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Grand Forks Herald

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2020

City Council unanimously passes mask mandate

By Sam Easter
Grand Forks Herald

In an extraordinary turn of local politics, the Grand Forks City Council on Monday voted 7-0 to approve a resolution requiring masks in public spaces to protect against the spread of COVID-19. The unanimous vote represents a remarkable change from just days ago, when it was unclear if such a measure could win enough votes to beat a potential mayoral veto. The result: the reso-

lution will take immediate effect upon it being signed by Mayor Brandon Bochenski, according to City Administrator Todd Feland, who expects Bochenski to sign it Tuesday. There is no fine for failing to wear a mask but a clause in the resolution notes that a person can be removed from a public space for failing to comply.

Council members spoke of the resolution as essentially having no penalty, leaving

it unclear exactly how leaders expect disagreements about masks to be handled in practice. After the meeting, City Administrator Todd Feland said the case of a persistent non-mask wearer — in a business insisting on masks — would lead to law enforcement trying to resolve the disagreement before escalating things further.

The resolution does include a clause for removing a violator from a public space, as well as

carve-outs for those who are very young or have certain health conditions, among others.

The language of the mask requirement also means that the mask mandate will be lifted if Grand Forks County's local coronavirus dashboard status is downgraded to "yellow." It is currently at a "red" status, indicating widespread infection.

The new resolution came at the end of an hour-long discussion —

peppered with comments from the public — that laid bare Grand Forks' sharp divisions over mask use. Some residents don't believe they are effective. Others, clearly frustrated, said a mask requirement would help slow the rate of new infections.

That left Monday's 7-0 vote purely about the city's role in managing public life. Many city leaders have asked residents to wear masks, but have hesitated to wield official power in doing

so. And as recently as last week, any council action to implement a mask mandate — with or without a penalty — appeared doomed to 4-3 support at most, and then facing a veto from Bochenski, who has supported mask use but opposed a requirement or mandate, even without a penalty.

Since then, other cities have instituted some kind of public masking requirement, including Fargo, Minot and Devils Lake.

Health care merger to create medical giant

Sanford Health, Intermountain Health sign letter of intent to combine in 2021

By Patrick Springer
Forum News Service

FARGO — Sanford Health and Intermountain Healthcare, based in Salt Lake City, have announced plans to merge next year and form a health system with a sprawling geographic reach extending from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains.

The boards of the two health systems voted on Friday, Oct. 23, to sign a letter of intent to merge next year and form what's believed will be the nation's sixth or seventh largest health system, which will include a network including hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities and health insurance.

The Sanford name will continue in Sanford's service area, while the Intermountain name will remain in its locations, but the new parent not-for-profit organization will be Intermountain Healthcare with headquarters in Salt Lake City and corporate offices in Sioux Falls, S.D.

Once the merger takes place, Sanford CEO Kelby Krabbenhoft will remain as CEO emeritus for two years, continuing his role in charting strategy and growth opportunities. Krabbenhoft, whose 40-year career in health care administration includes 25 years at the helm of Sanford, also will join the board of the merged organization.

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DEMOCRACY IN PLAY



Photos by Eric Hylden / Grand Forks Herald

A voter walks past rows of voting booths as early voting begins Monday, Oct. 26, at the Alerus Center in Grand Forks.

Voters head to the Alerus Center, while mail-in ballots pile up

By Adam Kurtz
Grand Forks Herald

Though voting in the Nov. 3 general election is mostly being carried out through the mail, some voters lined up on Monday, Oct. 26, to cast their ballots in person.

Early voting began at 10 a.m. at the Alerus Center, Grand Forks County's only in-person polling place, and runs through Nov. 2, excluding Sunday, Nov. 1. Voting started with an initial surge, which tapered off after an hour and a half. As for mail-in voting, ballots are piling up in numbers that more than

doubled the amounts received by the county in the 2018 general election.

"You get the big burst at the beginning and then it's going to start spacing out, because people come at their leisure," said Lori Morgan, assistant treasurer for Grand Forks County, about the first day of early voting.

On Oct. 20, Gov. Doug Burgum, in response to a request of the North Dakota Association of County Auditors, signed an executive order allowing those mailed ballots to be processed beginning on Oct. 29, five days before the election.

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Early voters cast their ballots on Monday, Oct. 26, at the Alerus Center in Grand Forks during the start of early in-person voting.

COVID cases dip, hospitalizations climb in North Dakota

By Adam Willis
Forum News Service

BISMARCK — Active COVID-19 cases took a rare dip while virus hospitalizations jumped on Monday, Oct. 26, as North Dakota continues to lead the country in new virus cases and deaths per capita.

The North Dakota Department of Health announced 527 new positive cases and nine hospitalizations in the state's latest report. Statewide active cases

dropped to 6,446 while hospitalizations climbed to 173, adding to the state's already strained health care system.

And as the United States passed its third peak of the pandemic for average new COVID cases over the weekend, North Dakota continued to lead the country in cases and deaths per capita for the last week, according to The New York Times. The entire upper Midwest has experienced a region-

wide surge in cases in the last month, with South Dakota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Montana and Minnesota all identified by the publication as states where infections are "high and staying high."

North Dakota health officials confirmed five deaths due to the virus on Monday, adding to what has already been the deadliest month of the pandemic in North Dakota. Since the start of October, 190 residents have died from

COVID, over 40% of the state's deaths since March. The department says 456 people have died in North Dakota since the start of the pandemic.

The deaths of a Burleigh County man in his 70s, a Cass County man in his 70s, a Ramsey County man in his 80s, a Williams County woman in her 80s and a Sioux County man in his 30s were reported on Monday.

At least 280 of the state's deaths have

come in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, many of which have been badly affected by the virus in the last two months. At least three facilities have 15 or more infected residents, according to the Department of Health's dashboard.

The state is battling through a shortage of available hospital beds as COVID hospitalizations converge with strains on health care

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