

March 30, 2020

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
OF THE CITY OF GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA
March 30, 2020**

The city council of the city of Grand Forks, North Dakota met electronically via Zoom for a special meeting on Monday, March 30, 2020 at the hour of 5:30 o'clock p.m. with Mayor Brown presiding. Present at roll call were Council Members Weigel, Dachtler, Weber, Mock, Marshall, Sande, Vein - 7; absent: None.

Mayor Brown announced that anyone wishing to speak to any item may do so by being recognized prior to a vote being taken on the matter, and that the meeting is being televised.

Mayor Brown commented that 2 positive cases of Covid-19 have been confirmed in Grand Forks County and encouraged all to stay home and wash hands for at least 20 seconds when returning home.

FLOOD RESPONSE SITUATIONAL UPDATE

Al Grasser, City Engineer, reviewed a map of the flood protection project limits and explained how the system functions in tie of flooding. Grasser also reviewed the flood action plan that details items such as at what flood levels closures of various roads, public facilities and bridges occur. He stated that while some predictions of probability on the highest end are lessening, there is still a strong prediction of a large scale flood this year and preparations are underway already to prepare for that. A team of staff from various city departments is meeting regularly. Currently there is not a need to operate an emergency center 24/7, but that may change as the crest approaches.

COVID-19 SITUATIONAL UPDATE

Debbie Swanson, Director of Public Health, reviewed a world map showing the spread of the Covid-19 virus and followed up with a review of infection statistics from a global, national, and state level. The infection seems to be most contagious for vulnerable populations, which includes elderly and those with an underlying health condition such as diabetes, obesity, asthma, cancer, etc. Swanson reviewed the response command structure that has been established. At this time, most staff is working remotely and will continue all functions such as contact tracing and assisting the State with actions related to Covid-19, as well as carrying out other local public health tasks under guidelines of the ND Department of Health. Coordination tasks include meetings with various community entities to ensure that best practices are put in place to protect residents and staff from this virus. Swanson also provided contact information for hotlines and other online resources related to the pandemic and the ND Department of Health's FAQ's on Covid-19.

Council Members commented and asked various questions regarding the virus and Swanson provided information.

1) It would be helpful to see a better breakdown of the demographics for those hospitalized, as it may personalize it for citizens that are resistant to some of the restrictions that have been put in place. This includes the resistance to exceptions for gatherings of only 10 or fewer people. Mayor Brown commented that we need to be consistent with our messaging as recommended by the CDC and WHO regarding social distancing, which includes physical distancing and limiting exposure.

March 30, 2020

2) Distancing is particularly hard for families with children as those that are not abiding by the request to social distance are putting pressure on those that are following the guidelines. Kids in particular have a hard time understanding this. Swanson stated that we need to keep reinforcing that especially with children it is important to follow the guidelines, as while children do not seem to be contracting the disease as rapidly as adults, they can be carriers and also tend to be less mindful of not touching their faces or eyes, maintaining distance while playing or washing hands and sanitizing frequently when playing.

It was discussed that while wet side of the flood project is currently closed due to flooding and the park district is considering closure of their parks and playgrounds, the City does own facilities on the dry side of the flood project such as the skatepark which are seeing gatherings of 10 or more and we may need to look at an action to make those recreational areas the same as others. Mayor Brown will reach out to the Park District and issue orders as needed so that our facilities access is consistent with the Park District.

3) Discussion of whether there is a need to develop volunteer lists for addressing response needs. Swanson stated that they have reached out to UND for assistance with contact tracing as it does require training and they have students and staff that can assist with that. There are also resources through the State which we are in contact with at this time to get assistance so that our local staff is not overwhelmed. Swanson also reviewed the symptoms and steps that are in place for individuals that believe they need to be tested.

4) Unemployment. Due to some of the business closures, there are many in community that have a concern with unemployment and knowing how to get connected. While this is a state issue, staff can work to add links to state agencies on the website page for Covid-19 information. It was also suggested to include links for those with social security questions, now that the local office is not available.

Tangee Bouvette, Human Resources Director, provided information relating to employees concerns due to the Covid-19 pandemic. She stated that as part of Mayor's Emergency Order 2020-1, employees have access to Administrative Leave to cover time when they may need to quarantine or be off from work due to need to care for children or family members as a result of Covid-19, and also if they are unable to perform their city job during this time of closure. Effective April 1, there is a federal act that provides for 80 hours of quarantine leave at 2/3 pay. The city will be utilizing their policy which is more generous for coverage of city employees affected by the pandemic. Bouvette stated that most employees are working remotely and are continuing to work with departments on these matters as well as looking at staffing levels and efficiencies as we go forward. Council Member Weigel stated that he has heard positive comments from employees and appreciative of the work that is being done to keep employees protected.

Maureen Storstad, Finance Director, provided financial information to the City Council including a review of 2019 year end revenue and expense numbers and fund balances. She also provided information on reviews that are ongoing regarding the 2020 budget including addressing anticipated gaps due to reduced revenue as a result of the Covid-19 closures which have reduced several funding sources for the city including sales tax, state aid, building permits, and various other fee and ticket revenue streams. At this time we are anticipating a 25% impact to the 2020 budget. The pandemic has highlighted the volatility of revenue sources such as sales tax and reinforced the importance of keeping a diversification of revenue sources and reserves so that we can continue to provide services in challenging times. Storstad stated that we are looking to reduce expenditures where possible, such as travel, education, fuel, and capital expenditures that can be pushed to a future year. Council Members commented whether 25% was enough and if staff should also look to have a plan in place if greater losses are a result of the pandemic.

March 30, 2020

Storstad said that she and staff are continuing to monitor closely both revenues and expenditures and if necessary will look at further cuts.

Meredith Richards, Director of Community Development, provided information on the business listening sessions that have been held. She stated that they have been working toward having a process in place so that if programs become available to assist local businesses we will be ready to implement. Concerns that are coming forward are for laid off employees, shop local engagement, and programs to assist the hospitality division, one area of which we have already taken some steps to assist with the Mayor's order to allow for the takeout and delivery of food and alcohol for local restaurants. Staff has developed a page on the website linked to the Corona-19 webpage which has information business sustainability and resources. There is a listening session this week with the hospitality sector.

Council Member Sande stated that it's important to continue to recognize as part of these sessions the hierarchy for support programs from Federal, SBA and SBA Loans, Loans and Grants from State Programs, then City, noting that the City has limited funding. He encouraged business owners to review all programs they may qualify for to choose the most effective plan for them. Council Member Weber agreed that federal programs should be pursued first and that the city may need to continue to review processes to make sure that we are flexible to support businesses in the community.

CENSUS UPDATE

Brad Gengler, City Planner, provided information on the continued efforts for the 2020 Census informing City Council that the pandemic has put further stresses on being able to make contact in problem areas for collection of data when self-reporting is not being done. The deadline for self-reporting has been extended to August 31 and can be done online even if you haven't received a form in the mail. Stephanie Halford appeared on the Valley Today television show to provide Census information, with an air date of April 1. He reported on upcoming marketing efforts including a social media push, flyers to Housing Authority properties, along with other ongoing activities. They are working with UND to address the student population, which should be counted where they go to school and live most of the year.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR COMMENTS

Todd Feland, City Administrator, provided closing comments, that the city team is working hard to continue to provide essential services and thanked all those in Public Health, Public Works, Public Safety, Cities Area Transit, and other staff for their work at this time.

Feland provided information on the recently passed CARES Act that was passed by the US Senate and appreciate the efforts of our team Senators Hoeven and Kramer will bring \$1.25 billion to State of ND. The act will provide opportunities for businesses to apply for loans which become grants if certain conditions are met, direct payments to individuals, provisions for health care related to Covid-19, reimbursements for Covid-19 related expenses and block grants which Community Development will be reviewing requirements on distribution of those program funds.

Mayor Brown thanked all for their work during this extraordinary time including the Public Information Center who has been distributing information to the public.

March 30, 2020

ADJOURN

It was moved by Council Member Weigel and seconded by Council Member Sande that we adjourn at 7:10 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Storstad
City Auditor

Approved:

Michael R. Brown, Mayor