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## College Hill Needs Government Mandates to Fight COVID-19

By Kathryn Sogard on Behalf of the College Hill Partnership

College Hill by the University of Northern Iowa holds so many memories for many neighbors, alumni, and visitors. Memories like warm June nights at the College Hill Arts Festival, fun family time at Seerley Park, a night out with friends, or maybe even the opportunity to meet the love of our life at one of the iconic bars on a cold night a few weeks before finals. College Hill still offers students, residents, and visitors the chance to create long-lasting memories even if those memories include masks, social distancing, and an abundance of handwashing. If we have learned anything from 2020, all of our memory-making opportunities will look a little different.

After viewing the photos and videos from last weekend and having many meaningful conversations with College Hill businesses, we felt it was our duty to speak out in support of College Hill. The more than 40 businesses on College Hill have been working countless hours to make innovative changes to serve their customers better. Many businesses offer online options never before offered, contactless payment, and curbside to-go services. They have upgraded their websites to sell items, book appointments, and order items for delivery. The resilient businesses of College Hill have willingly stepped up to the challenge COVID-19 has brought us and work hard every day to stay up to date with the ever-changing guidelines, proclamations, and recommendations made by many governmental entities. They have done this willingly because they know they play a vital role in keeping our university and our community safe. They have done this willingly because they also know in this challenging and stressful time that people are looking for familiar places to continue making long-lasting memories.

A few things must be made clear. Without leadership from the City, County, or the State on mask mandates and the inability for private businesses to enforce any regulation outside of their four walls, including social distancing on the public property, we find ourselves in the current situation. Having no mandates leaves these practices up to each visitor who chooses to head to the Hill or any other place. No matter the location, businesses have no authority over a public sidewalk area adjacent to their building. We have seen the leaders on College Hill transform their businesses to deal with this uphill battle COVID-19 has thrust upon us all. Business owners want to remain open, but understand that to do so, they must keep their patrons safe. Yet, they also compete for customers and should be on an even playing field when it comes to public safety requirements, so they can continue to serve Hill-goers in a safe and memory-making way.

Our organization has worked to encourage the public to implement the CDC guidelines for limiting the spread of COVID-19. But we believe it is going to take more than encouragement to obtain greater compliance with these recommendations.

Suppose the public expects city sidewalks and city-owned property to be socially distanced and fully masked. In that case, it is up to leadership in our local and state governments to create such mandates and have the ability to enforce such policies.

Shifting this leadership obligation onto individual citizens, small businesses, and organizations such as ours, results in a leadership void and is unwise. We do not have the authority to institute a mask mandate for our street or neighborhood. Individuals, nonprofits, and small businesses do not have the capability to monitor social spacing or mask mandates on our blocks. We do not have the workforce to enforce or encourage proper hygiene protocol within our district.

We look forward to working with leaders who care about our neighborhood, our community, our state. We hope they will be inspired to help us make the scientifically informed choice and institute a statewide mask mandate to help us keep our community safe and economically healthy.

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Kathryn Sogard is the executive director of the College Hill Partnership, the nonprofit organization that serves as the leader in revitalization and promotion of the College Hill area in Cedar Falls.