant seating areas, outdoor retail areas, and the indoor mask mandate are necessary and appropriate to balance the public’s interest in being free from undue restrictions with the compelling public interest of providing for the health, safety, and welfare of residents of Athens-Clarke County and the surrounding communities, particularly those individuals who are members of Vulnerable Populations or Other Populations at Risk; and

WHEREAS, in the judgment of the Mayor and Commission of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, with advice from other subject matter experts, there exist

emergency conditions as a result of COVID-19 within the geographical boundaries of the Unified Government as described in Section 1-102 of the Charter requiring extraordinary and immediate corrective actions for the protection of the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Athens-Clarke County and the surrounding communities;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Commission of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia hereby ordains and declares that a local state of emergency continues to exist within the territorial limits of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke, County, Georgia, and shall continue until the conditions requiring this declaration are abated.

NOW, THEREFORE, because of the local state emergency ordained and declared above, the Commission of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia hereby ordains and orders the following:

SECTION 1.
Indoor Mask Mandate

- (a) The provisions of Section 1 of this Ordinance shall only be enforced when the COVID-19 Community Level in Athens-Clarke County is “high” according to the Centers for Disease Control.
- (b) For purposes of this Ordinance, the following terms are hereby defined as follows:
 - (1) *Entity* means any private business, establishment, corporation, non-profit corporation, or organization, including the curtilage thereof.
 - (2) *Facial covering or mask* means a device to cover the nose and mouth of a person and impedes the spread of saliva, respiratory droplets, or other fluids during speaking, coughing, sneezing or other intentional or involuntary action. Medical grade masks are not required; coverings may be fashioned as advised by the CDC and from other suitable fabrics. The mask must cover the mouth and nose of the wearer.
 - (3) *Polling place* means the room provided in each precinct for voting at a primary or election.
 - (4) *Public place* means any place other than a personal vehicle, residential property, or an entity including the curtilage thereof.
- (c) Except as otherwise provided in this Ordinance all persons in an entity or a public place shall wear a facial covering or mask over the mouth and nose at all times when indoors.
- (d) Facial coverings or masks are not required in the following circumstances:
 - (1) In personal vehicles or upon residential property;
 - (2) When a person is alone in enclosed spaces or only with other household members;
 - (3) When the individual has a bona fide religious objection to wearing a facial covering or mask;

- (4) While drinking or eating;
 - (5) When a licensed healthcare provider has determined that wearing a facial covering or mask causes or aggravates a health condition for the individual or when such person has a bona fide medical reason for not wearing a facial covering or mask;
 - (6) When wearing a facial covering or mask would prevent the receipt of personal services or performing work in the course of employment;
 - (7) When complying with the directions of a law enforcement officer or for the purposes of verifying a person's identity, such as when purchasing alcohol, tobacco, or prescription drugs or when engaging in a financial transaction;
 - (8) Children under the age of ten (10) years;
 - (9) When the individual is having difficulty donning or removing a face mask or face covering without assistance;
 - (10) At any polling place and no individual shall be denied ingress or egress to or from a polling place for failure to wear a facial covering or mask; and
- (e) (1) Every entity subject to this Ordinance which does not consent to enforcement of this Ordinance upon its property shall post a clearly legible sign in one inch Arial font at all public entrances of such entity stating the following: "This location does not consent to enforcement of any local face covering requirement upon this property."
- (2) If an entity does not post the signage described in subparagraph (1) of this paragraph it shall be conclusively presumed to have consented to enforcement of this Ordinance on its property and failures by individuals to wear facial coverings or masks as required by this ordinance shall be determined to be violations and enforced as contemplated in paragraph (f).
- (f) Violations of this Section 1 may be enforced by a notice of ordinance violation issued by any police officer, code enforcement officer, or other authorized law enforcement official, as provided below:
- (1) A person who fails to comply with paragraph (c) of Section 1 of this Ordinance shall be first given a warning and an opportunity to put on a facial covering or mask, leave the entity, or comply with one of the exceptions in paragraph (d) of Section 1.
 - (2) If the person violating this Ordinance refuses or fails to comply with this Ordinance after being given a warning pursuant to subparagraph (1) of this paragraph then such person may be subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$25.00 on the first offense and not more than \$50.00 on the second and any subsequent offenses.

- (3) A notice of violation may be served by delivery into the hands of the suspected violator or by other reasonable process for serving notice of ordinance violations used by Athens-Clarke County.
 - (4) Violations of this ordinance shall not be enforced against any entity and shall not be taken against any owner, director, officer, or agent of an entity for the failure of their customers to comply with this ordinance.
 - (5) Notwithstanding the foregoing, every effort shall be made to bring an individual into voluntary compliance with the terms of this Ordinance prior to issuance of any notice of violation, including providing complimentary masks, explaining the importance of wearing facial coverings during this pandemic, and issuing verbal and written warnings.
- (g) In all locations where facial coverings or masks are not required to be worn pursuant to this Ordinance, they are strongly encouraged to be worn.

SECTION 2.
Outdoor Retail Areas

Any provisions of the Alcoholic Beverages Ordinance which prohibit any person from having in his or her possession any alcoholic beverages in any open container be temporarily suspended as it applies to patrons or employees of any licensee possessing a Class D (retail liquor by the drink), D1 (retail liquor by the drink, low volume restaurant), E (retail beer by drink), or F (retail wine by the drink) license who is participating in the Outdoor Retail Area Program pursuant to policy number MGR-008D entitled “A Policy to Extend the Outdoor Retail Areas Pilot Program for the Remainder of 2020,” and who are transporting, serving, or consuming alcoholic beverages in the Outdoor Retail Area as approved by the Athens-Clarke County Central Services Department or who are transporting alcoholic beverages across public streets, sidewalks or rights-of-way for the purpose of serving or consuming said beverages in said Outdoor Retail Area.

SECTION 3.

The Mayor and Commission adopt and make the findings discussed in the “Whereas” paragraphs the factual findings of the Mayor and Commission.

SECTION 4.

This Ordinance shall become effective at 8:00 a.m. on the next day following the Mayor’s approval and will continue to be in effect until 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, September 7, 2022, or until it otherwise extended, rescinded, superseded, or amended by an ordinance of the Commission.

SECTION 5.

Should any provision, paragraph, sentence, or word of this Ordinance be rendered or declared invalid by any final court of competent jurisdiction or by reason of any preemptive legislation, the remaining provisions, paragraphs, sentences, or words of this Ordinance as

hereby issued shall remain in full force and effect. All Ordinances or parts of Ordinances in conflict with this Ordinance are, to the extent of such conflict, hereby repealed or set aside.

SECTION 6.

The Clerk of Commission, in consultation with the County Attorney, shall have the power to correct scrivener's errors.

SECTION 7.

Copies of this Ordinance shall be: (1) promptly posted at Athens-Clarke County City Hall, 301 College Avenue, Athens, Georgia; (2) promptly posted on the www.accgov.com website; and (3) provided to any member of the public requesting a copy of this Order.

SO ORDERED AND ORDAINED this ____ day of August, 2022.

**THE UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF ATHENS-
CLARKE COUNTY, GEORGIA**

Kelly Girtz, Mayor

Attest: _____
Jean Spratlin, Clerk of Commission