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We want to get Kansas City open': Restaurants pushing back on mayor's plan, limits

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After weeks of closed dining rooms to help stop the spread of COVID-19, Kansas City restaurants are eager to get back to business — but concerned it could be a losing proposition.

Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas' plan, [dubbed "10-10-10."](#) calls for reopening in phases. In the first phase, restaurants must operate at 10% of their normal capacity or have 10 people in the establishment, whatever is greater. That includes the employees needed to run the business.

Bill Teel, executive director of the Greater Kansas City Restaurant Association, said restaurants will lose money if they reopen their dining rooms under those restrictions.

"At 10 percent a restaurant can't operate a dining room properly," he said. "We want him to kind of loosen the plan to match the surrounding municipalities. Six-foot distances are what Kansas and Missouri as states have proposed."

Starting Wednesday, Kansas City will see a ["soft reopening."](#) Nonessential businesses that don't draw the general public, such as an advertising agency or law firm, will be allowed to reopen, so long as they abide by social distancing rules.

Smaller businesses that serve the general public and were previously deemed "nonessential," such as some retailers, also can open. But they will have to follow the city's new rules for the foreseeable future.

Businesses or gathering places with more traffic, such as restaurants, libraries, community centers and gyms, will stick to the May 15 opening date but under the new rules.

Restaurants are in ongoing conversations with Lucas, talking about how to reopen safely and at least break even.

Teel first arranged a Friday conference call with the mayor and representatives from about 100 area restaurants to express their concerns. The association then formed a task force and presented their proposals Monday to the mayor and [Rex Archer](#), director of the Kansas City Health Department.

Besides increasing capacity, the restaurants also discussed target dates for each phase of the reopening so they can make firmer plans.

“We want to get Kansas City open and move to the future,” Teel said. “We’re all about safety. We clean, sanitize; we sterilize. We are safer than retail places now where people can pick up items and put them back down and walk off.”

In a statement Monday, Lucas noted that safety must come first.

“We will keep health and safety at the forefront as we create future guidance and will examine the reopening experience and new infection numbers in places that have opened, like Georgia and out-state Missouri,” the mayor said. “We look forward to further collaboration with this vital industry sector.”

Lucas also empathized with the business community but added : “While we share every Kansas City business’s desire to reopen as soon as possible, we also share the public health concerns of servers and patrons at sit-down restaurants, bars, and nightclubs — and their families at home. ... No one wants to see us open too fast and too broadly and have to shutter our small businesses once more.”