



City of Independence

Office of the Mayor, Eileen Weir

January 21, 2021

TO: City Council

FROM: Mayor Eileen Weir

RE: HOURS OF OPERATION

After careful review and consideration, I have determined that it is in the best interest of our citizens and of our City staff to continue operating with modified hours. This decision is based on the data provided to the Council every two weeks by our Health Director, Christina Heinen and discussion with the City's Incident Command Team.

Since implementing these modified hours in November the rate of infection among our City staff has greatly declined, even as the 14-day average percent positive rate for Eastern Jackson County has increased. On November 12th the rate of infection for Eastern Jackson County was 24%. As of January 13th it is 38%.

On November 12, 2020, I announced City facilities would be decreasing hours open to the public due to an increase in COVID-19 cases throughout the Kansas City Region. Specifically, I announced that City Hall and the Police Department Headquarters would be open to the public on Mondays and Thursdays from 8 AM to 5 PM. Further, all City staff whom are able to work from home would be required to do so. These changes were implemented on Monday, November 16th.

I issued this modification to our pandemic protocol in response to a spike in cases in the region and in our city staff. At that time, we had more than 20 city staff who had tested positive requiring more than 100 staff members to quarantine. To ensure we are able to provide the services our citizens depend on, I determined that we must take additional steps to protect the health of our staff and the health of the community we serve.

In addition to protecting our community, these modified hours help protect our City finances. In the Fire Department, for example, there has been no modification in staffing schedules, due to the nature of its essential services. 34 of the City's 114 confirmed cases among City employees have occurred in the Fire Department and has caused overtime expenditures to exceed \$1 million at the mid-point of the current fiscal year. Explanation of this comes from a snowball effect from quarantines, exposures and need to fill open vacancies to maintain the service. To reopen our other facilities despite these rapid increases in confirmed cases in our region would be needlessly reckless and defy the leadership position Independence has taken on this matter since I declared a State of Emergency on March 12, 2020.

While we continue to operate with reduced public access, our citizens should not experience a lack of responsiveness or reduction in services. Many of our process are now automated and can be addressed online. Citizens are able to pay their bills through the drive-through at the Independence Utilities Center Monday through Friday from 8 AM-5PM, in the Utilities' Center lobby on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 8 AM to 5 PM, and the secure drop-off box is available at City Hall every day.

Please find below an overview of City facilities and their hours of operations as of Monday, Nov. 16:

- City Hall – Open to the public Mondays and Thursdays from 8 AM to 5 PM
- Independence Police Headquarters – Open to the public Mondays and Thursdays from 8 AM to 5 PM
- Independence Utilities Center – Customer Service windows open to the public Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8 AM to 5 PM
- Roger T. Sermon Community Center – Open Monday through Thursday 8 AM to 8 PM, Fridays and Saturdays from 8 AM to 5 PM. Closed on Sunday.
- Truman Memorial Building – Open on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 AM to 6 PM, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 AM to 7 PM. Closed Friday through Sunday.
- Uptown Market – Open for events as posted.
- Municipal Court (located on the lower level of City Hall) – Is open Monday through Thursday from 8 AM to 4 PM and Fridays from 8 AM to 12 PM. Youth Court office hours are Tuesdays through Thursdays from 9 AM to 4 PM.

I have communicated to the City Manager that City staff is expected to provide superior customer service and exceptional delivery of City services. This has included adding messaging to the automated phone system regarding hours of operation, requiring all city staff to forward his or her office phone to his or her cell phone, and a response to all citizen requests within 48 hours. City staff who are not able to perform his or her duties remotely are required to perform his or her duties from the City workplace. If you are made aware of a situation where this does not occur, please report it immediately to the City Manager so that it can be addressed as a personnel matter.

I have asked the Council support staff including the Council Executive Assistant, Mayor's Executive Assistant, and City Clerk to ensure that the Council office is staffed during our hours of operation on Mondays and Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Support staff will be on-site during these days to assist you personally. Please consider utilizing these hours for meeting and appointments with citizens or others outside our organization. Your staff will be available to receive guests and escort them within the building if necessary. For those unable to utilize the elevator or stairs, Conference Room D on the ground floor is available for your use provided you reserve it in advance.

Meg Lewis, Public Information Officer, has taken several steps to provide information on changing operating hours and building access to citizens. These changes been provided to the media and our email lists through press releases, CityScene, all City social media platforms and on the City's website. I have conducted several television interviews regarding hours of operation. If you have additional suggestions on how to more broadly and effectively share this information, please discuss with the City Manager.

I will continue to review this data with the Incident Command Team on a weekly basis and will modify our operations as the situation allows. In the interim, I ask for your continued leadership in improving our communications and services.

CC: Zach Walker
Kim Osborne
Sheila Saxton
Rebecca Behrens