



# City of San Antonio

## Agenda Memorandum

**File Number:**20-4904

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**Agenda Item Number:** 8.

**Agenda Date:** 8/17/2020

**In Control:** Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee

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**DEPARTMENT:** Neighborhood and Housing Services and Department of Human Services

**DEPARTMENT HEAD:** Verónica R. Soto, FAICP and Melody Woosley

**COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED:** City Wide

### **SUBJECT:**

Housing Security Pillar Strategies

### **SUMMARY:**

Briefing on the implementation plans for various strategies included in the Housing Security pillar of the COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Plan.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

City Council approved the COVID 19 Recovery and Resiliency Plan for the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on June 4, 2020. The plan was developed around the five Guiding Principles of: 1) Public Health and Safety; 2) Equity; 3) Braided Funding; 4) Community Resilience and 5) Well-being.

The work is comprised of four pillars: Workforce Development, Housing Security, Small Business Support, and Digital Inclusion. Each of the four pillars was assigned to a City Council Committee. The Council Committee reviews the implementation plans for each strategy in their assigned pillar. The Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee reviews the Housing Security Pillar.

### **ISSUE:**

The Neighborhood and Housing Services Department and the Department of Human Services will present an

update on the Housing Security Pillar. The approved budget for the Housing Security Pillar is \$50.5 Million. The strategies included in this pillar include:

- Fair-housing Counseling Center and Family Resource Center to provide assistance to an estimated 10,000 residents (\$27.9 million);
- Virtual and place-based financial recovery hub to serve approx. 6,500 residents (\$4 million);
- Family Independence Initiative, Up Together investment for 1,000 families (\$4 million);
- Program to connect up to 700 residents to low cost products (\$120,000);
- A door-to-door engagement initiative to help educate marginalized and vulnerable populations about COVID-19 -related resources (\$500,000);
- Digital Referral Platform for Joint Case Management (\$1.5 million);
- Homeless shelter options with services for 500 residents (\$9.2 million); and
- Domestic Violence prevention and intervention strategies (\$3.3 million).

A virtual and physical Financial and Housing Recovery Center was opened on July 1, 2020. The physical locations are at the Central Library, Neighborhood Place, and Claude Black Community Center. The centers are assisting households recovering from economic impacts of COVID-19 to become financially and housing stable and more resilient going forward through the following services:

- Financial Counseling - Financial coaching including budgeting, debt management, credit report education, and linking to consumer-friendly financial products
- Benefits Navigation/Enrollment - Assist with eligibility assessment and enrollment working with federal, state and local benefits providers and with community partners (unemployment assistance, TANF, health insurance, housing authority programs, Financial Independence Initiative, transportation, utility assistance, rent/mortgage assistance, etc.)
- Fair Housing Counseling and Rent/Mortgage Assistance - Counseling to assist with landlord/tenant disputes, eviction procedures, foreclosure prevention, and financial rent/mortgage, or utility assistance.
- Housing Repair and Rehab Assistance - Provide access to housing programs like the minor repair program, Under 1 Roof, and owner-occupied rehab program.
- Workforce assistance - Enrollment with Family Service's occupation counselors, DHS Training for Job Success program, and NXT Level and referral to Alamo Promise, Workforce Solutions Alamo, Project Quest, Goodwill, and other community workforce programs.
- Small Business recovery assistance - Financial Counseling for simple small business recovery assistance tied to family finances and referral to EDD, LaunchSA, and other community partners.
- Right to Counsel Program, Pro Bono Legal Representation for Eviction Cases through Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) and San Antonio Legal Services Associates (SALSA).

The Neighborhood and Housing Services Department leads the Fair Housing component of the Recovery Center. The budget for this initiative is \$27,874,216. The City currently offers a variety of housing resources and programs to assist vulnerable residents in our community. These include emergency housing assistance, homeowner rehabilitation programs, and right to counsel support. The \$27.8 million expanded of the emergency housing assistance program and right to counsel program as well as the staffing for the housing component of the new resource center to increase overall access to housing programs in the community. Of this amount, \$25.5 million is dedicated to the Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) and will support 10,000 families.

This funding was added to an already allocated \$25 Million from other sources and the EHAP program has been helping families since April. Of the entire \$50.3 Million allocated for direct assistance, as of July 30 we have helped 10,781 families and disbursed \$30.6 million in assistance. There are another 1,254 applications

either pending approval or under review that represent another \$3.8 million. If all of those households get approved, that is \$34.4 million spent which would leave about \$15.9 million remaining for assistance.

The remaining \$2.3 million in the Recovery Center supports the administration and staffing needs.

Starting the week of July 27, three of the five precinct courts resumed hearings. All of the hearings have the option of being virtual or telephonic. At Precinct 1 Place 1 and Precinct 3, either party is welcome to show up in person, but they are being given the option of meeting telephonically or on Zoom. Precinct 4 has resumed exclusively virtually as long as both parties have to agree to Zoom otherwise the Judge won't set a hearing date.

Since the JP courts resumed hearings on June 15th approximately 37% of cases (414 out of 1,132) have resulted in "default" judgements" meaning the Judge ruled in favor of the plaintiff because the defendant did not appear. During that same time period 43% of cases have been dismissed or reset. Dismissals and resets are due to a variety of reasons including the resident self-resolving, the landlord receiving or pending payment through rental assistance programs, or the unit being vacated as some of the cases were backlogged as far back as January.

The City has taken proactive measures to provide assistance before households show up to court. Through our partnership with the Precinct Courts, NHSD has been using eviction filing data to inform both landlords and defendants about EHAP before their hearing. That same info is provided a second time when the JP Courts send out the hearing notice to both the plaintiff and defendant to appear in court. We also are present in person at each hearing and are able to offer assistance.

The Courts team has interacted with over 150 households since the courts reopened. We have had over 50 cases reset or dismissed by providing/pending EHAP and are actively working on assisting another 100 households before their hearing date. The courts team has also been able to help 40 households that were evicted with referrals to right to counsel legal representation, relocation, and referrals to homelessness prevention programs.

Another component of this strategy is the Notice of Tenants Rights Ordinance approved by Council on June 25, 2020 that became effective on July 25, 2020. The ordinance requires a landlord or property manager to provide an information sheet to a tenant when a Notice to Vacate for Non-Payment of rent is delivered. The Notice of Tenants Rights:

- Emphasizes that Notice to Vacate does not require tenant to leave the premises;
- Advises that the tenant enter into a payment plan with landlord;
- Provides information on City and Bexar County Resources; and
- Outlines the eviction process.

The Notice applies beyond the COVID 19 emergency period and applies to all residential landlords and is attached. The fine for violating the ordinance is up to \$500 and may include multiple citations.

Presentations about the Notice of Tenants Rights have been provided to over 11 groups including community organizations, residents, and landlords/property owners. Outreach included over 10,000 mailouts to small landlords as well as frequent evictors as well as notice to all the residents who have applied for emergency housing assistance.

The Department of Human Services leads the financial counseling and benefits navigation components of the

Recovery Center. The budget for this initiative is \$4,000,000. Clients will access services through a single phone number or online portal. An Intake Specialist will conduct an initial assessment of immediate household needs; triage urgency; and schedule an in-person or virtual appointment with the appropriate financial, benefits, or housing counselor. Counselors will be cross trained to reduce need for multiple appointments and assessments. The funding for the program is broken down as follows:

- \$850k for 5 Family Support Supervisors, 1 Family Support Coordinator, 1 Contract Officer, 1 Senior Accountant, and 1 Case Aide. The funding also includes office expenses and education and marketing.
- \$1.4 million to expand out contract with Family Services to assist with the Counseling efforts.
- \$1.75 million in direct assistance for the clients to help them with financial sustainability.

Clients who seek financial counseling services may be eligible for direct assistance from the Family Independence Initiative's (FII) Up Together program. The budget for this strategy is \$4,000,000 and all \$4,000,000 will be provided to FII for direct assistance and a small amount of program administration.

Through UpTogether, participants work together to strengthen existing and create new social networks, gain access to payments of unrestricted financial capital, set goals on their self-determined paths, monitor progress, and support one another in achieving economic and social mobility. Each participant will receive direct, unrestricted payments totaling approximately \$6,000 per participant over 2 years. The payment assistance contributes to the participants' ability to remain stable as they work to increase their income and on-hand savings through activities such as job training and creating or further developing a small business. In addition, FII will establish a COVID-19 Supplementary Emergency Assistance Program to serve an estimated 2,000 residents with a one-time payment of \$500 in conjunction with accessing services such as the Recovery Hub, Head Start, and other delegate agency partner programs.

Another component of the Financial Counseling Center is that it will link residents to financial products (e.g. checking accounts, savings accounts) that are certified by the Cities for Financial Empowerment BankOn initiative. In addition, the next VITA Tax Season will include expanded Refund Anticipation Loans to provide low-cost, low-interest loans for households expecting income tax refunds. The budget for this strategy is \$120,000 and all funds will be used for staffing and to market the programs.

To reach residents who have been traditionally marginalized and are likely to disproportionately be negatively impacted by COVID-19, staff has developed a door-to-door engagement initiative to offer marginalized and vulnerable populations about COVID-19 related resources. The Department of Human Services, in collaboration with funded partner agencies, will utilize an equity driven approach to focus outreach to the most vulnerable populations. The budget for this strategy is \$500,000 and the majority will fund contracts with non-profits to assist with outreach and education.

The Department of Human Services is leading the Digital Referral Platform strategy and the Homeless Shelter Options strategy.

A new Digital Referral and Case Management Platform will provide an internal and external referral system platform to streamline case management of families across service sectors and providers. Further, they would build on collaboration and coordination efforts currently supported by the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, nonprofit partners, and community funders. The \$1.5 million in CARES Act Funding will allow staff to procure the system and necessary licenses. This effort will result in a Case Management System and Referral Platform that is used by at least 70 contracted agency partners. Once implemented, 95% of families and/or individuals will receive 2 or more referrals for wraparound services. Of those families and/or individuals who have received one or more referrals, 90% of families and/or individuals will be jointly case managed by one or

more agencies.

The Homeless Emergency Shelter and Alternative Housing Options strategy includes multiple components designed to permanently house homeless individuals; increase available emergency shelter bed space, and reduce chronic and unsheltered homelessness including diversion from homelessness, hotel bridge housing, rapid rehousing, and expanded outreach avenues and funding to quickly rehouse residents who are experiencing homelessness. The budget for this strategy is \$9.2 million and will secure 300 hotel rooms and provide services, rapidly rehouse 500 homeless individuals and families to permanent housing, outreach, and continue the operation of the homeless hotline.

The Metro Health Department leads the expansion of the Domestic Violence Programs strategy. The domestic violence strategy combines direct services through initiatives including the Domestic Violence High- Risk team and cognitive behavioral therapy for children exposed to violence, with community-wide prevention and education campaigns. The budget for the strategy is \$3.3 million and is funded through the Corona Virus Relief Fund. This funding will add more resources to the Domestic Violence High Risk Team, expand the Triple P Positive Parenting Program, and enhance the coordination among our partners and community members. This effort will result in 2 million media impressions, help enroll 400 families in the online parenting program, train 200 professionals through online opportunities, provide 1,000 therapy sessions to students experiencing violence in the home, and facilitate case management services to 400 high-risk families.

Triple P has developed and proposed the online parenting format and the campaign website will be launched August 3, 2020. Chamoy Creative has been selected as the marketing firm for the development of the domestic violence awareness campaign. Contracting for all items identified in domestic violence should be finalized the first week of August.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

This item is for briefing purposes only.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

This item is for briefing purposes only.