



Guest Column

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Colorado Springs Chamber & EDC and El Paso County Public Health working together to guide re-opening of local businesses

In early April, the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce & Economic Development Corporation and El Paso County Public Health joined forces to balance public health and economic health on decisions about re-opening local businesses.

We recognize three elements needed for our economy to recover quickly and safely:

- Clear guidance from health experts about what is safe,
- Input from businesses about what is feasible, and
- Consumers to be confident they can conduct commerce safely.

This has been a community effort. With partners at El Paso County, City of Colorado Springs, VisitCOS, Pikes Peak Community Foundation, Solid Rock Community Development Corp., UCCS Economic Forum, and Pikes Peak Community College we meet frequently to identify risks and opportunities, gather and share ideas, and craft policy variances that have accelerated our region's recovery from the pandemic's grip.

Several policy variances have been approved throughout the course of the pandemic, enabling local retailers to make curbside and on-line sales, allowing restaurants to resume in-person dining service, and letting our high school graduates receive their diplomas at in-person graduation ceremonies - all ahead of other Colorado communities.

To achieve this progress, we have reached out to nearly 100 business owners and community leaders for their ideas and input. These include Colorado Restaurant Association, Pikes Peak Area Attractions, Downtown Partnership, Kimball's Cinema, Flying W Ranch, Great Wolf Lodge, School District 11, and more. We could not have made this progress without their involvement.

Each variance requires three levels of local approval, followed by approval from the state. Locally, each policy variance must be approved by Public Health; by UCHealth, Penrose-St. Francis, and Children's hospital systems; and by the El Paso County Board of Commissioners. Once approved locally, policy variances are submitted to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for final review and approval. Those four checkpoints ensure decisions are sound for public health, helping build confidence in the decisions.

These steps are well and good - and made even better if consumers are aware. The Chamber & EDC and Public Health developed "We're Staying Safe" signs for businesses to post to notify customers they are complying with state and local health guidelines. These signs are



available to members and nonmembers of the Chamber & EDC at <https://cscedc.com/window-signs/>, and have been adopted by VisitCOS and Downtown Partnership.

Look for these signs when you enter businesses to know they are helping keep you safe. Then enter with confidence. The guidelines that businesses have put in place are meant to help protect patrons, and they are only effective if customers abide by them. Please join us in taking these critical steps to help keep our community safe and healthy

Speaking for the Chamber & EDC, I am grateful for the partnership Public Health has displayed for the past two months. Public Health Director Susan Wheelan, Medical Director Dr. Robin Johnson, Deputy Medical Director Dr. Leon Kelly, Environmental Health Division Director Keith Siemsen, and many of their colleagues are working closely with the business community to help guide our recovery.

This is a symbiotic relationship, with shared decisions made based upon the expertise of our partners. While Public Health provides education and technical assistance, these decisions that are made in close collaboration with our incredible partners.

By working together as community partners, Colorado Springs has led the state on several measures, all while keeping our COVID-19 case rates well below state averages.

Public Health has a long history of supporting the business community, assuring organizations open safely. The pandemic is now shining a light on all of the work done behind the scenes.

We are working together. For you.