

MUNICIPAL COURT ADVISORY SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 11, 2020 at 2:00 PM
VIDEOCONFERENCE

Subcommittee Present:	Councilmember Melissa Cabello Havrda, <i>District 6, Chair</i> Councilmember Adriana Rocha Garcia, <i>District 4</i> Councilmember Ana Sandoval, <i>District 7</i>
Staff Present:	Camila Kunau, <i>Assistant City Attorney</i> ; Frederick P. Garcia, Jr., <i>Municipal Court Clerk</i> ; Caitlin Krobot, <i>City Manager's Office</i> ; Nancy Cano, <i>Office of the City Clerk</i>
Others Present:	Honorable Judge Carla Obledo, <i>Presiding Judge</i>

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Cabello Havrda called the meeting to order.

1. Discuss and recommend appointments of Municipal Judges.

Presiding Judge Carla Obledo provided a brief update on the current activities at the Municipal Court Facility. She reported that the San Antonio Municipal Court closed its doors to in-person hearings and traffic on March 20, 2020 due to COVID-19, in accordance with guidelines set forth by the City and Metro Health Department. She stated that a call center and an email process were established for the public to contact the Municipal Court to conduct core business. She reported that on May 7, 2020, the Municipal Court set up a contact-free, walk-up kiosk to serve the needs of individuals who were assigned court hearing dates.

Presiding Judge Obledo reported that on June 1, 2020, the Municipal Court resumed court hearings through virtual videoconferences that were available for the public to view on an established, dedicated YouTube channel on the Municipal Court's website. She stated that individuals charged with domestic violence and other criminal offenses were summoned to court at and were able to discuss their case with the prosecutor and Judge contact-free through the kiosk system or via videoconference. She added that fingerprints were taken of those individuals that had not previously complied with DPS fingerprint requirements. She noted that Magistrate Court continued to operate on a 24/7 continual basis through weekends and holidays.

Presiding Judge Obledo reported that approximately 430 calls and emails were processed on a daily basis since the establishment of the Municipal Court call center. She stated that the call center was very successful and would continue in operation post-COVID-19. She added that a "snap engagement" feature was added to the Municipal Court website that enabled a chat box to appear with a representative online to offer assistance.

Presiding Judge Obledo reported that Juvenile Case Managers were actively working in the field and assisted school districts for outreach to students that were not engaged in remote learning. She stated that South San, Southside and Harlandale Independent School Districts were very complimentary of the work the Juvenile Case Managers performed and credited them with the success of some students receiving their high school diplomas. She added that the Juvenile Case Managers would continue to work with the school districts throughout the summer and into the new school year. She noted that school districts would

adopt changes to truancy policies regarding extended remote learning and the Municipal Court would be at the ready for system changes, as needed.

Councilmember Sandoval requested an individualized summary update for each Court within the Municipal Court in follow up to Presiding Judge Obledo's briefing. She requested budget information for the Municipal Court. Frederick Garcia reported that revenues and expenditures were reported separately as the Municipal Court operated as a third branch of government. He reported of a direct, negative impact on its General Revenue Funds for the core collection of traffic fines. He stated that traffic fine collections were cyclical and dependent on volume and the promotion of grant-funded programs, such as Click it or Ticket. Due to COVID-19, officers were not issuing street citations and consequently, no new cases were incoming. He added that due to COVID-19 closures, older cases were postponed or reset. He reported that the most significant negative impacts were to the security fund, the juvenile truancy fund, and the technology fund, all of which were replenished with funds allocated through a mid-year budget adjustment from the City's General Fund. He stated that the Office of Management and Budget was preparing budget projections for the rest of the fiscal year and beyond. He added that he would provide a report on estimated revenue losses.

Chairwoman Cabello Havrda requested a presentation to the Subcommittee on the types of courts managed by the Municipal Court and a more comprehensive presentation on its budget. She asked of the types of calls received by the Call Center. Presiding Judge Obledo stated that many calls were traffic-related. She noted that most callers requested extensions to pay outstanding citation fees and for resetting of court hearings. She recognized that many individuals were struggling financially due to COVID-19 and the priority was public safety. She added that many individuals with older citations actually paid their fines as they needed their cases resolved in order to have their driver's license privileges restored. Presiding Judge Obledo added that many juvenile cases were set for court in July via videoconference or through the kiosk to resolve their cases.

Chairwoman Cabello Havrda reported that the Municipal Court consisted of 10 full-time Judges and 6 part-time Judges. She stated that all the Judges, except one part-time Judge, had re-applied for their appointments. She added that several attorneys who met the qualifications also submitted applications. She noted that a total of 18 applicants for full-time Judge and 8 applications for part-time Judge were received. She stated that all current terms expired on April 30, 2020, with Judges serving in a holdover capacity due to COVID-19. She noted that the suspension of meetings due to COVID-19, the Committee was not able to conduct interviews and forward its appointment recommendations to City Council. She added that budget development meetings were to begin in July, with a proposed budget to be approved by City Council in mid-September. She stated that City Council would review across the board City programs, policies, and finances to develop a balanced budget. She observed that it was practical and prudent for the Municipal Court to stay the course and continue with its current status of Judges until a budget was in place. She requested a discussion of the merits of continuing with Judges in a holdover capacity until the adoption of the City's fiscal budget for FY 2021.

At this time, Councilmember Rocha Garcia joined the meeting.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked of the number of pending animal cruelty citations and the range of fees imposed. She voiced concern for individuals that were unemployed due to COVID-19 and their inability to pay the fees. She agreed with the assessment for the continuance of Municipal Judges in a holdover capacity until the adoption of the City's fiscal budget for FY 2021. Presiding Judge Obledo stated that she would provide the information regarding the number of pending animal cruelty cases. She added that payment plans were available and resettings were granted to individuals unable to resolve their cases, as community service options were not offered at this time due to COVID-19. She noted that given

the nature of the animal cruelty cases, the goal of compliance was most important. She added that the Animal Care Services Department was engaged to contact individuals with outstanding animal cruelty citations to ensure compliance and could make possible recommendations for dismissal or the lowering of fines or court costs. She emphasized that all the Judges were sensitive to the financial hardships brought on by COVID-19.

Councilmember Sandoval moved to continue the holdover status of all current full-time and part-time Judges until the adoption of the City's fiscal budget for FY 2021, and to bring the recommendation forward for full council consideration at the A Session to be held on June 25, 2020. Councilmember Rocha Garcia seconded the Motion. The Motion carried unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, Chair Cabello Havrda adjourned the meeting at 2:35 pm.

ATTEST:

Melissa Cabello Havrda, Chairwoman

Nancy Cano
Office of the City Clerk