

# Officials Discuss 'Opening Up Madison County Again'

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EDWARDSVILLE — Officials held the first online meeting Thursday in an effort toward “Opening Up Madison County Again.”

“We are here to look ahead,” Chairman Kurt Prenzler said. “Business owners need hope for the future.”

Prenzler thanked everyone for being a part of the discussion to re-open the county — public safety being the No. 1 priority.

“We understand these are hard times, especially with the lives lost,” Prenzler said. “We also know we need a strategy for when businesses get going again.”

During the past week, Prenzler collected data from small businesses and local key sectors to put together an approach.

Committee members who took part in the online call included: County Board members Erica Harriss of Glen Carbon, and Chris Hankins, Pontoon Beach; Nancy Schneider, Chef’s Shoppe, Edwardsville; Ben Golley, Today’s Beauty Supply, Alton; Matt McSparin, Edison’s Entertainment, Edwardsville; Greg Fowler, J.F. Electric, Edwardsville; the Rev. Danny Holliday, Alton; Jerry Roderick, Jerry’s Cafeteria, Granite City; James Craney, attorney, Edwardsville; Justin Hopkins, Truck Centers Inc., Troy; and Loren Hughes, M.D., of Edwardsville.

Both Harriss and Hankins said they felt the committee was a good thing and local businesses were excited about moving forward.

“No matter what we do it’s a good thing to communicate on plans to open up,” Hankins said.

Golley said owners of small hair care salons and barbershops are struggling. He said the public needs to distinguish between a small business and a micro business.

“Micro businesses are the ‘mom and pop’ shops that employ one or two people, usually family member,” Golley said.

Some of the most common micro businesses include catering, childcare, photography, computer services, house cleaning, event planning, accounting and cosmetology.

Schneider said many small businesses were closed because they were deemed non-essential. She said it's frustrating to be sitting outside her shop that's closed and look over and see the parking lot full in front of Target.

Without drive-through or curbside service, McSparin said restaurants couldn't sustain their business.

"The food industry will be impacted by all of this even after we reopen," he said.

County Board member Tom McRae, who called in, said the committee was a great step in finding a pathway forward.

Prenzler said Thursday's meeting was about gathering data.

"What we did today was the first step in our plan to re-open the county in a safe manner," he said. "The next step is to formulate a plan."