

**State of Texas  
County of Bexar  
City of San Antonio**



**Meeting Minutes  
City Council Emergency Meeting**  
No in-person access to this meeting

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

2:00 PM

Phone/Video Conference

**ROLL CALL**

The City Council convened in a Emergency Meeting. City Clerk Tina J. Flores took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Councilmembers present:

**PRESENT:** 11 - Mayor Nirenberg, Treviño, Andrews-Sullivan, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Gonzales, Cabello Havrda, Sandoval, Pelaez, Courage, and Perry

Once a quorum was established, the City Council shall consider the following:

1. Briefing and discussion of the emergency weather event, utility crisis, and response of the City and our partners to include CPS Energy (CPS) and San Antonio Water System (SAWS) representatives.

Mayor Nirenberg thanked Paula Gold-Williams, Robert Puente, and Jelynn Burley for attending the meeting. He stated that the utility crisis had created an extreme hardship for San Antonio residents and the goal of the meeting was to learn our utilities' systemic responses in order to avoid this situation in the future. He noted that the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), the manager of the State's power grid, underestimated the situation. He stated that State leaders would hold House hearings on the matter next week. He added that many individuals had questions about how the State-ordered energy

cuts were conducted.

City Manager Erik Walsh reported that six nursing homes were assisted with fuel or generator repair through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD) had assisted 200 individuals by providing oxygen. He indicated that through the EOC, 55 individuals from two San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) properties and 23 individuals with medical devices requiring electricity were relocated to hotels downtown. He indicated that the City opened the Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center which served as a warming center and as of 11:00 am, there were 120 individuals and several pets at the warming center. He noted that the City partnered with the San Antonio Food Bank to provide meals, and the Northside Independent School District (NISD) to provide transportation to individuals to the Convention Center. He added that free parking was provided downtown for those coming to the warming center.

City Manager Walsh reported that Public Works crews had been working since March 13, 2021 at noon and with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT); and the Storm Water Division had assisted with downed trees and providing barricade deployment. He stated that as part of the ice plan, the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD), TxDOT, and Public Works would coordinate and treat 82 bridges over local highways. He indicated that City crews closed 30 roadways and crossings due to the ice. He reported that between March 14, 2021 and March 16, 2021, SAPD received 20,000 calls which was twice the normal call volume, and SAFD recorded 2,400 incidents over a 48-hour period. He spoke of accidents experienced by SAPD and SAFD and damage to equipment.

City Manager Walsh stated that the Human Services Department (DHS) partnered with Haven for Hope, the Salvation Army, Travis Park Church, Church Under the Bridge, Last Chance Ministries, City Church and the First Baptist Church to provide assistance to the homeless.

City Manager Walsh reported that as of 2:00 pm today, the Airport opened for departures and arrivals and garbage collection resumed. He indicated that COVID-19 testing sites were closed and probably would not open until February 19, 2021 and vaccinations were rescheduled to February 19, 2021 through February 21, 2021. He thanked the employees engaged in efforts at this time.

Paula Gold-Williams stated that CPS Energy understood that this weather event was something that the community had not experienced before and CPS Energy was working diligently to restore power. She indicated that the power grid had to function where capacity was greater than demand and CPS Energy's capacity was 7,000 megawatts. She noted that CPS Energy plants were designed for the average temperature range of San Antonio. She spoke of the effect of the extremely cold temperatures on plants and beginning February 13, 2021, CPS Energy stressed conservation with the media. She stated that the Save for Tomorrow Energy Plan (STEP) Program focused on energy efficiency and conservation and spoke of how conservation was promoted locally.

Ms. Gold-Williams noted that the extreme cold affected their plants and at the same time, the supply of resource was constrained. She stated that the majority of their capacity came from natural gas and the

price of natural gas increased. She indicated that a third of the system was tied to hospitals, safety, water, airport, and things which were necessary to keep the City running. She spoke of the causes of the outages and noted that once the wet part of the storm subsided, the City would see relief from the outage management process.

Robert Puente stated that San Antonio Water System (SAWS) would issue a boil water notice this afternoon due to low water pressure issues. He indicated that SAWS was responding to multiple service issues and was coordinating with CPS Energy on a constant basis to make sure that water was available to customers. He noted that SAWS would use the emergency to evaluate what worked and what did not.

Mayor Nirenberg thanked the residents for enduring an unprecedented crisis and acknowledged the work of first responders, grocery workers, electric and water crews, food bank, and all essential workers to help ease the burden of the disaster. He asked why residents received 30 seconds to five minutes of power when they were told that they would receive up to 45 minutes of power per hour. Ms. Gold-Williams stated that when the temperatures dipped so low, CPS Energy had to make adjustments to prevent an overall crash of the system.

Mayor Nirenberg stated that since CPS Energy was on a manual cycle, was the intent to have longer cycles of electricity and longer cycles without electricity. Ms. Gold-Williams stated that they were trying to go to three to five hours on and off. Mayor Nirenberg asked if the City could share its text alert system with CPS Energy. City Manager Walsh stated that the City could do so. He noted that due to the City's confidentiality agreements, customers may not want to be contacted by text. Mayor Nirenberg asked if the City could share its system immediately. City Manager Walsh stated that staff were looking to improve and expand that as much as possible.

Mayor Nirenberg asked when the crisis would end from an energy perspective. Ms. Gold-Williams stated that it would probably not end until February 20, 2021.

Mayor Nirenberg asked of the boil water notice. Mr. Puente stated that due to the constant loss of water associated with broken pipes, the Temperature Control Unit (TCU) mandated that a boil water notice be issued. Mayor Nirenberg asked if services were expected to come online as the temperature increased, where residents should go to receive water, and if delivery stations could be set up. Mr. Puente stated that SAWS would be in this situation as long as there was intermittent power to the pump stations.

Mayor Nirenberg asked how widespread the water outages were expected to be. Mr. Puente stated that total outages were concentrated north of Loop 1604, south of Loop 410, and in small pockets in the downtown area. Steve Klaus added that as pipes began to thaw, SAWS will see more demand on the system and there were approximately 10,000 leaks across the City.

Mayor Nirenberg asked why the pumping stations were not on critical circuits. Ms. Gold-Williams replied that CPS Energy had tried to go to the main facility sites to coordinate the circuits and that it was

an opportunity point for CPS Energy. Mayor Nirenberg stated that this would be at the top of the list for after-action.

Mayor Nirenberg asked where customers could get water right now. Mr. Puente replied that they would have a meeting with NCB to put them on notice that water needed to be brought in.

Councilmember Pelaez stated that the City would ensure that the EOC and City departments would work with SAWS. He asked if neighborhoods that had not had power for three days could be prioritized.

Ms. Gold-Williams stated that CPS Energy would prioritize neighborhoods that have been without power for longer times.

Councilmember Courage asked the City Manager if more warming centers could be set up. He stated that having just one downtown did not meet the need and suggested that the City partner with VIA to set up warming centers in buses. He stated that there was a need to develop a system that would share energy in a more equitable and reliable manner. He suggested that SAWS turn off water where there was a leak in order to raise the pressure.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia stated that she wanted to ensure that CPS Energy and SAWS had a plan to take care of critical infrastructure plants. Ms. Gold-Williams reported that CPS Energy had identified value pillars to focus on such as reliability, resilience, safety, security, environmental responsibility, and affordability; and a security team looked at the physical and cybersecurity requirements through events and everyday activities and CPS Energy was committed to maintaining that. Mr. Puente stated that SAWS employees helped out customers by turning off their water. He stated that the emergency presented the opportunity to learn and SAWS would take what it learned to address issues such as critical infrastructure plants.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan stated that the utilities should have been better prepared. Mr. Puente emphasized that the boil water notice was precautionary and the water had been disinfected as before. He stated that staff reached out to Coca Cola and HEB for additional water resources.

Councilmember Sandoval stated that it would be useful to understand the risks residents were facing over the next 24-48 hours and to ensure that the City mitigated those risks. She asked if the only immediate risks were the safety of the water and the lack of power. City Manager Walsh added that there was a need for shelter. Councilmember Sandoval requested a daily update on the existing risks. She indicated that now was the time to act and protect the health and safety of residents.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda stated that a plan was needed to restore power. Ms. Gold-Williams stated that the objective was to restore power as soon as possible but noted that the grid was unstable. She indicated that once the system was up and stabilized equipment could be repaired and residents without power for the longest time would be prioritized.

Councilmember Treviño asked the City to consider adding more warming centers potentially being located at senior centers. He asked of the hours of operation for 3-1-1 and the homeless hotline. City Manager Walsh replied that 3-1-1 closed at 11:00 pm and the homeless hotline closed at 7:00 pm. Councilmember Treviño requested a list of city facilities which were on a critical circuit. City Manager Walsh stated that if there were facilities on a critical list, he would provide that information to the City Council.

Councilmember Viagran stated that an action plan should have been put in place prior to the storm. She asked when power could be restored at the Mission Del Lago subdivision. Rudy Garza stated that he would see what the issue was with that particular circuit after the meeting.

Councilmember Perry stated that he didn't understand why the communication methods utilized by the City for COVID-19 spike alerts were not utilized for this emergency. He asked if the Deely Plant would have gotten the City through the crisis. Ms. Gold-Williams stated that it would not have solved the entire problem. He requested the number of times the City had drawn power from ERCOT versus how many times ERCOT drew power from the City.

Councilmember Pelaez asked if the City was charging residents for parking. City Manager Walsh replied that parking was free by the Convention Center and he would follow up to see if parking fees could be adjusted temporarily for all City parking facilities.

Councilmember Gonzales asked if aged infrastructure increased the length of power outages. Mr. Garza replied that the age of infrastructure would factor into potential equipment damage.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan suggested that the Freeman Coliseum parking lot be utilized as a resource station for VIA buses.

Councilmember Viagran spoke of price gouging by hotels. Mayor Nirenberg reported that he and Bexar County Judge Wolff were executing an emergency order today on price gouging.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if there was a sustained power loss plan. Mr. Garza replied that they did have plans but the current event was unprecedented.

Mayor Nirenberg stated that a public hearing was scheduled for today and would begin after the meeting. He acknowledged the presence of the CPS Energy Board of Trustees member Janie Gonzalez. Ms. Gonzalez stated that the number one priority of the Board of Trustees was the community and learning from the crisis to make improvements.

Councilmember Sandoval asked when areas would have power restored and in what order. She asked that this information be included in the City Manager's report. Ms. Gonzalez stated that the Board of Trustees was working with their team to provide that information.

Councilmember Gonzales asked if the City had conserved energy, would that have made a difference. Mr. Garza stated that a message of conservation was relayed to customers on February 10, 2021 and CPS Energy followed up on that message every day leading up to the weather event. He noted that it probably would not have made a difference.

Mayor Nirenberg asked when street repairs and others were going to begin following the immediate weather event. City Manager Walsh stated that assessment of the damage had begun and repairs needed would be quickly identified once the weather event was over. Mayor Nirenberg stated that residents should be assured that a delay in receiving their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine due to the weather event would not reduce the effectiveness of the vaccine. City Manager Walsh stated that the second doses would be scheduled within the time frame allowed.

Mayor Nirenberg asked utility leaders to identify the next steps in response to the crisis. City Manager Walsh stated that the City would continue to get operations and services back online. He reported that the City would continue to run the warming center and work with others on setting up warming centers. He indicated that he would include an update from CPS Energy and SAWS in the daily update provided to the City Council. He noted that staff would talk to CPS Energy and SAWS about how the City could support their messaging and improve communication with the public.

City Manager Walsh stated that the City was not enforcing downtown meters at this time and parking in all City garages was free. He reported that 3-1-1 would take calls until 12:00 am.

Ms. Gold-Williams stated that CPS Energy was committed to get the grid back online and stable and to partner with the City on improving communications. She stated that CPS Energy would be bringing more information to the City Council on what needed to happen structurally and providing updates on activities at the State level and with ERCOT.

Mr. Puente stated that the boil water notice was issued due to low pressure in the system. He noted that SAWS would partner with HEB to ensure that those who could not boil their water received water. He indicated that all issues brought up today would be reviewed and mitigated as much as possible. He stated that SAWS did not have an answer as to when service would be restored. He noted that everyone was learning and the response would be improved in the future.

Mayor Nirenberg requested information on the water service plan as soon as possible.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- A. Economic development negotiations pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.087 (economic development).
- B. The purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.072 (real property).

- C. Legal issues related to collective bargaining pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.071 (consultation with attorney).
- D. Legal issues related to litigation involving the City pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.071 (consultation with attorney).
- E. Legal issues relating to COVID-19 preparedness pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.071 (consultation with attorney).
- F. Legal advice regarding election laws pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.071.

Mayor Nirenberg announced that the Executive Session would be carried over to February 18, 2021.

Mayor Nirenberg opened the public hearing for Amendment Number 3 to the FY 2021 HUD Action Plan and Budget for up to \$3,401,669 in HOME Partnership Funds to affordable housing activities, and up to \$1,144,002 in Community Development Block Grant funds to eligible public works and public services activities consistent with the five-year consolidated plan.

Stephen Versteeg stated that he did not support the reprogramming of assisted affordable housing program funds.

Nick Walsh expressed support for reprogramming Federal HOME funds to eligible affordable housing development.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further discussion, Mayor Nirenberg recessed the meeting at 5:26 pm.

**APPROVED**

**RON NIRENBERG**  
Mayor

Attest:

**TINA J. FLORES**  
City Clerk