

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

April 17, 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 dissolved on March 23 after meeting twice, but this committee has been reconstituted as the Committee on Reopening the Economy (CORE) to analyze public health data and determine when and how the City should consider rescinding various emergency restrictions. The other three committees have remained active and productive as evidenced by the following summary of their progress during the past week. The co-chairs of all four committees appeared with Mayor Price in her daily COVID-19 briefings this week to inform the public about that progress.

Committee on Reopening the Economy, co-chaired by Brian Byrd and Dennis Shingleton

This newly appointed committee consists of the two co-chairs and ten prominent civic leaders, including experts in public health and various aspects of the local economy. The committee met for the first time on April 14 and will meet again on April 21. In her charge to the committee, Mayor Price emphasized the following points:

1. Critical issues: We need to communicate to the public: When will it be safe to re-open, how is it going to look, and how did we reach that decision?
2. City leadership: These questions may get answered in part at the county, state, or federal level, and those answers might pre-empt some of our decisions. We also realize that this is a highly fluid situation. Nevertheless, most of the crisis decisions were City-led at the front end and they are likely to be City-led as we emerge from the pandemic. We cannot wait and hope that someone else is going to figure this out for us.
3. Guidelines and phasing: Within the next two weeks, local public health officials can help us to articulate clear guidelines as to when we should be reopening. Also, local industry and community leaders can help us to articulate what that should mean for key activities, such as religious gatherings, large public events, hotels and tourism, restaurants and bars, and many other businesses. We expect the reopening to occur in a phased manner as any loosening of restrictions will impact these activities differently.

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

1. Financial assistance: The application process for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) has gone live and there have been many applications already processed. Mike Pavell (Bank of America) and Tony Prenger (Pinnacle Bank) joined the call to give some input on how they are processing the loan applications. Bank of America indicated that they have had 106,000 requests for forbearance thus far but are getting clients funded. They are only accepting applications from current account holders due to anti-money-laundering security measures that must take place with new customers. As of last week, Pinnacle Bank has been accepting applications and has had over 450 loans approved locally for \$63 million. They are also only accepting applications from account holders currently.

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2. Communications: The committee discussed how we could communicate what to do once a business receives the PPP funding. Tarrant SBDC said that they will investigate best practices. The Sparkyard website was offered as an option to push out the information. Concerns were raised by multiple committee members about the support network and support systems for small businesses and having a succinct way to communicate with them outside of email. The City completed the one-page guide discussed at the last meeting and this has been placed on the website. Tarrant SBDC has a call center that has gone live and they have been taking calls to answer FAQs and connect the businesses with an advisor if needed. They have been working on translating all their information into Spanish and Vietnamese.
3. Employment and recovery: City staff has been talking to the Fort Worth Chamber on how to encourage the Fort Worth community to support its own through "buy local" programs. The committee would like to drill down on what that looks like and engage Visit Fort Worth for the marketing efforts. There are several initiatives under way including a "Made in Fort Worth" branding effort and a "Hold Down the Fort" video series that is telling stories of how COVID is impacting businesses. The committee recommends building on those initiatives and pursuing them in a coordinated way.

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

1. Internet access: On April 14, the Fort Worth Independent School District board of trustees voted to support the Learning at Home initiative by ratifying the emergency purchase of 3,200 Chromebook computers and 5,000 Internet hot spots to be distributed on April 16 and 17 at elementary school sites for students who lack Internet access. The committee supports these efforts but has focused much of its attention upon the challenges facing many low-income and immigrant families in which parents may lack the technical, educational, and/or language skills necessary to facilitate their children's online learning. These problems tend disproportionately to affect African-American and Hispanic families, who already faced significant educational disparities before the onset of coronavirus. The school district shares these concerns and has been keeping the committee informed about their efforts to address them.
2. Childcare services for families of essential workers: Through the leadership of Child Care Associates and other organizations, we now have an online search tool whereby the families of essential workers can easily find licensed childcare providers near their homes and worksites. Essential workers include not only hospital employees and first responders, but also critical infrastructure workers, grocery and restaurant employees, and many others upon whom we depend for essential services. We have over 7,700 childcare slots available at more than 400 licensed facilities throughout Tarrant County. The website is <http://find.bestplace4kids.com>. Furthermore, we also have access to 100-percent childcare subsidies for essential workers with incomes at or below 150 percent of the state median income, or \$118,000 for a family of four. These subsidies will cover a three-month emergency period and we currently have funding for approximately 600 essential workers. To apply for these subsidies, essential workers should visit the local Child Care Management Services website, <https://tarrantcountycms.org>, and complete a simple online application. A caseworker will contact them within 48 hours to finalize and activate the assistance. The main challenge seems to be promoting awareness of available childcare slots and available childcare subsidies among essential workers. Through April 16, Child Care Associates has received 376 applications and has enrolled 142 children for the 600 subsidized slots, but the committee believes that the demand would be greater if more essential workers were aware of these resources. The City's Communications and Public Engagement Department has been addressing this challenge by intensifying publicity about the program.

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1. Food security: City distribution of evening meals for children at community centers is averaging 3,600 to 4,000 per week. The Tarrant Area Food Bank (TAFB), Meals on Wheels, and Catholic Charities partnership began delivering fresh produce, frozen meals, and senior-friendly staples to homebound elderly and disabled persons on April 14th. This is in addition to the 5,000 meals per day delivered by Meals on Wheels volunteers. Older adults obtaining meals from Sixty and Better at City community centers has increased from 125 to 173 adults. Committee members and staff are gathering food distribution locations and service zip code data to identify gaps.
2. Communications: On April 10, the City issued a robocall to residents in zip codes 76112, 76116, and 76119 with high numbers of COVID-19 cases. On April 14, the City mailed a large postcard in English and Spanish to residents in those same zip codes with shelter in place guidance and resource information. The City will robocall all residents by April 17 and will mail a flier to many more residents with COVID-19 resource information by early next week. City Communications has provided 10,000 fliers this week to grocery stores and meal distribution locations at community centers, United Community Centers, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, and churches. The flier has also been emailed to distribution lists including NextDoor, Fort Worth ISD, and faith-based groups. Communications is creating a distribution list of Spanish-speaking churches to send Spanish faith-based bulletins with COVID-19 resources. City News and social media now include positive "Worth Sharing" stories from neighborhoods and churches. The City's resource website is: <http://fortworthtexas.gov/COVID-19/community-resources>.
3. Housing and utility assistance: The City via Community Action Partners continues to provide housing and utility assistance to qualified residents: <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:

- Reopening the Economy: Chelsea Adler, Chief of Staff (817-392-6363);
- 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