

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

April 10, 2020

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**SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE ON COVID-19 ADVISORY COMMITTEES**

At the City Council's special called meeting on March 19, 2020, Mayor Betsy Price announced her intent to appoint a set of four advisory committees that would advise the City Council and the City Manager about urgent issues associated with the COVID-19 public health emergency. These advisory committees, each to be co-chaired by two Council members, would address issues relating to health, small business and economic recovery, education and childcare, and community services. The Health Advisory Committee, co-chaired by Brian Byrd and Dennis Shingleton, dissolved on March 23 after meeting twice, but this committee is now regrouping to analyze public health data and determine when and how the City should consider rescinding various emergency restrictions. The other three committees, however, have remained active and productive as evidenced by the following summary of their progress during the past week.

Small Business and Economic Recovery Advisory Committee, co-chaired by Cary Moon and Ann Zadeh

1. Financial Assistance: The applications for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) went live on April 3rd. The Economic Disaster Loan Program (EIDL) website is up and running smoothly and the SBA has begun to disperse funds. SBA, SCORE, and Tarrant SBDC continue to conduct webinars providing technical assistance to business owners looking to apply for help from these programs. Many of the committee members indicated that there are still a lot of questions that are keeping small businesses from applying for the PPP due to changing guidelines during the rollout. Facebook announced a \$100 million grant program for businesses in communities where they have a presence. City staff will work with the local Facebook representative and will provide more details on this program when it becomes available.
2. Communication: The City continues to push information out via email, social media, and the Internet. We need to ensure we are getting information out in a way that people can understand it, since a lot of the documentation is very complex and difficult to get through. A coordinated communication effort would be ideal, but there is a lot of sharing going on among organizations and most information is getting out to the people that it needs to reach. The committee suggested that we put together a simplified graphic to outline where companies can find resources among all the entities. Staff will work with Visit Fort Worth to complete and promote this document.
3. Rent Relief and Evictions: Committee members have been getting calls and questions about whether a moratorium on commercial rent evictions can be applied, how to deal with late fees that are accruing, and how we can keep encouraging landlords and tenants to reach out to each other. The EIDL program is available for both landlords and sole proprietorships and we should keep encouraging landlords to talk to tenants and vice versa. Some communities across the country have issued moratoriums that have been extended to commercial tenants and staff will review how those were established. Staff is also having conversations with Texas A&M Law School about the potential to offer *pro bono* legal counseling to small business owners related to this issue and will report back on the outcome. Staff confirmed that no new certificate of occupancy will be required when businesses re-open. However, if the power is turned off, this would require a new electrical inspection. City staff will determine how we can expedite this process if necessary.
4. Employment and Recovery: Tarrant Workforce Solutions Jobs Now website (<https://workforcesolutions.net/category/jobs-now/>) is connecting potential employees with companies that are hiring. The Miles Foundation is also working on a similar platform to connect employers that are looking to hire furloughed workers. The Alliance Opportunity Center is helping on job openings in the Alliance area of Fort Worth. A new program utilizing the Shifts Smart program, (<https://www.getshiftdone.org/north-texas>) has begun offering job opportunities to those affected in the

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restaurant and hospitality industries. The Sparkyard website (<https://www.sparkyard.co/>) also has a resource page that can support and encourage entrepreneurial efforts. Economic downturns are generally good for start-up activity and the City needs to begin putting a plan together to increase these initiatives. A sub-committee will be established to work on these efforts.

Education and Childcare Advisory Committee, co-chaired by Carlos Flores and Kelly Allen Gray

1. Internet access: During the week of April 6-10, the Fort Worth Independent School District launched its online learning program for all students in all schools. The district expects this program to be successful but is mindful of concerns expressed by some committee members about the program's impacts upon families in which parents may lack the technical, educational, and/or language skills necessary to facilitate their children's online learning. The district has agreed to monitor this situation and to keep the committee apprised. The committee has expressed appreciation for the district's cooperation and the City has reaffirmed its willingness to assist the district in any way possible.
2. Childcare services for families of essential workers: Child Care Associates has expanded the geographic scope of its online search tool at <http://find.bestplace4kids.com/families>, so that essential workers throughout the state can now find licensed childcare providers near their homes and worksites. Furthermore, effective April 6, essential workers with jobs as identified by the Texas Workforce Commission and with incomes at or below 150 percent of the state median income (e.g. \$118,000 for a family of four) may apply for 100 percent subsidies of childcare fees charged by licensed providers. To apply for these subsidies, essential workers in Tarrant County should visit the local Child Care Management Services (CCMS) website, [tarrantcountyccms.org](http://tarrantcountyccms.org); complete a two-page online application; and use the "FIND!" search tool to find a licensed provider that accepts subsidies near their home or worksite. They should expect a CCMS caseworker to contact them within 24-48 hours thereafter to finalize and activate the assistance. The assistance covers a three-month emergency period and is limited in availability.

Community Services Advisory Committee, co-chaired by Gyna Bivens and Jungus Jordan

1. Food security: City distribution of evening meals for children at community centers continues, along with food distribution by Meals on Wheels, Sixty and Better, YMCA, schools districts, and others. The Tarrant Area Food Bank (TAFB), Meals on Wheels, and Catholic Charities have partnered to deliver fresh produce and senior-friendly staples to homebound elderly and disabled persons. TAFB will provide 10- to 15-pound boxes to be collected by Catholic Charities. Meals on Wheels will add five frozen meals and then Catholic Charities drivers will deliver to the homebound. This new partnership will be operational next Monday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, starting with 150 boxes per day and growing until need is met.
2. Communications: City Communications continues sending daily community bulletins to neighborhood organizations and regular bulletins to faith leaders. The City and United Way are encouraging the public to use 2-1-1 to find community services. City Communications is mailing a large postcard with resource information in English and Spanish to all Fort Worth residents, providing fliers for grocery stores, sharing on NextDoor, etc. The City's resource website is: <http://fortworthtexas.gov/COVID-19/community-resources>. City Communications is also identifying ways to call Fort Worth residents, particularly seniors and low-income residents, in order to provide resource information.

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3. Housing and Utility Assistance: The City via Community Action Partners is providing housing and utility assistance to qualified residents and is able to waive the requirement for birth certificates between April 7 and August 7: <http://fortworthtexas.gov/cap>. Low-income residents are also eligible for deferred payment plans for electric bills and may call the Public Utility Commission to enroll: 866-454-8387.

If you have any questions about this information, please contact the following staff members as appropriate:

- Health: Valerie Washington, Assistant City Manager (817-392-6192);
- Small Business and Economic Recovery: Robert Sturns, Economic Development Director (817-392-2663);
- Education and Childcare: Fernando Costa, Assistant City Manager (817-392-6122); and
- Community Services: Dana Burghdoff, Assistant City Manager (817-392-8018).

**David Cooke**  
**City Manager**