



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

May 19, 2020

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

This is the eighth weekly update on the work of four *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 on Tuesday, May 12, and was briefed by Visit Fort Worth on a “Reopen Responsibly” campaign. This campaign will give business owners a form of certification, such as a badge or sticker, to display at their establishment once they have committed to a certain set of guidelines for reopening safely and responsibly. The campaign will be able to launch in the coming weeks. The CORE group had previously produced and distributed “Y’All Get Ready, Y’All Stay Healthy,” a twenty-page guide for responsible behavior during the pandemic. The document presents advice for local businesses wishing to resume operations while protecting the health of their employees and customers. It offers specific recommendations for various kinds of businesses, including buffets, dine-in restaurants, fast-food restaurants, in-person religious services, and movie theaters. The document also describes various health precautions that all residents can take to prevent the spread of coronavirus and it provides answers to frequently asked questions. The full document is available on the City’s website, <https://fortworthtexas.gov>.

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

1. Financial assistance: The committee has discussed some of the challenges encountered with the reopening of restaurants over the past week. Restaurants are very hesitant to operate at 25 percent capacity as it is not financially feasible. A capacity of 50 percent or higher would be optimal. In addition, customers are not there as consumer confidence remains low. Visit Fort Worth has conducted a flash survey to determine the current state of our restaurateurs and approximately a third are still waiting to assess how things continue to progress. The City, Chambers, and Visit Fort Worth have launched “Protect the Fort” through a contribution from Facebook of \$300,000. A total of \$50,000 was used to stand up a personal protective equipment (PPE) program for business owners and the remaining \$250,000 will provide grants of up to \$5,000 for businesses with fewer than 25 employees. Hillwood matched the \$50,000 contribution to expand the PPE program. The grant applications will go live on May 13<sup>th</sup> and are being marketed by all the participating organizations.
2. Marketing/communications: The City’s Communications Office has developed a shared dropbox of marketing collateral for all organizations to utilize. A second business survey has been sent out to assess where businesses are in their operations and how many have applied for any of the funding efforts over the last few weeks. We are prepping a marketing strategy for the grant program that will be pushed out to all the partners. A micro-campaign has also been developed to push various programs listed on the City’s business resource page.
3. Entrepreneurship and recovery: The entrepreneurship and recovery subcommittee continues to digest the twenty-page document they have created and are beginning to rank their overall goals and initiatives. The work of this committee could tie into the recently announced Fort Worth Now initiative that is focused on long-term recovery and business recruitment opportunities. The Dallas Entrepreneur Center (DEC) at Redbird is a model that could be replicated in Southeast Fort Worth. Conversations with the DEC are being held to assess their interest in working regionally.



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

1. School reopening: The Fort Worth Independent School District has announced that it will provide summer school entirely online from June 3 through June 30. The ISD will also conduct voluntary in-person graduation ceremonies on June 23 at Farrington Field and on June 26 at Clark Stadium. The school board should be deciding as soon as possible, but no later than early July, about the format for classes to be held during academic year 2020-21. The Texas Education Agency has published guidelines that will assist the ISD in preparing its school calendar.
2. Childcare services for families of essential workers: We now have almost 9,600 childcare slots available at 705 licensed facilities throughout Tarrant County, including 334 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 nearly 1,700 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 941 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://tarrantcountycms.org>, and complete a simple online application. A caseworker will contact them within 48 hours to finalize and activate the assistance. The Governor’s current executive order allows childcare facilities to serve only the children of essential workers, but we anticipate that the Governor may soon be easing or rescinding this restriction as the economy continues to reopen.
3. Survey of childcare providers: Child Care Associates has conducted a survey of 1,124 licensed childcare providers in Tarrant County to assess the impacts of COVID-19 upon their operations, with nearly one fourth (24%) of the providers responding. The survey finds that 41 percent of the respondents have furloughed or laid off employees because of the pandemic. The most common concerns expressed by respondents pertain to the overall health and safety of their employees and customers; the spread of coronavirus; the smaller group sizes that regulations now require; the difficulty of social distancing with children; and the availability of supplies, cleaning products, and personal protective equipment. Many respondents cite a need for financial assistance to continue their operations through the pandemic and City staff is responding to this need by exploring the possible use of federal CARES Act funding to provide that assistance.
4. Summer programs: City staff is awaiting further guidance from the Governor while tracking pertinent public health data to determine whether, when, and how various departments and cooperating organizations will be able to provide certain summer programs this year. If we can do so safely, we expect to provide a six-week summer day camp and reading instruction program from June 29 through August 7.



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

1. Food security: Matt Dufrene, with Blue Zones Project and Texas Health Resources, is briefing the committee on Friday, May 15, about the Blue Zones Project (BZP) COVID-19 community response. On May 10, BZP started a four-week program to distribute 3,600 bags of groceries in targeted zip codes. BZP is also providing in-kind and financial support, primarily focused on food insecurity. Neighborhood Services reports that demand for evening meals for children at community centers is continuing to decline. Tarrant Area Food Bank has begun the Summer Food Service Program. Since March 15, the City has averaged 539 meals per week, and last week served 521 meals. For the same period last year, the City served an average of 733 meals per week, a difference of 212.
2. Rental/mortgage and household assistance: Judge Ralph Swearingin, Jr., with Tarrant County Justice of the Peace Precinct 1, is briefing the committee on Friday, May 15 on the court’s role in assisting renters and landlords to avoid evictions and coordinating with the Tarrant County Human Services Department. The City’s new Emergency Household Assistance Program (<http://fortworthtexas.gov/neighborhoods/covid-19-relief-funds>) launched on May 7 and has received over 600 applications. It is funded with \$7.2 million in federal CARES Act funds and is available to Fort Worth households earning up to 120% of area median income who have been affected by COVID-19.
3. Communications: Communications worked with Neighborhood Services to create the “Emergency Household Assistance Program - CARES Act” webpage to take applications for assistance from the Community Services Block Grant and Coronavirus Relief Fund. It has been shared via City News, bulletins, and all social media. Communications will deliver 10,000 COVID-19 resource postcards to food pantries and community centers next Monday and Tuesday for distribution. As of May 14, the Community Engagement Office has contacted more than 6,300 neighbors by phone in historically underserved ZIP codes to check on them, direct them to area resources, food pantries, and utility assistance. Calls to 76104 and 76105 have been completed, and 76112 is still in progress. The Call Center has assisted residents with COVID-19 information by answering more than 2,865 calls since the pandemic began.

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**