

From: Steve Glassman

May 11, 2020

Relaunch Lauderdale

Most of Florida has begun to reopen including Palm Beach County which has a higher COVID-19 death rate per 100,000 than Broward County. That leaves just Miami-Dade and Broward Counties and many Fort Lauderdale residents, like me, are anxious to return to more of our daily routines and experience our beaches, restaurants, businesses and everything our beautiful city has to offer; however, we need a smart plan to reopen. The Mayor and his Reopen Fort Lauderdale Working Group developed excellent guidelines and advocated to the State that our city is ready to implement actions to Relaunch Lauderdale and help our city recover with proper safety measures. It is time now for us to join the rest of the State and enter Phase 1 when the Governor's Stay at Home Order expires on May 15; we have met the criteria for reopening.

Our City took the lead by closing Fort Lauderdale Beach during the heart of Spring Break when no one else in Broward would take any measures and we are continuing to work hard to protect the health of our residents. Sadly, each day I hear from so many business owners, especially restaurant owners, who are running on fumes. Some small businesses have shuttered completely, many have no idea if they will recover or ever open again, and I hear from neighbors who are desperate to get back to work in order to provide for their families. We have all made the sacrifice in order to protect the public's health, but now we must begin to find the balance while still remaining smart and safe.

How do we continue to protect everyone's health while understanding the heart wrenching suffering of folks who want to work, who need to earn money, and need to pay bills? Their concerns are now, too, causing undue health issues of their own. It is time to implement creative solutions to help Relaunch Lauderdale.

Businesses and neighbors are eager to get back to work and guidelines have been established to implement proper steps and procedures to Relaunch Lauderdale in a safe and smart way. All businesses should be able to open at the recommended reduced capacity levels while maintaining health and distancing guidelines. In addition, multi-family dwellings should be in control of their own private properties. Let them decide which amenities to open responsibly and safely and which should remain closed. We should not delay the opening of businesses or restaurants (at our Working Group's recommendation of 50% capacity) that are ready and able to adhere to the safety guidelines. In addition, there are many creative and safe opportunities to form open festival spaces in parking lots and alleys for both restaurants and retailers in order to decrease our density in public spaces; City Code regulations will need to be relaxed. Examples follow:

Restarting Restaurants & Retail

Spread out on Sunrise Lane:

By creating small festival streets, nearby restaurants can fulfil social distancing measures in an open communal space, providing a healthier and more spacious outdoor dining experience. Customers will be able to ease their way back into our local economy on the beach in an open-air marketplace and unique eating experience.

Expanded Seating on the Las Olas Sidewalk:

To reboot our local restaurants, we need to consider ways to decrease the density of customers looking to grab a bite to eat, while ensuring scale and sustainability of local business operations. Through the temporary elimination of on-street parking, we can improve dining and pedestrian access while increasing safety. This will ensure that restaurants can get back on their feet and expand capacity in compliance with the Governor's Orders.

Pop-Up Parking Lot Plazas:

Parking lots adjacent to parent properties are in prime position to be temporarily repurposed as we jump start our local economy.

In keeping with social distance guidelines, tents and stations could be set up that obey the 6-foot distance requirements with ground markings. Some of us are old enough to remember the car hops who used to place trays on your doors filled with your food order! All of the above examples have application throughout our City.

The Path Forward

Whether we adopt all of these approaches, or only a handful, we will not be alone in this task, and I truly believe that together, our community can tackle any challenge that comes our way. All across the state, our fellow cities and counties will be testing the best methods to restore confidence, preserve the health of neighbors, and revitalize local businesses. Just this past week, Hillsborough County was released from the Governor's order.

As it is not under the same restrictions as Broward County, the City of Tampa produced Lift Up Local, a playbook that they have used to implement a tailored economic recovery plan that we might be able to adapt to our particular needs. It is pivotal to get the beaches open quickly and safely, and with input and restrictions set by the Reopen Fort Lauderdale Working Group with non-congregating activities, we should be able to achieve this with deliberate steadiness. Working in coordination with our neighboring beach cities will help spread out recreational resources along the coast.

Bringing Back Fort Lauderdale Beach:

We should look to open the beach on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for the remainder of the month of May beginning on May 19. This will help our first responders understand and adapt to the patterns of beachgoers and return to patrolling our beaches while protecting our community. At the same time, this will allow local families the opportunity to access the beach and begin to return to normalcy.

The beach garages and surface lots should be opened; however, the parking on A1A should remain closed. The beach should be open only for recreational activities in May with no congregating and no towels, blankets, chairs, etc. After June 1, we can reassess the scope of the opening and slowly increase the number of open days and activities, while evaluating the results and ensuring the public welfare.

By following the plan to reopen Fort Lauderdale as presented by the Mayor's Working Group and incorporating specifics outlined here, our City should be able to begin this process on May 15. Even more specifics can be finalized in the days ahead.

Thank you to everyone who has provided so much feedback these past two months. In the meantime, it is vital that we continue to adhere to all CDC guidelines, maintain social distancing, limit large groups and wear masks; this is our new reality for the foreseeable future. It is also imperative that each of us behave in a way that does not imperil our future. Every citizen must take personal responsibility for his/her actions and must realize that if we do not conduct ourselves in a responsible fashion, then we risk relapse and the loss of all of our Relaunch Lauderdale initiatives.

If anyone is not comfortable with participating in the reopening, has an underlying medical condition, or is a member of a vulnerable population, then it is best, if possible, to continue to Stay Safe at Home.

Stay safe; stay healthy!

Steve Glassman
Vice Mayor

