

**CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
NEIGHBORHOOD AND HOUSING SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

TO: Erik Walsh, City Manager
FROM: Verónica R. Soto, Director, NHSD
COPY: Mayor and City Council; Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager
SUBJECT: Proposed Amendments to the Emergency Housing Assistance Program
DATE: February 17, 2021

In January 2021, the U.S. Treasury awarded the City an additional \$46.8 million for rental and utility assistance. The additional funding will increase the EHAP budget to \$133.6 million and fund the program through September 2021.

As a result of the additional funding from the US Treasury and the potential for more federal funding, the City is recommending some amendments to the EHAP. The recommendations consider feedback from various stakeholders to include the Mayor and Council, Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee, Housing Commission, staff that administers the EHAP, applicants, outreach partners, a survey that was co-developed with the Housing Commission that had over 7,000 responses, and other stakeholder groups. The recommendations also consider the eligible uses for the federal funding which states that the funds can only be used for rental and utility assistance and cannot be used for cash assistance.

The EHAP is currently tiered and provides more benefits to those making less than 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Applicants are eligible to get up to 2 months of rental/mortgage assistance and a 3rd month of cash assistance.

Emergency Housing Assistance Program Allowances						
Current						
AMI	Months 1 and 2					Month 3
	Rent/Mortgage	SAWS	CPS	Internet	FII Cash Grant	FII Cash Grant
<50%	✓	✓	✓	✓	Up to \$300	\$500
51% - 80%	✓					\$250

Staff proposed the following amendments to the Housing Commission and Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee (CNSC):

- Keep the tiered system
- Provide up to 6 months of assistance versus the current 2 months of assistance
- Eliminate cash assistance as an automatic benefit to applicants.

Emergency Housing Assistance Program				
Proposed on February 12, 2021				
AMI	Up to 6 months			
	Rent/Mortgage	SAWS	CPS	Internet
<50%	✓	✓	✓	✓
51% - 80%	✓			

Staff also recommended administrative enhancements based on the feedback we received from the survey and other stakeholder groups.

- Enhance the referral system and integrate the referral system into the online application system and call center. Each applicant will be asked if they need additional assistance other than the rental, mortgage, and utility assistance they are getting through the EHAP. If the answer is yes, the applicant will be connected to a Benefits Navigator in the Financial and Housing Recovery Center who will then perform an assessment on the applicant and connect them to those benefits that they need.
- Develop an application assistance program for those applicants that do not have access to a computer or the ability to complete the application on their own.

The CNSC approved to advance the recommendations to the full City Council with consideration of the feedback and requests from each Committee member. Primary feedback included the following:

- Expand utility assistance to the families making between 51% to 80% AMI.
- Extend the term of eligibility from 2 months of assistance to 12 months of assistance.
- Further clarify that cash assistance is still available through the referral program.
- Coordinate referral system with the Foodbank.

Staff evaluated each of the requests and recommends the following.

- Staff will expand utility assistance to all families making less than 80% of the AMI. The average AMI of an applicant receiving assistance through the EHAP is approximately 30% AMI. Since December, 15% of all applicants (999) make between 51% to 80% AMI.
- Staff will keep the proposed term of eligibility to up to 6 months. If an applicant receives 6 months of rental assistance and needs additional assistance, they can request up to 3 months of assistance from the State’s recently announced Rent Relief Program and an additional 3 months is available if the program still has funding.
- Cash will be a tool through the referral system. If through an assessment it is determined that cash assistance is the only tool available to help meet a specific need, a gift card will be provided.
- City staff will coordinate with the Foodbank as a service provider but will use the City’s referral system. The Foodbank’s referral system only does federal benefits enrollment. The Financial and Housing Recovery Center is designed to be a hub where residents can get up-to-date info on services and easily connect to benefits not only through Federal assistance programs, but also through state and local programs like unemployment and job training, with particularly close inter-departmental referrals among City of San Antonio departments and programs. The Benefits Navigators’ assessment of residents seeking financial benefits navigation is thorough and tailored to each family member’s needs.

Emergency Housing Assistance Program				
Revised on February 15, 2021				
AMI	Up to 6 months			
	Rent/Mortgage¹	SAWS	CPS	Internet
At or below 80%	✓	✓	✓	✓

¹Residents are eligible for a total of 6 months of assistance; prior assistance will be counted towards 6-month total.

These recommendations will be presented to City Council for approval as part of Item #4 on Thursday’s City Council Agenda. While not part of Thursday’s recommendations, it is important to note that NHSD continues to work with our partners to prevent eviction and displacement and to help

those experiencing homelessness. City staff are present at the Justice of the Peace (JP) courts to provide education on tenants' rights and information on resources available to assist with rental payment and relocation assistance and staff makes referrals to the City's Right to Counsel program as appropriate. NHSD works with DHS to provide resources for people experiencing homelessness to include: emergency shelter, shelter diversion funds, and rapid rehousing assistance.

At the CNSC meeting, Councilmember Trevino suggested that the Office of Innovation conduct an assessment of the Fair Housing Unit. NHSD is already working with the Office of Innovation to conduct such an assessment. The assessment will review the Fair Housing Unit's programs to determine which ones need to be reframed or expanded in response to the pandemic and recovery efforts and will also propose how to provide comprehensive services with social service partners in cases where relocation or displacement may be a concern. The assessment will commence in March and take about six months to complete.

Please contact me with any questions.