

Clemson eases mask restrictions

BY GREG OLIVER
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CLEMSON — Clemson City Council eased restrictions Friday in the city's mask ordinance, which will no longer require bar patrons to remain seated while actively eating and drinking.

The vote passed 5-1. "While we enforce the mask ordinance uniformly throughout the

community, the student residents have been the most vocal about their frustration with this ordinance," said Clemson Mayor Robert Halfacre, who made the motion. "We need to recognize there's a safe population and allow some leniency to prevent this frustration from promoting an uncooperative relationship with the students.

SEE CLEMSON, PAGE A3

THE JOURNAL **A3**

EMSON: 'COVID is a hitchhiker,' McGuire said

FROM PAGE A1

We think that the mask ordinance is still necessary, but we can offer new and updated advice on how to comply with this ordinance in a way that better conveys council's intentions."

Halfacre said the ordinance still requires social distancing.

A new flyer has been prepared that will be shared with businesses and posted on the city website.

The new mask mandate requires masks that cover the nose and mouth to be worn at all times when inside a business. Masks must be worn at any time outdoors when people are waiting in line to enter a bar and, when in line, social distancing must be practiced. While seated, tables must be kept 6 feet apart.

Failure to comply with the ordinance can result in a \$25 fine.

Halfacre added in his motion that Clemson Police Chief Jorge Campos would be authorized to provide the new revised guidelines to businesses.

Voting along with Halfacre were Councilwomen Alesia Smith and Catherine Watt and Councilmen John Ducworth and Bob Brookover. Councilman Fran McGuire cast the lone dissenting vote.

"COVID doesn't care if you're sitting or standing — it's irrelevant if you'll get COVID or

not," McGuire said. "I assume the intent of this change is to get more people in the bar, so it's not just standing as opposed to sitting — it's the number of people in the bar. So, I think the number of people in a bar, even acknowledging how safe we've been, increases the likelihood of spread, because there's more potential people that can do that. What happens downtown doesn't end downtown — COVID is a hitchhiker, so if you move downtown to other areas, it moves with you."

Following a January incident at the Study Hall restaurant and bar where social media erupted over attendees not wearing masks or social distancing, police have enforced a rule requiring anyone who is not seated at a bar to be masked. Bar owners requested council relax the requirement, saying customers have simply taken their business to neighboring cities, counties and even across the state line, where such requirements aren't as stringent.

Halfacre said COVID-19 cases would continue to be monitored in the city on a weekly basis.

"We will continue as a city council to look at what's in the best interests of safety in our community, as well as business vitality," he said.