

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

April 3, 2020

Page 1



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, economics/business, education/childcare, and community services. The Health Advisory Committee dissolved on March 23 after meeting twice and observing that committee members were already meeting regularly to coordinate pandemic-related activities. The other three committees, however, remain active and productive. The following is a brief update on their progress.

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

1. Financial Assistance: Committee discussed the SBA Economic Injury Disaster loan details, process and time it takes to access funds. Applicants were experiencing significant delays due to issues such as a complex application process, the website being down, long phone wait times, and processing turnaround. Tarrant County SBDC has conducted four WebEx sessions on the program with three more planned. Recommended that we continue offering assistance via video or additional webinars to help explain the process. Hillwood offered office space for SBA-related activities and will coordinate with the Fort Worth Chamber. The City should also encourage communication by tenants with landlords and by landlords with banks to work together and defer rent payments if possible.
2. Communication: Communication in general has been a challenge since there are several organizations posting resources to help business owners, but not everyone may be aware of them. Recommended that we focus on a central and well-marketed resource page for all business-related updates, information, and financial assistance. We also need better utilization of traditional press and press releases to inform our business community. There is also some misinformation being spread about post-COVID reopening, specifically if they will need a new health inspection and certificate of occupancy and the time it will take to get these. Staff will work on a one-pager explaining these codes and policies to dispel any confusion.
3. Unemployment: Many firms, such as Amazon and Walmart, are hiring during the pandemic and those should be promoted along with the various resources for small business owners. Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County has a Jobs Now webpage (<https://workforcesolutions.net/jobs-now-2020-update-03-31-20-2/>) for employers to post immediate job openings.

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

1. Internet access: During the week of March 30 through April 3, the Fort Worth Independent School District has been helping students and parents in transitioning to online learning, which includes distributing appropriate computer devices to elementary school families that lack such devices at home. In view of the City’s stay-at-home order, the Fire Department has offered to assist the school district in delivering these devices directly to needy families at their homes. The school district has expressed appreciation for the City’s offer, but the district has arranged for its Transportation Department to deliver the devices as necessary.

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Page 2

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2. Childcare services for families of essential workers: On March 30, Child Care Associates announced the launch of FIND!, an online search tool by which essential workers can find licensed childcare providers near their homes and worksites throughout Tarrant County. This platform, which is available at <http://find.bestplace4kids.com/families>, links interested families with more than 7,500 available slots at 425 licensed facilities. The Communications and Public Engagement Department has notified all City employees and local hospitals about this valuable resource. In the days ahead, Child Care Associates will begin administering locally a Texas Workforce Commission program that will subsidize childcare expenses for the families of essential workers.

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

1. Food security: On March 26, the City started distributing daily evening meals for children at community centers, partnering with the Tarrant Area Food Bank (TAFB) and Food for Good. Meals have grown from 850 daily to 1,250 daily and will grow incrementally with demand. This complements the meal distribution by Fort Worth ISD. Meals on Wheels initially reported a need for volunteers to serve its 2,400 clients, and City Communications was able to address the need with an appeal through NextDoor. Sixty and Better is reaching 500 seniors weekly with meal delivery, and City Neighborhood Services will be assisting them with required calls to seniors. TAFB reports they have enough food for now and are working on distribution with other agencies. Ben E. Keith is providing product to TAFB, given reduced restaurant demand. Albertsons/Tom Thumb reports that the supply chain is good and customer hoarding is calming down.
2. Communications: City Communications is sending daily community bulletins to neighborhood organizations, including previously registered ones, and is sending regular bulletins to faith leaders. Communications has also called all registered neighborhood and faith organizations to check on community needs. The City and United Way are encouraging the public to use 211 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>. The City is assisting Fort Worth ISD by sharing their information on NextDoor and by providing resource fliers with their meal distribution.

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

- o Economics/Business: Robert Sturns, Economic Development Director (817-392-2663),
- o Education/Childcare: Fernando Costa, Assistant City Manager (817-392-6122), and
- o Community Services: Dana Burghdoff, Assistant City Manager (817-392-8018).

David Cooke
City Manager