



TOWN OF FREEPORT, MAINE

OB #1

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MEMORANDUM

To: Freeport Town Council
From: Peter Joseph, Town Manager
Date: 7/16/20
RE: Feedback and Evaluation on Main Street Closure

From a public health and safety perspective, the closure has been successful. The vast majority of people present and visible in Town on both weekends so far (07/04-05 and 07/11-12) have been wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. Nearly every person waiting in line to get into a retail establishment has been wearing a mask, which shows an overall compliance with the Governor's executive orders. Both state and local numbers of new infections remain low, which is a good sign. People have been able to leave the sidewalks and walk in the street in the areas of the closure, avoiding lines in front of shops and helping to space foot traffic out onto the street. An interesting behavioral observation is that a good deal (but not all) of foot traffic has still tended to stay on the sidewalk, even with the street closed. Anecdotally, we have had reports from Freeport PD that areas outside of the closure area (specifically the sidewalks at the intersection of Bow and Main Streets) have seen pedestrian traffic packed in so closely that pedestrians are frequently walking on the shoulder of Main Street in order to pass people queued in front of stores. Other than this concern, there have been no public safety concerns reported by the Freeport Police or Fire/Rescue Departments during the first two weeks of the closure.

From a business perspective, the majority of feedback the Town has received has been neutral or negative, with a small amount of positive feedback. This coincides with the anecdotal observations of many regarding the decrease of shopping traffic in Town, as well as some hard traffic data from individual retailers that we have heard that shows a best case scenario of a 50-60% decrease in shopper traffic into stores. We hope to have additional data to present to the Town Council on 07/21.

Input from non-business owning residents has been mixed, with slightly larger number or favorable responses than negative responses. A spreadsheet showing input from businesses and residents (organized by Visit Freeport) is attached to this memo. This input is current as of 1PM on Thursday, 07/16/20. An updated version will be provided to the Council on 07/21 showing all input received prior to the Council meeting.

At this time, the Town needs to decide whether to discontinue the closure, continue with the closure until Labor Day, or possibly consider some middle alternative, such as reducing the dates or duration of the closure. One alternative that I would suggest for consideration is that a number of weekends (1, 2, possibly 3) without the Main Street closure be considered in order to evaluate whether the closure is helping or hurting business. A potential downside to this approach is that it may create confusion among residents and visitors as to when the closure would be in effect.

Timestamp	I am a:	majority of people in town practicing appropriate	Would you like the closure to occur every weekend through Labor Day Weekend?	For Freepoint business representatives: Do you have traffic and/or conversion data to help determine if the closure this past weekend helped your sales?	For Freepoint business representatives: What was the feedback you heard regarding the closure from your customers over the weekend?	Please use this area for general feedback, or ideas on how to further improve the closure.
7/13/2020 13:59:11	Freepoint business representative	More like 50/50	No	Traffic did not increase	Some of the things were fun but did not bring them in for traffic. The customers were enjoying the extra space, but there were a LOT of out of state visitors. The crowds we saw were not local, and were not shy admitting they didn't have time for quarantine during their short trip, but were wearing masks. It's more of a draw for out of state visitors than I anticipated.	Would like more information on cost of tent on Main Street.
7/13/2020 14:00:17	Freepoint business representative	Yes	Perhaps with the suggestions I added in General Comments (see below).			The corner of Main and Bow streets where Linda Bean expanded tables onto the sidewalk is a bit crowded, as guests congregate there, and the chairs blocking the corner don't allow for walking in the street.
7/13/2020 14:00:30	Freepoint business representative	More like 50/50	No	Yes	No feedback either way.	We have not seen any increase in business with the closure.
7/13/2020 14:05:24	Freepoint business representative	Yes	No	Yes		Signage should be on both sides of the barricades. The barricades should be separated and a clear/visible entrance or walkway in and out should be obvious. Straight across gives the impression that people need not go further. People are more likely to walk through something than around. Our sales suffered both weekends from the closure and unfortunately, I don't have the inventory or staff to take advantage of a tent.
7/13/2020 14:10:54	Freepoint business representative	Yes	Yes	No we don't but our guests like the idea of being able to space themselves	Our guest feedback has been positive as they like the additional space.	I'd prefer it to look nicer on the ends w/ the barriers as the barriers are just ugly
7/13/2020 14:35:47	Freepoint business representative	Yes	Yes	NO	None	
7/13/2020 14:54:12	Freepoint business representative	Yes	No	Yes		Signage should be on both sides of the barricades. The barricades should be separated and a clear/visible entrance or walkway in and out should be obvious. Straight across gives the impression that people need not go further. People are more likely to walk through something than around. Our sales suffered both weekends from the closure and unfortunately, I don't have the inventory or staff to take advantage of a tent.
7/13/2020 15:02:50	Freepoint business representative	Yes	Yes	No	We didn't hear anything! No news is good news!	
7/13/2020 15:04:38	Freepoint business representative	More like 50/50	No	Traffic did not increase	Some of the things were fun but did not bring them in for traffic	Would like more information on cost of tent on Main Street.
7/13/2020 16:11:02	Both	Yes	No	I do have data. I do not think the closure benefited my business.	Many customers thought it was an LLB event. A few that stood in line outside of my store did not enjoy the karaoke guy. A few customers thought the extra space was nice	I witnessed a few emergency vehicles speed up Bow st. and around the corner. I'm surprised there was not a pedestrian hit.
7/13/2020 16:28:17	Freepoint business representative	Yes	Yes	We have missed our LY numbers but traffic is also down average of 50%. The number of customers making purchases has increased.	It is not too disruptive. Good foot traffic on the closure of Main St	
7/13/2020 21:18:54	Freepoint business representative	Yes	Yes	We have missed our LY numbers but traffic is also down average of 50%. The number of customers making purchases has increased.	It is not too disruptive. Good foot traffic on the closure of Main St	
7/14/2020 13:13:46	Freepoint business representative	Yes	No	Yes, again our number are WAY down	Customers are saying that they're disappointed that many of the small businesses are not in that blocked off area, which promotes staying within that area psychologically, whether that is the purpose or not.	Though it's a nice gesture, taking advantage of space in the close down area adds to our payroll expenses, equipment to process sales & additional inventory to allocate for additional space, which we do not have an abundance to spare at this time. Unfortunately, this has not gone well for us & I do not foresee us being able to sustain our Freepoint location much longer.
7/14/2020 16:10:08	Freepoint Resident	More like 50/50	Yes	Yes		I was pleasantly surprised by how well the flow of traffic worked with the street shut down. I wonder if it makes sense to extend it even further down to Sherman's.
7/14/2020 16:17:30	Freepoint Resident	Yes	Yes			If businesses saw increase in foot traffic then I support it!
7/14/2020 16:45:44	Freepoint Resident	Yes	Yes			
7/14/2020 16:51:19	Freepoint Resident	No	No			
7/14/2020 16:56:22	Freepoint Resident	No	No			As an economist I absolutely reject the notion of this plan as the cost of closing the roads and diverting traffic does not justify our town's exposure to the majority of individuals who do not practice safe social distancing or health practices.
7/14/2020 16:59:31	Freepoint Resident	More like 50/50	Perhaps with the suggestions I added in General Comments (see below).			What was the emergency service delay to get North of town? What can be done so people stop making U-turns in front of Holbrook St when they see the closure and don't realize they can turn onto Howard or Grove? Tables for sitting - is that really necessary? That's not about shopping. You also said this would not be an event- there was someone playing music the last two weekends.
7/14/2020 19:23:37	Both	Yes	Yes	Do not		Thank you for asking.

7/14/2020 20:20:45	Freepoint Resident	More like 50/50	No				There was hardly anybody downtown on Sunday. It seemed like it probably cost the town a lot more to have spent all the time and money blocking and detouring the town.
7/14/2020 20:47:59	Freepoint Resident	Yes	Yes				I love this idea even absent Covid. Main Street is perfect to drive thru in summer. Chase off bow street too - down to the corner across from Backyard. Re question of people distancing etc. I was not in town so cannot accurately answer.
7/14/2020 21:40:25	Freepoint Resident	Yes	No				
7/14/2020 21:50:33	Freepoint Resident	Yes	Yes				Thanks for being creative. Trying different approaches takes a ton of extra work and it's very appreciated.
7/14/2020 22:59:48	Freepoint Resident	Yes	Yes				I thought it has been executed well and love the thought of the downtown becoming pedestrian only.
7/14/2020 23:14:54	Freepoint Resident	No	No				I drove by last weekend 5 lanes in the street and not 1 thing in the tents people or items.
7/15/2020 5:49:17	Both	Yes	Yes				Keep up the good work!
7/15/2020 6:10:47	Freepoint business representative	Yes	Perhaps with the suggestions I added in General Comments (see below).	NO	NO	Positive feedback	I don't think it's helping or hurting anyone.
7/15/2020 8:13:22	Both	Yes	Yes				Thank you for your efforts.
7/15/2020 9:59:14	Freepoint Resident	More like 50/50	Yes				I am a resident, and didn't go walking at all downtown during the street closures so can't speak on that as much. But I had wondered how it would affect traffic (getting AROUND town using the detour) and it was totally fine and smooth sailing.
7/15/2020 10:24:38	Freepoint Resident	More like 50/50	No				
7/15/2020 15:38:23	Freepoint business representative	Yes	Yes	Several customers were actual visitors and were here because of the outside environment.			First time this year that Freepoint was active. We HAVE to keep doing this.
7/16/2020 11:02:00	Freepoint Resident	Yes	No				Why not utilize the area that isn't being used without concerts in the park or even the upper section of the GAP parking lot where there once was a carnival. I just don't feel like it's necessary to shut the road down with such little tourists visiting. It's only congesting local traffic.
7/16/2020 11:06:53	Freepoint Resident	Yes	No				close a secondary street, not US Rt 1.
7/16/2020 11:18:39	Freepoint Resident	More like 50/50	Yes				
7/16/2020 11:28:47	Freepoint Resident	Yes	No				We went last weekend around 5:30. Went into one store before everything closed. The only other store open was beans. Nothing was going on in the blocked off section. It seemed pretty good. May have been busy earlier, but it seemed useless.
7/16/2020 11:34:34	Freepoint Resident	Yes	Yes				vehicles - find us stopping for them to cross on crosswalks to be a charming throw back. They wave, smile, and talk about our welcoming attitude. Let us add to their adventure in Maine. The traffic re-route is confusing or a pain to get around town and by the non crowds, not worth it. For Freepoint business representatives: Do you have traffic and/or conversion data to help determine if the closure this past weekend helped your sales?
7/16/2020 12:12:42	Both	More like 50/50	No				It was repeatedly stated it is a pain to get around town and by the non crowds, not worth it. There was not real social distancing - lines were people back to back, masks or no. For Freepoint business representatives: What was the feedback you heard regarding the closure from your customers over the weekend?
Timestamp	I am a:	majority of people in town packing appropriate	Would you like the closure to occur every weekend through Labor Day Weekend?	CSAs were delayed by the road closure.	For Freepoint business representatives: Do you have traffic and/or conversion data to help determine if the closure this past weekend helped your sales?		Please use this area for general feedback, or ideas on how to further improve the closure.