



To our valued Restaurant Business Leaders,

We have an incredible town – a town whose backbone is our small business community and a town made up of the most incredible and diverse citizens in America. Trying to protect our businesses who desperately need customers and our citizens who desperately need to distance themselves is a difficult balance to achieve.

For people with full-time salaried jobs that come with healthcare coverage and paid leave, the current state of affairs can be considered very inconvenient – and, if you look at your retirement accounts – frightening. For business owners, the thought of business slowing to a crawl and potentially closing for a period of time while rent and other expenses continue to mount, can certainly cause us to be more than a little anxious. But for those working in our service industry and hourly wage jobs who are facing either dramatically reduced income and having to find childcare while our schools are closed, the potential impact of the COVID-19, the disease caused by the new strain of coronavirus, is dire. It is going to be hard to pay rent or feed their families.

So – we can either be paralyzed by the fear or we can make plans that will be imperfect at best and rally together as only Oxford can do to weather this storm and support each other every step of the way.

If you are confused about what to do right now, you're not alone – even the experts occasionally disagree on best practices right now. The general consensus is that while young and healthy people who are at lower risk for personally suffering severe illness from the Coronavirus don't have to be locking themselves in their homes for the next month, they do need to dramatically alter their daily lives starting NOW.

The CDC recommendations are to keep six to ten feet away from other people. Bottom line, there's no absolute indication not to go to bars and restaurants, but in practicing good health – which is the responsibility for everybody in the country – we really need to think about how we can decrease those close contacts.

I know many of you have already put plans in place and are making many changes in typical business operations to protect customers and practice good health. With that in mind, I want to propose a citywide plan for promoting our restaurants who are making every attempt to be open for business while offering the highest level of protection for customers. I have researched many other communities and talked to professionals to develop this plan, and I am certain it could be improved upon and welcome your input.

The goals of this plan are two-fold – find ways to assist small businesses with working capital to remain open during this pandemic, and offer safe protocols that protect our community and give customers confidence in visiting your businesses.

#ServingOxfordSafely will be a designation of restaurants and bars who pledge uber safe protocols including but not limited to the following:

- Insist that employees DO NOT come to work if they are not well;
- Employee temp checks at beginning of shifts and questionnaires about contact with sick folks;
- Increased routine hand washing;
- All servers wear gloves;
- Tables and chairs wiped down each time a table turns;
- Sanitizer solution buckets and towels on each kitchen station that are changed hourly;
- Attendant to open the door for customers at entry and exit or doors propped open to avoid touching any door handles;
- No menus to handle – chalkboards, signs or servers with excellent memory;
- ½ table capacity pledge (to create distancing restaurants would agree to seat every other table);
- Hand sanitizer available for customers;
- Eliminate any unwrapped straws. Eliminate cocktail straws completely;
- Offer pre-wrapped plastic cutlery;
- Take-out protocols – we will work with you to designate curbside delivery options if helpful;
- Fast food restaurants: ZERO self-service stations (no drink stations, open utensil dispensers or straw dispensers);

As marketing is my background, I hope you will forgive me for taking the liberty of suggesting a few promotions to help with short term working capital. As you know better than I, gift cards will offer an immediate working capital flow. Think about offering gift cards with a discount to be used in the future. For example, if you purchase a \$25 gift card, you will receive a 5% discount. If you purchase a \$50 gift card, you will receive a 10% discount. If you purchase a gift card of \$100 or more, you receive a 15% discount. This allows the customer to get a "deal" now and will encourage them to buy a larger amount to get a discount that they will use at face value of card in the future when business is more stable.

There are many other programs and promotions that we can embrace and publicize together from home meal deliveries to curbside or backdoor pick up to creating drive-thru lanes in your parking lot where a drive thru windows doesn't exist. Perhaps you could develop a Grab-n-go option instead of encouraging dine-ins. My office stands ready to assist with this transition.

It will take drastic measures to limit the spread of the virus, but I do believe it is our responsibility to do everything we can to protect our community. The goals of this plan are aimed toward those who are symptom free and not part of an at-risk group.

Will you join me in #ServingOxfordSafely? To partner in this program, please respond to this email that you pledge to meet the protocols listed above. We will begin to push out messaging of what it means to be a part of #ServingOxfordSafely and will list you as a business that has signed on to protect our community while staying open for business. You may call my office if you prefer at 662.232.2340 and speak to me or my assistant, Kara Giles. A call was made to every restaurant to ask for a manager or owners name and email address, some were not available. Please feel free to pass this along to any other food industry representative.

Know that as your Mayor I am committed to partnering with you to help you stay open and in business. I don't even know what that looks like right now but I fully understand that accommodations will have to be made to allow for businesses to be successful during this time. There is no way to predict the future even of the next few hours as this pandemic progresses but we are committed to doing everything in our power to help businesses stay alive and open.

*Robyn Tannehill*