

WHAT IS THE COMMISSIONERS POSITION ON REOPENING BUSINESS IN MONROE COUNTY

There are several criteria for moving from being a red county to a yellow one. Included in the list are adequate testing sites and personal protective equipment, hospitals that are not at- risk from being overly stressed from COVID cases, and a predetermined number of new cases. On the third criterion, alone, Monroe County is not quite ready to move into the yellow category. Governor Wolf has adopted the standard of fifty new cases per 100,000 residents over a 14 day period. While we are well below the 82 new CORONA cases that we saw on April 4, 2020, we have not yet reached the magic number for our status to change. Following the Department of Health report on Friday, May 15, 2020, our new case count over the past fourteen days is 116. With Monroe's population, our new case count needs to be below 85 for that period. It is the relatively high numbers that we were seeing two weeks ago that are keeping us above the criterion for movement to the "Yellow" category. If new cases continue to be as low as they have been for the last week, it is reasonable for our two week count to dip below 85 next week .

We do not intend to defy Governor Wolf's order that businesses remain closed. In truth, despite County Commissioners in other parts of the state taking this stance, reopening businesses in the county is not a decision that is ours to make. Land use decisions in Pennsylvania (zoning and occupancy permits included) remain the purview of our twenty municipalities. The Commissioners suggesting that businesses reopen carries about as much weight as receiving the same advice from one's neighbor. The Monroe County District Attorney has indicated that his office will not enforce criminal citations against businesses that defy the Governor's order to remain closed. Issues related to licenses for businesses that require licensure by the state of Pennsylvania are beyond his control.

The residents and businesses in Monroe County have done a fantastic job of minimizing the spread of the COVID virus by isolating themselves, practicing social distancing, increasing their sanitation efforts and wearing masks. We are keenly aware of the effect COVID is having on our businesses, large and small. We have made \$500,000 available to small businesses through a low interest loan program to help them make it through the current pandemic.

We have communicated with Governor Wolf asking for two things:

- That when we hit the criterion of 85 new cases over a fourteen day period, he designate Monroe County as "Yellow" immediately. Over the past few weeks, the Governor announces those counties that are going to move to yellow, with his order effective the following Friday. This can result in a ten day plus delay in reopening businesses. We see no reason why such a delay is warranted. Businesses that are presently closed have been planning for how to protect their employees and customers, almost from the moment they closed their doors. Obviously, any business that reopens will need to follow the CDC guidelines and, in fact, the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau is collecting the names of businesses that have already made such a pledge.
- That the Governor considers allowing additional businesses to open even before achieving "Yellow" status. We have big-box home improvement stores, Walmarts, and grocery stores

in the county who are doing an excellent job of protecting employees and shoppers. We believe that hair and nail salons, barber shops, small retailers, car dealerships, realtors, and others could ensure equal or better levels of protection. It goes without saying, that business in the near future will not be transacted the way that it has been done in the past.

We are hopeful that the Governor will consider our recommendations. In the meantime, keep doing what you're doing. Hitting the magic 85 number depends on the cooperation of everyone.