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Office of Mayor
Christopher M. Taylor

To Jacqueline Beaudry, Clerk of the City of Ann Arbor:

On Tuesday February 16, I voted in favor of R-21-070, Resolution to Approve a Street Closure for Conor O'Neill's Main Street Dining on Main Street Between Liberty and William Streets on Wednesday, March 17, 2021 from 6:00 AM until 11:00 PM. I have reconsidered that decision and today exercise my veto to disapprove R-21-070 pursuant to Section 4.5 of Charter.

I voted in favor of the resolution on the strength of Ann Arbor's months-long COVID-friendly, positive experience with downtown outdoor dining. Indeed, on March 15, I look forward to Council's consideration of a resolution to resume April 1 Healthy Streets closures and downtown outdoor dining so as to bolster our outstanding and varied local businesses and to provide those who wish it a controlled outdoor venue in which to meet and dine with family and friends.

When one hears "street closure," one thinks "block party", but that was never on the table, never the request of the petitioner. The street closure here would have enabled outdoor dining, following and expanding upon the established Healthy Streets model. Conor O'Neill's cooperated closely with the Washtenaw County Health Department and City staff and had designed an event that would feature table service only, by reservation only, masks required when not eating, no gathering (not in the street or in line), no table hopping, no congregating of any kind. They planned for additional staff to enforce all of these rules and to address other issues that might arise. I wish to emphasize my view that the petitioner, Conor O'Neill's, is an outstanding local business, an excellent steward of our downtown, with an established history of responsible operations. Their proposed event, which Council approved and I have decided to veto, does not tarnish Conor O'Neill's fine record. They did everything right.

That all said, during COVID we should err on the side of caution. I disapprove the resolution because even careful measures cannot counter the cultural reality that St. Patrick's Day is a day typified by social gatherings and alcohol, a difficult combination always, and with COVID, particularly perilous. Gatherings and celebrations for Memorial Day, July 4th, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and a wide range of religious observances have been cancelled or limited. The City should not lend its weight to the notion that St. Patrick's Day 2021 should be anywhere near business-as-usual, whether on Main Street or elsewhere.

Case rates are falling and vaccines are slowly on the rise, but we are far from out of the woods. So. Remain vigilant this St. Patrick's Day -- stay home, wear green (this one day only!), and treasure each other. We'll get through this together.

Sincerely,