

City of San Antonio



Meeting Minutes City Council Special Meeting

Webex Meeting - No in-person public access to this meeting

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

2:00 PM

via Teleconference

To protect the health of the public and limit the potential spread of COVID 19, the City Council held this meeting via telephone conference call. These meeting standards are based upon the various suspended provisions of the Open Meetings Act issued by the Texas Governor in response to the COVID 19 crisis. These modified standards shall remain in place until further notice or until the state disaster declaration expires or is otherwise terminated by the Texas Governor. The meeting was available to the public at AT&T channel 99, Grande channel 20, Spectrum channel 21, digital antenna 16, www.sanantonio.gov/TVSA and www.Facebook.com/COSAGOV or by calling (210) 207- 5555 (password 1111).

ROLL CALL

Acting 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 item.

Mayor Nirenberg provided a summary of the City of San Antonio's first Webex Council Meeting noting that the Councilmembers would participate in the order of their respective City Council Districts.

1. Briefing on the City's response and preparedness on COVID-19.

Fire Chief Hood stated that contracts had been enacted for Isolation Care Facilities for First Responders, Public Health Employees, and the Homeless. He noted that there were six hotels which could be utilized for this purpose and guidelines for homeless shelters were being drafted. He stated that there were no tenants in the facilities outlined at this time.

Fire Chief Hood reported that 250 beds were set up at the Freeman Coliseum and an additional 250 beds would be set up by Baptist Child and Family Services (BCFS) to include laundry, food service and

showers. He noted that five lanes were currently open at the drive-thru testing site and one ambulance decontamination site was in operation at the Technical Services Building. He stated that Station 32 in the Medical Center would be converted to an ambulance decontamination site and the downtown YMCA would serve as a third decontamination site if needed.

Fire Chief Hood noted that the Follow-Up Call Center was established by Metro Health with support from the Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) Unit. He added that staff would contact individuals who previously tested positive for COVID-19 to assess their condition.

Fire Chief Hood stated that the Fire Department performed contact follow-up with the Southeast Nursing and Rehabilitation Center and assisted Metro Health with contact tracings. He noted that San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD) personnel visited 13 nursing homes for contact follow-up and evaluated 140 individuals who were either staff or residents at the nursing homes. He reported that 15 staff/residents had symptoms of COVID-19 and were tested.

Dr. Dawn Emerick stated that Metro Health was notified today that there were five additional COVID-related deaths at the Southeast Nursing and Rehabilitation Center which were not reported to Metro Health, bringing the total number of deaths at the facility to eight (COVID-related) and one (non-COVID-related). She reported that the total number of deaths in the city was 18. She noted that over the last three months, the hotline received just under 10,000 calls, 428 voice mails, and over 1,300 emails. She added that the screening tool on the COVID-19 website was visited on an average of 6,000 times per day with 3,000 completing the screening per day.

Dr. Emerick stated that several Urgent Care Clinics were testing for COVID-19 and over 2,700 individuals had been tested at the Freeman Coliseum. She noted that results of the testing were taking three to eight days, sometimes longer to be received. She stated that Clinical Pathology Lab (CPL) was contracted to process tests after the Federal program ends. She estimated that just under 5,000 tests were performed in Bexar County from all labs.

Dr. Emerick stated that positive cases were investigated by a team of Epidemiologists who gather demographic, clinical, and exposure contact information. She noted that exposure was identified in individuals which had been in close contact with those testing positive. She added that both groups were monitored, especially those in quarantine.

Dr. Emerick stated that data was analyzed on a daily and weekly basis and a web bot was established on the COVID-19 website to answer hotline questions and expand the rapid collection of data. She noted that a Provider Town Hall was held with over 670 attendees. She stated that Metro Health and its partners contacted individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 daily to ensure that they were adhering to their quarantine guidelines.

Assistant City Manager Lori Houston stated that requests for housing services had increased, with four out of five calls to the hotline requesting food or shelter. She noted that the City worked closely with the homeless population along with Haven for Hope and the South Alamo Regional Alliance for Homelessness (SARAH). She stated that as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, calls from individuals and families living week-to-week in hotels or in cars had increased. She noted that the City would launch the Homeless Connection Hotline on April 9, 2020 to connect the homeless to resources which were available.

Ms. Houston reported that Haven for Hope and other shelters were not accepting new clients which

limited the options available to the newly homeless. She stated that those living in encampments and on downtown streets were facing challenges and City staff was partnering with local churches and non-profits to ensure that their food needs were met. She noted that staff and City partners visited encampment sites throughout the day to provide hygiene kits, COVID-19 informational fliers, and access to hand washing stations. She added that the City was working closely with its homeless partners to develop appropriate protocol for shelters to refer and test homeless individuals for COVID-19.

Ms. Houston stated that the number of requests for rental assistance went from 57 requests per week to 4,100 requests per week. She noted that in response, the number of staff had doubled and redeployment of approximately 25 additional staff would occur over the next two weeks. She stated that inquiries regarding utility assistance had grown from 181 per week to approximately 750 per week. She reported that CPS Energy and SAWS were suspending disconnections until further notice and Bexar County issued a moratorium on eviction hearings. She noted that the Bexar County Tax Assessor cancelled property tax foreclosures for April and May 2020.

Ms. Houston stated that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac suspended foreclosures and evictions of Enterprise-backed single-family mortgages for at least 60 days. She noted that as part of the Federal Cares Act, a notice to vacate could not be issued for 120 days for those living in low income housing projects. She reviewed actions prohibited in the cities of Austin and El Paso, and in Hidalgo County. She presented the funding available for housing assistance:

FUNDING SOURCE	HOUSING	HOMELESS
Rental Assistance Program Fund balance	\$ 400,000	-
Utility Assistance Program Fund balance	\$ 450,000	-
San Antonio Housing Trust	\$1,000,000	-
Affordable Housing Budget	\$4,700,000	-
Cares Act (Community Development Block Grant (CDBG))	\$7,700,000	-
Cares Act (Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG))	-	\$3,900,000
Cares Act (Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA))	-	\$ 297,000

Mayor Nirenberg asked if other questions would be included on the application to assess and utilize indicators for varying needs. Ms. Houston reported that staff were partnering with the Department of Human Services and others to capture information on the needs of residents on the application. Mayor Nirenberg asked of the role of South Alamo Regional Alliance for the Homeless (SARAH). Ms. Houston stated that SARAH provided assistance in staffing the Homeless Connection Hotline and some shelters.

Mayor Nirenberg asked if there would be an opportunity to screen individuals at homeless hubs. Ms. Houston replied that staff would review options to accomplish that goal. Mayor Nirenberg asked if quarantine units were available for homeless individuals and families who tested positive for COVID-19. Ms. Houston replied that quarantine options were available for homeless individuals and families.

Councilmember Treviño asked how residential renters could be protected from evictions once the Emergency Order was lifted. Ms. Houston replied that staff were reviewing what other cities in Texas were doing and the City of Austin required a 60-day notice before a notice to vacate was issued.

City Attorney Andy Segovia noted that municipalities and local entities were limited by Bexar County and the State of Texas in what they could do to either stop or suspend eviction notices from a legal standpoint.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan asked if there were funds in the Federal Stimulus Package for mortgages. Ms. Houston reported that the Housing Assistance Program included \$14 million to assist with rental and mortgage assistance. Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan asked of the requirements to qualify for rental and mortgage assistance. Ms. Houston stated that individuals applying for rental or mortgage assistance must provide proof of hardship such as proof that they filed for unemployment or a letter from their employer stating that they had been laid off or their hours had been reduced. She noted that to qualify, individuals could not be above 100% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or 80% AMI if CDBG funds were utilized.

Councilmember Viagran asked how many San Antonio Police Department (SAPD) Officers had tested positive for COVID-19. Ms. Villagómez reported that there were three confirmed cases and one pending confirmation. Councilmember Viagran asked how many San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD) Firefighters had tested positive for COVID-19. Chief Hood replied that no Firefighters tested positive for COVID-19 but three were quarantined due to travel.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if staff were visiting homeless encampments and providing them with access to food and shelter. Dr. Colleen Bridger replied that staff visit encampments to connect the homeless to resources that they are needed.

Councilmember Gonzales asked of the cause for the increase in the homeless population. Dr. Bridger reported that shelters were limiting the number of new people admitted due to the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Councilmember Gonzales asked if individuals were moved from Haven for Hope to Margil Elementary School. Dr. Bridger replied that a small number of individuals were being moved from Haven for Hope to Margil Elementary School to increase social distancing in the evening hours.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked if homeless individuals who could not be accepted at Haven for Hope were tracked. Dr. Bridger reported that shelters were asked to provide the phone number for the Homeless Hotline for assistance through a Case Manager or counseling staff. Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked what was being done to ensure that individuals working at testing sites were adhering to social distancing guidelines and/or standards. Dr. Emerick reported that she would follow up with Metro Health's plan to address the issue.

Councilmember Sandoval requested information on outreach to non-English speaking individuals. She asked if shelters had space to guarantee social distancing. Dr. Bridger replied that they did. Councilmember Sandoval asked if individuals in homeless encampments were offered shelter. Dr. Bridger replied that there were no shelters which were accepting the general population of homeless but shelter could be provided for a homeless family. Councilmember Sandoval asked where outreach efforts were focused. Dr. Bridger replied that outreach was focused in six zip codes on the eastside, four zip codes on the westside, five zip codes on the southside, and five zip codes in the center city.

Councilmember Pelaez asked of the capabilities of the online Bot on the City's website. Dr. Bridger stated that the Bot could answer questions quickly and provide links to additional information.

Councilmember Perry asked if any general funds dollars would be allocated for housing assistance. Ms. Houston replied that the remaining balance in the Rental Assistance Program would as part of the FY

2020 Budget.

Councilmember Courage asked what percentage of seniors received meals at senior centers were still receiving them. Dr. Bridger replied that she would provide that information. Councilmember Courage asked of the percentage of students in San Antonio schools who were still receiving meals. Dr. Bridger stated that information would have to be gathered from the school districts. Councilmember Courage suggested that a liaison share information from the five working groups with Councilmembers.

Gordon Hartman stated that the first meetings of the working groups began April 2, 2020. He noted that five Working Group Managers would be appointed by the City Manager to work directly with co-chairs, members, and resource leads of the working groups. He stated that the Working Group Managers would consolidate and organize information. He noted that weekly briefings would be provided to Mayor Nirenberg and Judge Wolff.

Erik Walsh stated that the food bank and the food security working group would continue to track and address food security issues over the next 10 to 12 weeks. He added that staff would continue to work with homeless shelters to continue tracking the number of homeless individuals who were not admitted into shelters.

Mayor Nirenberg stated that the City Council could discuss opportunities for public comment. He noted that extension of the Declaration of Public Health Emergency would be considered on Thursday, April 9, 2020 and staff would be available to discuss updates.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, Mayor Nirenberg adjourned the meeting at 4:00 pm.

APPROVED

RON NIRENBERG
Mayor

Attest:

TINA J. FLORES
Acting City Clerk