

Testimony by Barry Graham

I support the off-ramp recommended by Council Member Andrew Friedson as part of the amended Board of Health Regulation the council is voting about on January 4th.

We are among the ten most vaccinated counties in the country. Thanks to our vaccination rate, our hospital system has been able to withstand the effects of Omicron, which is a more mild variation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The United Kingdom and South Africa have reported a 70-80% decrease in hospitalization rates compared to previous strains and research has shown that Omicron is less pathogenic in lungs. The emergency has passed, and as such, so has the need for the council to exercise emergency powers.

When COVID arrived, we were promised a return to normality when we hit herd immunity. 85% vaccination is far above what was expected at the time. The County has already had a mask mandate for the last several weeks and it has not led to a decrease in cases. On the other hand, States and localities that do not have mask mandates have seen a decrease in cases (even though, at this stage, cases should not even be published). COVID will be with us for ever. It's time to end the pandemic mentality.

If the County votes to rescind all metrics that would lead to an end to this punishment that is not only unhelpful but is also causing distress to many (including those that have become addicted to them without realizing), it will be doing a great disservice and it will show that this is no longer a viable place to live.