

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****May 5, 2020**

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

This is the sixth 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 Committee met on April 28 and had a productive discussion in response to the Governor's most recent order. The committee has divided into several subcommittees organized around business/organization categories, including:

- Places of worship,
- Salons/massage parlors/etc.,
- Movie theaters,
- Restaurants,
- Bars (establishments deriving 50 percent or more of their revenue from alcohol sales),
- Hotels,
- Gyms, and
- Mass gatherings.

These subcommittees have worked to prepare reopening recommendations for their respective topics. The Code Compliance Department has compiled these documents, incorporated the Governor's guidelines, and added its own edits. The result is an initial Guide to Re-Opening that will be distributed by the end of the week.

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

1. Financial Assistance: Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley joined the call to outline the current situation from the County's perspective, particularly as it relates to the status of testing and modeling. The County is looking at some opportunities to partner with CVS and Walgreens for testing centers. The County is also working with the North Texas Commission on safe options to reopen some businesses and a report should be issued next week. The key takeaway is ensuring that our older population and those with pre-existing conditions should continue to shelter in place, regardless of any amended declarations. There were several questions regarding statements from the State and what we can do locally about business reopening.
2. Communication: Visit Fort Worth has been working on a shop-local campaign called "Support the Fort," which went live on social media on April 24<sup>th</sup>. We will work on expanding this program over the next few weeks. It was recommended that we consider tapping into the Comptroller's database of registered businesses to communicate more directly with them about the resources available. It was suggested that we utilize NextDoor as many residents are sharing information on that platform.
3. Employment/Recovery: The sub-committee to focus on entrepreneurial opportunity will hold its first meeting next week to begin discussions about the best way to support the ecosystem and which partners to engage. Cameron Cushman (UNTHSC) is leading this effort with several committee members.

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**SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE ON COVID-19 ADVISORY COMMITTEES**Education and Childcare Advisory Committee, co-chaired by Carlos Flores and Kelly Allen Gray

1. School reopening: Fort Worth Independent School District Superintendent Dr. Kent Scribner and his leadership team are engaged in summer and fall planning with multiple contingencies. The school district has not yet made any firm decisions, however, pending further guidance from Tarrant County and the City of Fort Worth about public health restrictions and phased reopening.
2. 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.
3. Childcare services for families of essential workers: We now have nearly 9,000 childcare slots available at 682 licensed facilities throughout Tarrant County, including 313 childcare centers and 369 family homes. The website for the online search tool is <http://find.bestplace4kids.com>. Furthermore, Child Care Associates has now received 1,050 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 484 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.
4. Survey of childcare providers: Child Care Associates next week will be conducting a survey of all licensed childcare providers in Tarrant County. The purpose of this survey will be to collect information about their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as their needs and concerns as we reopen the economy. Committee members are providing specific questions and requests for information to include in the survey.
5. 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. COVID-19 response: Dr. Michael Williams, President of UNT Health Science Center, briefed the committee on the COVID-19 public health response. HSC provided the first testing for emergency responders and is now finalizing a website for the public to be screened and referred to testing sites in Tarrant County. He emphasized the importance of testing, hospital capacity, and case tracking/surveillance. For students, UNTHSC anticipates staying with online instruction until the fall and perhaps even to January 2021.

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2. Housing, utility, food, medicine, and related assistance: Victor Turner, Director of Neighborhood Services, briefed the committee on the proposed use of federal CARES Act funds to assist Fort Worth residents. The City has received \$8.2 million in HUD and HHS funds beyond the normal annual allocation for housing programs. Neighborhood Services proposes to allocate an additional \$7.2 million in federal Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) resources to assist residents affected financially by COVID-19 with housing, utility, food, medicine, and other household expenses. The CRF funds would be available to residents earning up to 120% of area median income, some of whom may not be eligible for HUD and HHS programs.
3. Child abuse: Police Chief Ed Kraus briefed the committee on reports of child abuse, which increased in March 2020 compared to March 2019. Reports of abuse to date in April 2020 have declined compared to March 2020 and April 2019, but the severity of abuse has increased. Chief Kraus explained that schools are the primary source for reporting child abuse, so their closure has masked abuse happening in homes. Police is working with Fort Worth ISD and other agencies to address the issue. The Apartment Association of Tarrant County is sharing information 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**