

**CULTURE & NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES
COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2020
2:00 PM
VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Members Present:	Councilmember Roberto Treviño, <i>Chair, District 1</i> Councilmember Jada Andrews-Sullivan, <i>District 2</i> Councilmember Rebeca Viagran, <i>District 3</i> Councilmember John Courage, <i>District 9</i> Councilmember Clayton Perry, <i>District 10</i>
Staff Present:	Ed Guzman, <i>Deputy City Attorney</i> , Lori Houston, <i>Assistant City Manager</i> ; Dr. Colleen Bridger, <i>Assistant City Manager</i> ; Verónica R. Soto, <i>Director, Neighborhood & Housing Services</i> ; Patrick Steck, <i>Interim Assistant Director, Department of Human Services</i> ; Ian Benavidez, <i>Housing Administrator, Neighborhood & Housing Services</i> ; Carlos Valenzuela, <i>Public Engagement Officer, Government & Public Affairs Department</i> ; Nancy Cano, <i>Office of the City Clerk</i>
Others Present:	Debbie Hernandez, <i>Community Organizer, RAICES</i> ; Christina Rosales, <i>Deputy Director, Texas Housers</i> ; Juany Torres, <i>District 3 Resident</i>

Call to Order

Chairman Treviño called the meeting to order.

Public Comment

Christina Rosales, Deputy Director, Texas Housers, stated that the City should restructure its rental assistance program by providing cash directly to applicants. She added that the U.S. Treasury stated that localities receiving funds may make payments directly to individuals and families impacted by a loss of income due to COVID-19.

Juany Torres, COPS/Metro Leader, stated that she assisted families seeking rental assistance in Council District 3. She requested that the City restructure the Risk Mitigation Fund (RMF) to allow for rental assistance payment to be made directly to renters and noted approximately 3,000 local landlords refused to receive third party payments and refused to participate in the program.

Robert M. Laurence, Member of the Texas Organizing Project, submitted written testimony. He noted difficulties in the rental assistance application process and advocated for reorganization of the application process that included input from grassroots organizations and community leaders.

Terry Castillo submitted written testimony. She stated that she assisted individuals seeking rental assistance and urged the Committee to push the City to provide direct cash assistance to renters as

some landlords chose not to become vendors of the City and not to accept City funds which would result in excessive late fees and eviction.

Marty Hutchison, Property Manager, submitted written testimony. He stated that the City's informational brochure to residents regarding rights and resources prior to eviction was excellent. He noted that after a Notice to Vacate was given to a tenant, it was difficult to fully explain the eviction process and procedure. He added that the ability to provide this information to tenants would be greatly beneficial.

Kayla Miranda submitted written testimony. She stated that payments from the Risk Mitigation Fund need to be paid directly to families and noted the refusal of some landlords to receive third party payments or to fill out or sign necessary paperwork.

James Hamilton submitted written testimony requesting a live callback, but was not available during the meeting.

Rick Trevino submitted written testimony requesting a live callback, but was not available during the meeting.

Graciela Sanchez, Director, Esperanza Peace & Justice Center (EPJC), submitted written testimony. She asked of the Door-to-Door engagement process that the City was going to undertake for hard-to-reach microbusinesses and families. She stated that EPJC did such work amazingly well and had not been approached to apply for the funding of such a project nor for free expertise consulting. She requested that the City take the best path forward to reach out to our most vulnerable communities.

Mi Casa No Se Vende (MCNSV) submitted written testimony. MCNSV requested that the EHAP implement income targeting below 80% AMI, provide direct cash assistance to tenants, and requested a dashboard to track the use of CARES Act funds.

San Antonio Board of Realtors (SABOR) submitted written testimony. SABOR stated that it was in support of the proposed Notice of Tenant Rights Ordinance to ensure that San Antonio families were provided with direct information about resources faced with a Notice to Vacate and was committed to working with the City towards this goal.

Debbie Hernandez voiced concern for the EHAP program and the 3,000 landlords that refuse to enroll as vendors in the program and requested direct assistance payment to renters.

Conjunto Heritage Taller submitted written testimony. The organization urged the Committee to retain the Department of Arts and Culture as the primary steward of City arts funding to assure survival of small and mid-sized arts organizations that are the heart and soul of San Antonio.

- 1. Briefing and Possible Action on the implementation plans for various strategies within the Housing Security Pillar of the COVID19 Recovery and Resilience Plan. The overarching strategy to be presented is the Fair Housing Counseling and Family Resource Center and Virtual and Placed Base Financial Recovery and Resilience**

HUB which includes the Right to Counsel program, Notice of Tenants Rights ordinance, the Emergency Housing Assistance Program, Family Independence Initiative Up Together Investment, Low Cost Financial Products, and door to door engagement with hard-to-reach micro businesses and families to connect them to resources.

Assistant City Manager Lori Houston provided an update on the Emergency Housing Assistance Program (“EHAP”). She reported that 10,956 applications were received and represented \$21.5 million of the \$25 million budget, 1,924 applications were referred to Bexar County or were denied due to not meeting the income requirements, 58% of applicants made less than 10% of the area median income (AMI), 65% of the applicants were female, and 60% of applicants were between 26 and 45 years old.

Assistant City Manager Houston stated that two weeks ago, the City began proactively remitting rental assistance payments directly to landlords instead of waiting for landlords to enroll as vendors in the program. She stated that applicants were notified the process took no more than 30 days from receipt of a complete application packet. She added that payments were made directly to utility providers or landlords. She noted that a cash component was made directly to tenants. She stated that an estimated 11,000 or 12,000 would benefit from the original \$25 million EHAP budget and an additional 10,000 would receive assistance from an additional \$25 million funding allocated through the community Coronavirus Relief Fund.

Assistant City Manager Houston reported that the Texas Supreme Court placed a moratorium on evictions filed between March 27, 2020 and July 25, 2020 which blocked evictions for tenants that received federal rental assistance. She stated that the moratorium applied to approximately 50% of rental properties in San Antonio and provided some property protections until July 25, 2020; thereafter, landlords could issue a Notice to Vacate as a 30-day requirement so that the earliest date any CARES Act property could go to an Eviction Court would be in late August 2020. She added that the City had entered into a partnership with Bexar County Justices of the Peace (JP) wherein docket information was collected from each JP Court and landlords were provided information on the EHAP and tenants were provided available resources and assistance. She stated that City staff and legal advisors from the Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid Program would be present at eviction hearings to provide immediate onsite assistance with the EHAP application process.

Verónica Soto presented five Housing and Financial Recovery Resource Center strategies representing \$31 million under Housing Security Pillar as part of the City’s COVID19 Recovery and Resilience Plan. She reported that the main hub would be located at the Central Library, the Neighborhood Place, and the Claude Black Community Center. She highlighted services and programs that would be available: financial counseling, benefits navigation and enrollment, fair housing counseling and rental/mortgage assistance, housing repair and rehab assistance, Right to Counsel Program, Workforce Assistance Program and Small Business Recovery Assistance Program.

Ms. Soto reported that the Neighborhood and Housing Services Department would lead the Fair Housing component of the Recovery Center with a budget of \$27.8 million: Emergency Housing Assistant Plan (EHAP): \$26.9 million to 10,000 families; three Administration Centers and

staffing support for each: \$481,000; and contracts with Texas Rural Legal Aid and San Antonio Legal Services Association (SALSA) to coordinate pro bono eviction and landlord/tenant efforts: \$456,000. Ms. Soto stated that a City Ordinance would require a landlord or property manager to provide a Notice of Tenant Rights information sheet that would inform tenants of their rights and access to resources when a Notice to Vacate was delivered. She added that the proposed City Ordinance would be presented to City Council on June 25, 2020 and would apply beyond the COVID-19 emergency period.

Ms. Soto reported that the Department of Human Services Department would lead the Financial Counseling component of the Recovery Center with a budget of \$4.12 million: Staff support: \$850,000; expansion of contracted Family Services to assist with counseling efforts: \$1.4 million; direct assistance to clients: \$1.75 million; and provide certified financial products to clients: \$120,000.

Ian Benavidez reported on the Family Independence Initiative (FII) strategy with a budget of \$4 million. He stated that the FII expanded upon the UpTogether Program, a self-sufficiency and success-focused model to help residents increase their income and build assets over a two-year period and included one-time emergency cash assistance of \$500 to 2,000 vulnerable residents.

Mr. Benavidez reported that the Door-to-Door Engagement strategy was a Department of Human Services initiative with a budget of \$500,000. He stated that an outreach equity-driven approach targeted 30,000 vulnerable residents likely to be disproportionately and negatively impacted by COVID-19. He added that partnering agencies would contact residents to inform them of available resources beginning July 2020.

Chairman Treviño asked staff to provide recommendations of direct cash assistance to qualifying residents.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan asked how many families were assisted at eviction hearings. She asked of any additional funding obtained through grants or philanthropy groups. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that three individuals registered for the program as a result of staff presence. She added San Antonio Area Foundation contributed \$100,000, Wells Fargo Bank contributed \$25,000 and many donations were received in the range of \$10 to \$100. She stated she would provide a report on the donations and noted that additional Community Block Development Grant funding was anticipated.

Councilmember Viagran asked staff to clarify restructuring of the EHAP to address non-cooperative landlords and direct cash assistance to tenants. She voiced concern for the 30-day EHAP process. She asked of the Emergency FII and the UpTogether FII processes. Assistant City Manager Houston confirmed that a change in payment structure occurred two weeks ago when staff identified various issues with landlords of small properties. She stated that vendor registration issues were quickly addressed by remitting direct rental payments to landlord and direct cash assistance to tenants. Director Soto confirmed that several grassroots organizations reported landlords were not responding timely, had technical difficulties with the PDF format, and some believed the communication from the City to be spam. She confirmed that no response was initially received from approximately 3,000 landlords which was the basis for immediate outreach

to landlords. She stated that the payment process was restructured to avoid a backlog of vendors remit payments as timely as possible. Patrick Steck explained that the two separate FII programs required separate enrollment but once enrolled in one program, the enrollment for the second process was much quicker as the majority of required paperwork was obtained through the first enrollment. He added that the Emergency Assistance FII was a weeklong process and the UpTogether FII was a 2-year program, with both having linked resources.

Councilmember Viagran asked if Bexar County would be adopting the Notice of Tenant Rights. She requested a copy of the Door-to-Door-Engagement Map which prioritized outreach to 30,000 residents in targeted zip codes and census tracts. She noted the low amount of EHAP applicants in Council District 5 and requested that staff continue its investigation of vulnerable residents within the area. She requested staff to present further direct cash assistance strategies at the next meeting. Assistant City Manager Houston stated she would provide further information regarding Bexar County adopting the Notice of Tenant Rights.

Councilmember Courage noted the number of landlords not enrolled in EHAP and asked if legal support would be provided for every eviction court case and asked if unemployment status was verified during the EHAP process. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that the Judge would address the parties at the time of the eviction hearing and ask if they were interested in receiving assistance. She added that the City's Risk Mitigation Fund or Housing Assistance Program could be used to help relocate tenants. Deputy City Attorney Ed Guzman added that if a landlord or property owner did not want assistance, it would be to the Judge's discretion to delay the hearing for a period of time so that the parties could further negotiate. Assistant City Manager Houston verified that EHAP applicants were screened to determine all benefits they were receiving.

Chairman Treviño noted that 75% of EHAP applicants were females ranging in age from 26 to 45 and expressed concern for single mothers. He requested that staff provide further detailed statistics on EHAP applicants to provide better wraparound services and additional direct assistance strategies. He asked of the Low Cost Refund Anticipation Loan Program. Dr. Bridger stated that the City's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program charged a refund anticipation fee of approximately \$20.

Councilmember Viagran moved to approve and forward the Notice to Tenants Rights to City Council on June 25, 2020. Councilmember Courage seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Overview of Culture and Neighborhood Services Council Committee Dashboard (as of June 1, 2020).

Assistant City Manager Houston provided an update on amendments made to the Dashboard as a result of the pandemic. She reported that tree adoption activities ceased for the months of March, April, and May due to COVID-19; therefore the goal for trees adopted was at 90% for 6,000, reduced from the original goal of 8,500; the goal for trees planted was at 74% of 2,500, reduced from the original goal of 3,500. She reported that the Under One Roof Program goal was at 50% of 300, reduced from the original goal of 530. She stated that commercial permits issued were at 67%, residential permits issued were at 98%, and 185 demolition permits were issued. She added

that sidewalk completion was on target at 50% of 35.79 miles completed. She reported that meal service at senior centers was changed to delivery service, serving approximately 400,000 seniors, with an additional 240,000 meals served between June 1, 2020 through September 30, 2020.

Councilmember Viagran asked if EHAP statistics would appear on the Dashboard. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that she would provide the Committee with a weekly update on EHAP and staff would create a separate dashboard for COVID-19 funding.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan requested that the Dashboard include the number of box fans distributed to Seniors, the number of individuals and families that received Food Bank distributions, and the number of urban gardens coordinated.

Chairman Treviño requested that staff collaborate with the Risk Mitigation Fund stakeholder group to create an EHAP dashboard that would display remaining funds available, funds expended weekly, applications received, applications in process, and applications completed by zip code, average time from application submission to completion, number of incomplete or unsuccessful applications, and number of applications per month.

3. Briefing on June 25th Culture and Neighborhood Services Council Committee meeting.

- EHAP status update to include ideas to increase direct cash assistance
- Presentation of the three remaining strategies under Housing Security Pillar as part of the City's COVID19 Recovery and Resilience Plan: Digital Platform, Homeless Strategic Plan, and the expansion of the Domestic Violence Plan
- Update on the formation of a Renters Commission and efforts to provide more public input

Adjourn

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:21pm.

Roberto Treviño, Chairman

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Cano
Office of the City Clerk