

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

April 24, 2020

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

This is the fifth weekly update on the work of certain *ad hoc* advisory committees appointed by the City Council to address urgent issues associated with the COVID-19 public health emergency. These advisory committees, each co-chaired by two Council members, are dealing with reopening the economy, small business and economic recovery, education and childcare, and community services. The following is a summary of their progress during the past week.

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

The CORE group met this week and reviewed draft guidelines for the reopening of restaurants submitted by a committee member. The committee will now break into smaller groups focused on different kinds of venues and businesses, i.e. restaurants and bars, places of worship, hotels, etc. Code Compliance has offered to assign a staff person to each subcommittee in order to help them develop recommendations and proposed guidelines for reopening. The committee will also work to respond to the Governor's anticipated announcement on Monday, April 27th.

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) overloaded the system during the roll-out. The program stopped taking applications on April 16th, but small businesses that started the process were told to continue as there will be another round of funding. There continued to be much frustration on how the funds were distributed, with several large payouts going to established corporate companies. It was noted that having a relationship with your banker seemed to be a key component on getting funding. The committee asked the City to lobby for additional PPP funding and a relaxation of the rule on 75 percent of funding being dedicated to covering payroll expenses. This requirement is not helping smaller business and the group urged everyone to contact their congressional representative.
2. Communication: Communication remains an issue for certain populations in Fort Worth. A recent call survey conducted by Economic Development indicated there was low awareness on the Eastside of the available resources for business owners. Areas such as Las Vegas Trail also did not feel connected to the recovery efforts. The committee indicated that Community Frontline could be a good resource for the Eastside and staff will connect with them to share information. The committee also suggested that we should focus on traditional media channels such as newspaper, radio, and television as opposed to email and social media to distribute information.
3. Employment/Recovery: The committee will establish a subcommittee to focus on entrepreneurial opportunity considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Cameron Cushman will chair this subcommittee and he provided a high-level overview of a six-point plan to foster recovery efforts. This subcommittee plans to begin meeting next week to provide some guidelines on how we can facilitate new growth opportunities.

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

1. Internet access: The Fort Worth Independent School District has been distributing Chromebook computers and Internet hot spots 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. Several non-profit organizations associated with the committee will be using their summer programs to help these parents in acquiring the needed skills.

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2. Childcare services for families of essential workers: We now have 8,778 childcare slots available at 678 licensed facilities throughout Tarrant County, including 307 childcare centers and 371 family homes. The website for the online search tool is <http://find.bestplace4kids.com>. Furthermore, Child Care Associates has now received 820 applications for childcare subsidies that are available to essential workers with incomes at or below 150 percent of the state median income, or \$118,000 for a family of four. They have already enrolled 321 participants, making Tarrant County's participation rate the highest among all urban counties in Texas. To apply for these subsidies, essential workers should visit the local Child Care Management Services website, <https://tarrantcountyccms.org>, and complete a simple online application. A caseworker will contact them within 48 hours to finalize and activate the assistance.
3. Summer programs. The City Manager on April 17 issued an Informal Report about the status of various summer programs provided by the Park and Recreation, Neighborhood Services, and Library departments. These programs, all of which have been affected by the pandemic, include Summer Day Camp, Mobile Recreation, Aquatics, Youth Sports, Adult Sports, and the Mayor's Summer Reading Challenge. In short, the City will be able to provide some program activities this summer in accordance with public health guidelines, but some activities have been canceled and others will be subject to future decisions as the pandemic unfolds. The advisory committee is discussing these City-sponsored programs as they relate to similar or complementary programs sponsored by the Fort Worth ISD, the Boys and Girls Clubs, United Community Centers, AB Christian Learning Center, and other non-profit organizations.

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

1. Food security: City staff has mapped food distribution locations, and they match up well with low-income and food desert areas. The Tarrant Area Food Bank (TAFB), Meals on Wheels, and Catholic Charities partnership delivered over 1,000 supplemental nutrition food boxes this week, in addition to the 5,000 meals per day delivered by Meals on Wheels. Churches and faith-based organizations are distributing food as well, along with other agencies. TAFB reports continued strong food supply.
2. Communications: Library staff started calling 10,000+ cardholders over age 65 and directing them to community resources on the City's website. Last week, Community Engagement finished contacting 1,200 neighborhood leaders for a second round of wellness checks, and this week started calling 6,000 seniors in the 76104 ZIP code, to be followed by 76105. Communications is mailing a flier to 80,000+ residents in vulnerable ZIP codes with COVID-19 resource information. Staff has also translated all City web service links to Spanish and communicated to 400 Spanish-language faith leaders on community resources and COVID-19 testing information. The City's resource website is <http://fortworthtexas.gov/COVID-19/community-resources>.
3. Housing and utility assistance: Community Action Partners, a City-sponsored program, is expecting to receive \$4 million from the CARES Act for housing, utility assistance, and job training, including training for reentry individuals. Federal maximum income guidelines have increased from 150% to 200% of poverty level to increase the number of households eligible for assistance. The CAP website is <http://fortworthtexas.gov/cap>. The Apartment Association of Tarrant County reports that most renters made their monthly payments for April, but they express concerns about May and June.

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4. Mental health and domestic violence/child abuse: My Health My Resources of Tarrant County (MHMR) reports that many calls to their 24/7 hotline are for depression and anxiety due to COVID-19. Help Me Grow North Texas provides services to families with children and, with MHMR, is helping to prevent child abuse. The Apartment Association of Tarrant County is sharing information on domestic violence and child abuse with its network.

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