

## MEMORANDUM: CITY OF KNOXVILLE COVID-19 RESPONSE

To: City Council

From: Mayor Indya Kincannon

Date: April 7, 2020

RE: Administrative Report Responding to Resolution R-102-2020

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Resolution R-102-2020 requested that the City administration consider appropriating emergency funds for certain programs to assist Knoxville residents during the Coronavirus pandemic and to also evaluate all current taxes, fees, penalties and tax deadlines. This memo outlines our assessment of and specific actions related to these topics.

### Social Services to Respond to COVID-related Community Needs

Since the start of COVID-19, my administration is in close coordination with community partners who are organizing through the KEMA Emergency Operations Center (EOC) with a special focus on helping our community's most vulnerable citizens. Matt Ryerson, Executive Director of United Way, serves as the Social Services Branch Chief at the EOC and will present specific information about our collective efforts to Council on April 7 during Mayor's Remarks.

Through the EOC Social Services Branch and its multiple sub-committees, the City is constantly monitoring the landscape of needs that have arisen in our community, as well as the resources available to meet those needs. We are looking for specific gaps, both in terms of staff/volunteer capacity as well as funding, that the City or other partners may be in a position to fill. We recognize and expect that such needs will continue to evolve and change, and that additional City resources will be necessary to support critical community systems in coming weeks and months. Please remember that this unprecedented event is a marathon, not a sprint, and that our support efforts will continue to evolve based on any number of factors including State and Federal allocations that may have specific usage requirements.

### General Information & Communications

Our website ([www.knoxvilletn.gov/COVID19](http://www.knoxvilletn.gov/COVID19)) has been updated with information helping to connect individuals and businesses with numerous resources to help mitigate the economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are continually working to expand and improve the information on this site and to connect our residents to the programs and resources they need. As of Monday, this includes a specific "Renter Resource Center" outlining tenants' rights and other information related to avoiding evictions, which are paused as a result of court closure through April 30.

Anyone who needs help during these difficult times is invited to call 2-1-1, which is managed by the City and can connect individuals with hundreds of community resources specific to their needs.

### Support for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness (Lead/Contact: Michael Dunthorn)

Working in partnership with the Knox County Health Department, Volunteer Ministry Center (VMC), Metro Drug Coalition and other partners, the City has established "The Guest House," an 18-bed facility to provide shelter as well as medical and social support for individuals experiencing homelessness who

have tested positive for COVID-19 or are awaiting test results. VMC will provide 24-hour on-site management of The Guest House, and many other social service providers have stepped up to help support this effort. KARM, the Knox Baptist Association, United Way, Next Step Initiative, CAC, Angelic Ministries and others have offered resources including food delivery, portable shower and laundry facilities.

The City will provide up to \$95,000 to operate the shelter over the next two months, and referrals will come from physicians, hospitals and the Knox County Health Department.

In coordination with Volunteer Ministry Center, the City is maintaining clean bathrooms accessible to the Safe Space on Broadway, as well as providing increased cleaning and sanitation of the Safe Space via a specialized cleaning contractor. Those who use the Safe Space are being provided information and encouraged to practice social distancing.

In accordance with recommendations of federal, state and local health officials, KPD and Public Service ceased closing encampments for cleaning in March, as smaller encampments create a lower risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus through the homeless population.

The City is working with the State of Tennessee, peers in other cities across the state and with the EOC to coordinate statewide requests for additional support from TEMA for resources to address needs of the homeless population here and statewide.

Individuals and organizations interested in providing food and resources to the homeless are encouraged to support established organizations such as KARM, VMC, CAC, The Salvation Army, rather than going into the Safe Space to provide food and resources, which unintentionally can create close groupings of large numbers of people in the space.

This pandemic highlights the need for a housing first model to address the issue of homelessness in our community, and the City will continue to work with our partners on strategies like permanent supportive housing, along with continued use of our Affordable Housing Rental Development Fund to ensure adequate housing for everyone in our community.

#### Food Assistance Programs (Lead/Contact: Fiona McAnally)

A strong network of local food providers are developing creative new service delivery models, while scaling up to meet the needs of our community. Organizations such as CAC, Second Harvest, Senior Citizens Home Assistance Services (SCHAS), Knox County Schools, Great Schools Partnership, Nourish Knoxville and more are working to address our food needs. Additional organizations such as the Knox County Baptists Association are providing emergency feeding for homeless organizations.

For instance, **CAC** is providing some of their seniors a week's worth of frozen meals, with daily phone check-ins vs. daily delivery. CAC is also increasing its support of seniors in KCDC housing. CAC provides meals/snacks for partner organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and has activated their Summer Feeding Program in partnership with Knox County Schools. CAC has capacity to expand and anticipates additional emergency federal funding that will be distributed through the state from the CARES Act.

**Second Harvest** has seen a sharp increase in demand that they expect to continue for at least 6 months. They report that local food pantries have experienced a 30% increase in visits. Funding has been bolstered significantly by a recent \$500,000 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield. Second Harvest has adjusted some of their delivery models to a grocery box for families vs. bulk deliveries to partners.

**SCHAS** launched a program called SOS that stands for “SCHAS Out Shopping” to provide grocery shopping services for seniors or anyone that must stay inside due to health issues. Individuals pay for their groceries, but the service is free. SCHAS staff can take orders online or over the phone. This program is steadily growing and additional funding will be needed to further expand and/or to subsidize groceries for some clients.

**Knox County Schools** has 25 school-based and 10 community-based food distribution sites across the county serving breakfast and lunch to all children under the age of 18 that show up at a school location. Starting this week, KCS will only serve on Monday & Wednesday through the end of the school year.

**Community Schools**, with Second Harvest and a myriad of neighborhood partners, are providing weekend meal bags on Fridays (Wednesdays starting next week) at the 8 Community Schools that are KCS food distribution sites.

**Nourish Knoxville**, will be adding additional Winter Markets in April and promoting their SNAP and SNAP doubling programs, as early spring produce becomes available in addition to year round local food. They are also supporting groups such as Bridge Refugee Services.

Examples of increased City support for these organizations include:

- City Public Service staff assisting with deliveries from CAC to KCDC housing.
- City charter of free grocery transit shuttle for residents of Isabella Towers and Northgate Terrace (KCDC properties).
- City Parks and Recreation staff assisting with school-age feeding programs.
- The Convention Center providing overflow freezer space for CAC prepared meals.

[Youth Support Programs](#) (Lead Contact: Steve Diggs, Emerald Youth Foundation)

Led by Emerald Youth Foundation, this committee is coordinating with over 35 organizations dedicated to providing educational and support services to children across our community, including Knox County Schools, Great Schools Partnership, Centro Hispano, and the City's Parks and Rec Department. The group is collaborating with each other to make sure that needs of children and parents are met, often through cross-organization partnership.

Meal distribution (outlined in Food Services section above) is working to make sure that there are no gaps in children receiving food services regardless of the obstacles. Partners are also coordinating to provide education and emotional support for students through check-ins with students and families.

The group is currently attempting to collect solid numbers on available childcare services for “essential workers” across the community. Multiple partners, including the Boys & Girls Club and YMCA have expanded hours of service and are accepting new enrollments to provide emergency childcare support for essential workers.

Some organizations such as Centro Hispano are working on helping students get access to computers and other technology needs for online learning.

The group is playing an important role in collaborating on toolkits for non-profits to get access to federal grant opportunities and other resources to help non-profits continue operations. They are also working to identify service gaps that can be filled by non-profits.

### Support for Seniors (Lead/Contact: Eden Slater)

The Systems of Support for Seniors Team, which includes staff from the City, County, the CAC, and numerous other non-profit and government partners, meets weekly to discuss the needs and gaps in senior support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, the largest needs for seniors across the city are primarily food and social support. Current support systems are adequately addressing known issues, although we expect new challenges to emerge as the financial crisis deepens.

As mentioned in the Food Systems section above, Mobile Meals continues to serve their general clients, with additional client needs growing by an average of 5 new registrants per day. City Public Service staff, church support from the Association of Baptists, and Volunteer East Tennessee are helping to fill gaps in meal packing and delivery needs. To limit direct contact, Mobile Meals has moved to once a week delivery, delivering five frozen meals to general clients and seven meals to the senior high rises.

As many seniors are on a fixed income, they have been somewhat less impacted by COVID-19's economic effects; however, many call different agencies seeking social support. To help address this issue, the CAC Office on Aging has mobilized Senior Care Calls to all Office on Aging clients and is taking referrals for any seniors who may benefit from a friendly social call. Seniors receiving Mobile Meals also receive wellness calls. The Senior Care/Wellness Calls serve as a point of social interaction and as a check-in to address any other needs. Multiple City staff, including the 2-1-1 Call Center, are supporting the Senior Care call system.

### Immigrant/Refugee Services (Lead/Contact: Patricia Robledo)

The Immigrant & Refugee Services group coordinates to fill unique and specific needs facing this community that are not addressed by other systems. Many of the financial impacts of the crisis are hitting immigrant populations disproportionately hard due to employment, legal, language, technology and other barriers that exacerbate need and inhibit access to resources. Groups such as Centro Hispano and Bridge Refugee Services are in full-time crisis response-mode, coordinating to translate critical information into diverse languages, connecting individuals with legal support, and coordinating with childcare and food providers to make sure children of working families are fed and cared for. Many do not have reliable access to internet nor adequate technology to be able to access benefits through online applications, a gap that also affects the ability of children in this community to complete educational assignments (which are often provided only in English).

Specific actions and solutions supported by the City include:

- Developing survey for leaders in the refugee and immigrant community to evaluate needs.
- Supporting translation of key messages for non-English speakers.
- Creating resource flyer specific for refugees and immigrant populations.
- Arranging for social security office to open for specialized, in-person appointments for brand new refugees who can only apply for social security cards in-person.

The needs of this community are currently outpacing resources, and active conversations are in progress about how the broader Knoxville community can support through volunteers, pro bono support, technology donations, and funding.

### Support for Renters

The first of the month is a rent due date for many residential and commercial tenants. The City has no jurisdiction over landlord-tenant law and no authority to put a moratorium on evictions or on rent increases. KPD does not serve eviction notices or take actions on evictions at all. However, eviction

actions are on “hold” right now. On March 25, 2020, the Tennessee Supreme Court issued an Order stating that courts may not take any action to evict or otherwise displace a tenant from his/her residence through April 30, 2020.

For those who live in public housing, including Section 8 properties, there is a temporary moratorium on the eviction process through July 23, 2020. The moratorium is just for evictions related to nonpayment of rent or fees. Evictions for other things like criminal activity or threats to the safety of other residents are not on pause.

Supporting those who may be on the brink of homelessness is a priority. Sudden loss of employment and other financial ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic have left some Knoxville residents unable afford shelter and/or afford food or basic transportation. The City has provided \$100,000 to support CAC’s provision of services through their Homeward Bound programming, which helps people quickly regain stability in permanent housing after experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis.

The Federal CARES act has allocated approx. \$1.5M to Knoxville through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME programs. The City’s Department of Housing & Neighborhood Development is currently evaluating what portions of these funds can support more robust rental/housing assistance in response to COVID-19.

## EVALUATION OF CITY TAXES, FEES, AND PENALTIES

The City has evaluated multiple ways to help reduce financial burden on residents and businesses during the COVID-19 crisis. The following outlines preliminary analyses and actions, and we will continue to evaluate and consider other fee & penalty policies over coming weeks as we further flesh out the FY20/21 fiscal year budget.

### Commercial Rents on City Properties

There are several small businesses who are commercial tenants of City properties as managed by the Public Building Authority (PBA). These specific properties include the Locust Street Garage, Sunsphere, and 506 Gay Street. To help these tenants support their employees and as a model for other commercial landlords, we have instructed the PBA to work with each tenant and provide an initial 60-day rent waiver for those tenants, all of which are restaurants and/or event-related small businesses.

### Evaluation of Taxes

The following taxes are collected/set by the State of Tennessee, with no local authority to waive, reduce, or change payment requirements:

- Sales Tax
- Beer Tax
- Gas Tax
- Business Tax
- City Telecom
- Excise City
- Income Tax (Halls Income Tax)
- Mixed Drink
- Alcoholic Beverage

The City does have authority to modify the following taxes:

- Property Tax
- General Admissions Tax
- Cable TV Franchise Tax
- Fiber Optic Franchise Fee
- City Hotel Motel Tax
- Short Term Rental Tax

Property taxes were due October 1, 2019, and will not be due again until October 1, 2020. Any significant delays or reductions in this primary source of revenue for the City will have an immediate impact on the City's ability to provide core services including police and fire protection and public works. The Cable TV and Fiber Optic fees are levied on large telecommunications companies and not as impactful to small businesses and individuals. We are evaluating the financial implications on COVID-19 on revenues from General Admission, City Hotel/Motel, and Short Term Rental taxes.

#### Other Fee Actions

Other fees that have already been altered by the City in response to COVID-19 include:

- Parking: Downtown parking meter enforcement has been suspended.
- KAT: As of March 24, 2020, KAT has temporarily suspended ridership fares.
- Neighborhood Codes Enforcement: All inspectors have been advised to suspend normal operations and to focus solely on those issues that pose a clear and immediate hazard to the public. In addition, our enforcement officers are also supporting the communication and enforcement efforts associated with the City of Knoxville's Safer at Home Order that I issued on March 31, 2020 and renewed yesterday.

Cc: Stephanie Welch, Deputy to Mayor  
Erin Gill, Deputy to Mayor  
David Brace, Deputy to Mayor