



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

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Agenda Item Number: 4

Agenda Date: 11/2/2020

In Control: Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee

DEPARTMENT:

Neighborhood & Housing Services Department

DEPARTMENT HEAD:

Verónica R. Soto, FAICP, Neighborhood & Housing Services Department Director

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED:

Citywide

SUMMARY:

Housing Security Pillar Strategy Update: (1) Update by Neighborhood and Housing Services on the Covid-19 Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) and discussion on proposed amendments and program evaluation; and, (2) Briefing and discussion by Department of Human Services on the cash assistance program

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

A) Update by Neighborhood and Housing Services on the Covid-19 Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) and discussion on proposed amendments and program evaluation

In response to COVID 19, City Council approved an ordinance on April 23, 2020 allowing the creation of the COVID-19 Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP). The original budget for the COVID 19 Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) of \$25,533,016 was approved in April. On June 4, 2020 City Council approved Phase II of the COVID 19 Recovery and Resiliency Plan that provided an additional \$26,944,551 in Coronavirus Relief Funds to the EHAP and on September 17, 2020 City Council approved and additional \$24,102,756 for Phase III of the EHAP bringing the total project budget to \$76,600,323. As of October 26, 2020, \$53.9 Million in assistance to over 19,000 households has been provided. Breakout by City Council District below.

Emergency Housing Assistance Program				
CD	Avg AMI %	Approved	Avg HH Size	Approved \$
1	27.8	1,887	3	\$5,163,841
2	28.3	2,454	3	\$6,815,257

3	29.3	2,144	3	\$5,843,341
4	29.5	1,738	3	\$5,048,822
5	24.9	1,467	3	\$3,768,572
6	32.9	1,952	3	\$5,677,059
7	29.0	2,080	3	\$5,840,048
8	32.1	2,197	2	\$6,333,500
9	31.9	1,465	2	\$4,382,075
10	32.4	1,667	3	\$4,994,802
Totals		19,051		53,867,317

B) Briefing and discussion by Department of Human Services on the cash assistance program

As part of the COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Plan, \$4 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) were allocated to the Family Independence Initiative (FII), a national nonprofit, to 1) establish an emergency cash assistance fund and 2) jump-start a 2-year program model that assists families in poverty to improve their financial standing. Each of the two components received \$2 million in funding to support San Antonio residents earning below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level and who have been financially affected by COVID-19. The emergency cash assistance fund served 3,920 households with \$500 in direct assistance. The 2-year UpTogether program will serve 1,000 households, providing an initial cash assistance grant of \$1,900 from the City's CRF funds, with \$3,200 in additional cash assistance provided over the two-year program by FII using non-City leveraged funding from other sources.

ISSUE:

A). Beginning October 1, 2020, the following eligibility criteria is utilized to determine assistance and applicants must:

- Reside within the San Antonio city limits
- Provide documentation of hardship due to COVID-19
- Must make less than 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI)

Assistance is tiered based on the applicants AMI:

- If an applicant's AMI is at or below 50% AMI, the applicant is eligible for 2 months of rental or mortgage assistance, utility (SAWS, CPS, Internet) assistance, and a cash grant (up to \$300). If a third month of assistance is needed, the applicant is eligible for a \$500 cash grant only.
- If an applicant's AMI is between 51% and 80%, the applicant is eligible for 2 months rental or mortgage assistance. If a third month of assistance is needed, the applicant is eligible for a \$250 cash grant only.

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

Residents who received assistance in Phase 1 or Phase 2 are eligible for 1 month of cash assistance in

alignment with the month 3 amounts in above table.

For those cases that proceed to the eviction courts as part of our right to counsel program, defendants will be eligible for up to \$5,000 in rental assistance to help address arrears.

At the last CNSC meeting, a recommendation for some changes to the program were made and a recommendation regarding college students is being presented.

The Housing Commission recently initiated discussion of an evaluation process of the EHAP at their September 14th meeting and have since vetted it through their Outreach Workgroup. Their recommended process includes a survey that was drafted by staff and Commissioners and was approved by the full Housing Commission at their October 28th meeting. The Housing Commission recommended adding additional open-ended questions and suggested that the period for survey responses allow more feedback. The survey is intended to gather information from applicants (successful and unsuccessful), landlords, and administration and outreach partners on usage, access, and outcomes from the program. Depending on audience, slightly different questions will be asked and the entire survey should take about three minutes to complete. After Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee reviews and provides feedback on the survey, it will be released through SA Speak Up the week of November 2nd and remain posted through at least December 4th.

Staff has identified a need to formalize an evaluation process for the Risk Mitigation Program/COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Program than ensures the program is successful by adjusting to the needs of the community. Staff will be working with Housing Commission to recommend a formal evaluation process and bring that recommendation to the Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee.

For information purposes as it relates to EHAP, on September 25th, the Governor announced a pilot program called the Texas Eviction Diversion Program (TEDP.) The program is designed to cover up to 6 months of rent, up to 5 of which can be arrears, for residents with evictions filed against them. In addition, the Justice of the Peace courts will seal the records related to the court case. San Antonio was selected to administer the program locally and will receive \$600,000 from the state. Up to 10% of this fund can be used for administration.

NHSD's Courts team will be responsible for implementing the program. The department is in the process of hiring two new support staff and updating our digital application system to support TEDP implementation. In the coming week, staff will be participating in trainings with TDHCA and DHS.

B). FII launched the emergency cash assistance fund of \$2 million on Monday, October 19. The program provided \$500 in direct assistance to San Antonio residents below 150% of the federal poverty level and who have been affected by COVID-19. DHS marketed the program through DHS programs, delegate agencies, immigrant services networks, and faith-based organizations. The online portal closed three and a half days after launching, having received nearly 9,000 applications. The fund served 3,920 households with \$500 in direct assistance; 2,042 applications were denied primarily for living outside the City of San Antonio, and nearly 3,000 applications were not processed due to exhaustion of funds. An additional \$900,000 would fund these pending applications (based on approval rate experience). Based on FII capacity and CRF regulations, an additional \$1.1 million could be expended by reopening the application for emergency assistance to clients in targeted programs, with the goal of serving the most vulnerable in the community.

The 2-year UpTogether program will serve 1,000 households, providing an initial cash assistance grant of \$1,900 from the City's CRF funds, with \$3,200 in additional cash assistance funded by private philanthropy. The FII 2-year UpTogether program is recruiting families now and will expend its \$2 million allocation before December 30.

ALTERNATIVES:

- A) The current Phase 3 Emergency Assistance Program Eligibility will remain in place as approved by City Council

FISCAL IMPACT:

- A) There is no fiscal impact as the Emergency Housing Assistance Program has been allocated \$24.1 Million to assist eligible families with rent, mortgage and utility assistance.
- B) The Recovery and Resiliency Plan includes \$4.0 Million to fund the FII emergency cash assistance and UpTogether programs. Staff will present City Council a financial update on the Recovery and Resiliency Plan and the City's Emergency Response at the November 4, 2020 B Session.

RECOMMENDATION:

- A) Staff recommends approval of modified Emergency Housing Assistance Program Eligibility requirements to allow for parents of college students to be listed on leases although not their primary residence. Students would have to show proof of current enrollment and parents must continue to meet other eligibility guidelines. Staff also recommends to proceed with the EHAP evaluation survey and the recommended timeline