

Pinellas County



Minutes - Final

Tuesday, July 7, 2020

9:30 A.M.

Virtual Regular Meeting

Board of County Commissioners

Pat Gerard, Chair
Dave Eggers, Vice-Chair
Charlie Justice
Janet C. Long
Kathleen Peters
Karen Williams Seel
Kenneth T. Welch

ROLL CALL - 9:30 A.M.

Present: 7 - Chair Pat Gerard, Vice-Chair Dave Eggers, Charlie Justice, Janet C. Long, Kathleen Peters, Karen Williams Seel, and Kenneth T. Welch

Others Present: Barry A. Burton, County Administrator; Jewel White, County Attorney; Katherine Carpenter, Board Records Manager; and Amelia Hanks, Board Reporter

Office of Technology and Innovation Director Bryan Zumwalt introduced himself and announced that he would be the Technology Moderator for the virtual meeting; and that Chief Assistant County Attorney Don Crowell would serve as Process Moderator; whereupon, he conducted a roll call of the members.

1. Local State of Emergency

Mr. Burton requested approval of the proposed resolution extending the Local State of Emergency until July 17, 2020 and indicated that the extension allows the County to access federal funds and engage in activities under the emergency.

Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County Director Dr. Ulyee Choe provided a summary of statistics regarding COVID-19, including the total number of cases and deaths, the seven-day rolling average of cases, the percent positivity rate, the volume of individuals at emergency rooms, and ICU bed capacity. He indicated that Pinellas County continues to have community-wide spread of the virus; that the virus affects all age groups; and that the spread is mainly occurring in indoor settings such as long-term care facilities, restaurants, summer camps, daycares, country clubs, and gyms. He stated that the statistics underscore the importance of continued messaging regarding social distancing and the use of masks.

Mr. Burton explained that the actions taken by the Board at the beginning of the virus were meant to flatten the curve and allow the health care system to prepare; that hospitals now are training individuals, have surge capacity plans, and have increased staffing levels; and that the recent spike in cases has put a strain on hospital resources. He discussed the Governor's action to close bars and indicated that the Board took an additional step by requiring masks indoors, but further steps may be difficult to take.

Mr. Burton discussed steps other counties are taking to stop the spread of the virus, including closing restaurants and beaches, and indicated that Pinellas County is not ready to take those steps yet; whereupon, he provided information regarding the increased number of testing sites and the importance of messaging regarding social distancing and not congregating in groups.

In response to queries by the members, Dr. Choe, Mr. Burton, and Emergency Medical Services Medical Director Dr. Angus Jameson provided information regarding the following topics:

- Surge capacity at local hospitals to expand ICU bed availability
- Status of a Super Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) which would have additional hospital bed capacity
- Turnaround time for virus testing and the limited availability of rapid test kits due to lack of supplies
- Spread of the virus due to close and prolonged contact with other individuals
- Increased number of individuals conducting contact tracing and how some individuals who tested positive are unwilling to provide information to assist with contact tracing
- Possibility of setting up a government laboratory for rapid testing, which would be required to partner with a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA)-certified laboratory in order to operate
- Length of time it would take to determine whether the mask ordinance was successful
- Spread of the virus in more vulnerable populations, such as those individuals with chronic health conditions or who are over the age of 65
- Progress of revisions to the Agency for Health Care Administration's Code of Conduct to address additional responsibilities of staff in long-term care facilities
- Exchange of statistics and information between the hospitals and County staff

Assistant County Administrator Lourdes Benedict confirmed that the County did survey the hospitals regarding their statistics and indicated that the hospitals have been great partners. Mr. Burton agreed, noting that the partnership with hospitals has allowed them to support one another; and that each hospital is trying to operate within the constraints of its resources in order to address surge capacity needs, and discussion ensued.

In response to query by Commissioner Eggers, Dr. Jameson indicated that he is continuously reading peer-reviewed journals, consulting experts across the country and the world, and conferring with hospital staff caring for COVID-19 patients in order to bring the Board the most vetted recommendation on how to appropriately address the virus. Dr. Choe added that it is important for individuals to get their information from more reputable sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the National Institutes of Health.

In response to query by Commissioner Welch regarding the plans for hurricane shelters during COVID-19, Mr. Burton indicated that the County has had to completely redo the way that it looks at shelters; that the standard of 20 square feet per person has to be expanded to 60 square feet per person to take into account social distancing guidelines; that individuals will get their temperature checked and have to wear a mask inside the shelters; and that Emergency Management Director Catherine Perkins will be attending a future meeting to present the revised plans.

Upon call by the Chair for public comment, the following individuals expressed their concerns:

David Waddell, Clearwater
Dawn Bohler, St. Petersburg
Trevor Burgess, St. Petersburg
John Benincasa, Oldsmar
Mae Quinn, Gulfport
Barbara Walker, Palm Harbor
Glenn Reihing, St. Petersburg
Emma (last name not provided, city not provided)
Karen Mullins, Dunedin
Robert Radomski, Clearwater Beach
Tammy Vasquez, Treasure Island
Jamie McNamara, Largo

Mr. Burton, Dr. Choe, and Chair Gerard responded to comments by the public, indicating that the County was not responsible for closing down businesses; that hospitals are meeting frequently with community partners to develop surge plans, which are at various stages in the planning process depending on the hospital; and that the County still has the capacity to test individuals, especially at the Tropicana Field location and a new location which will be announced soon.

Commissioner Long commented that staff has been working hard behind the scenes to address this crisis; that the County has been coordinating with partner counties such as Hillsborough, Manatee, and Pasco; and that she would recommend that County Communications staff increase messaging regarding how to appropriately wear and maintain cloth masks to ensure that individuals are safe and healthy.

Commissioner Seel clarified that, under the emergency ordinance, individuals who meet certain requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are exempt from wearing a mask; and that, separate from ADA exemptions, she would urge anyone who is medically compromised to stay at home. Commissioner Peters added that the County should include messaging regarding how to be respectful of individuals who are unable to wear a mask due to ADA issues.

Mr. Burton related that, under the emergency ordinance, the County cannot require individuals to provide paperwork stating that they have an ADA exemption, but the issue is more difficult when a private business has a policy that requires an individual to wear a mask when entering the business.

A motion was made by Commissioner Peters, seconded by Commissioner Welch, that the order extending the Local State of Emergency be approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Chair Gerard, Vice-Chair Eggers, Commissioner Justice, Commissioner Long, Commissioner Peters, Commissioner Seel, and Commissioner Welch

Resolution No. 20-58 adopted extending the Local State of Emergency established in Resolution No. 20-16 until 3:00 P.M. on July 17, 2020.

In response to comments by Commissioner Peters regarding penalties for businesses who violate the mask ordinance, Mr. Burton, with input by Sheriff Bob Gualtieri, clarified that a violation of the local ordinance does not result in a criminal penalty; that the penalty does not include the removal of a business's liquor license; that businesses should be making a good faith effort to comply and are not responsible for forcing customers to wear masks; that the majority of the public is complying; and that the mask ordinance only covers indoor areas that are accessible to the public.

2. Resolution(s) approving Pinellas CARES program(s).

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Burton explained that the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided funding for two programs: the Pinellas CARES Small Business Grants Program and the Pinellas CARES Financial Assistance Program for individuals. He introduced Office of Management and Budget Section Manager Aubrey Phillips to present information regarding new criteria for Phase 2 of the programs.

Ms. Phillips provided background information on the steps taken to develop the programmatic requirements for Phase 2, including engagement of the community through an online survey and community conversation. She related that members of the public expressed that assistance to individuals, families, and local businesses is a top priority; that responding to and mitigating the public health impacts is a concern; and that greater applicant technical support and increased awareness of the availability of the programs would have improved the initial Pinellas CARES programs.

Ms. Phillips explained that Phase 2 will expand the Pinellas CARES programs to equitably address the most pressing needs resulting from COVID-19, and will include a flexible framework that will provide short-term relief to support public health while addressing sustained economic recovery.

Ms. Phillips indicated that, during Phase 2, the County will split funding roughly between support for individuals and families, local business recovery and resiliency grant programs, and public health mitigation and response, with less than one percent of the CARES funding allocated to expand capacity for existing community partners to serve as navigators to help raise awareness of and access to the programs for individuals and small businesses.

For individuals and families, Ms. Phillips indicated that funding would be used for three programs. She explained that the expanded Financial Assistance Program would provide rent, mortgage, and utility payment assistance to individuals with \$10,000 or less in liquid assets who have lost their job or significant income due to COVID-19, increase the cumulative maximum amount per household to \$5,000, and allow for individuals who did not qualify previously to re-apply for the program. Ms. Phillips related that the second program financially supports not-for-profit organizations providing services directly related to COVID-19; and that the third program, which will partner with CareerSource Pinellas, provides workforce reemployment, retraining, and placement for residents who suffered economic impacts due to COVID-19.

For small businesses, Ms. Phillips indicated that the bulk of the funding is intended to bridge the gap for those most impacted by COVID-19; that the Small Business Grants Program would be expanded to include businesses with more than 25 employees and annual revenue of under \$3.3 million; that businesses would receive grant awards on a sliding scale ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000 based upon 2019 gross revenue; and that grants would also be available to home-based businesses.

In addition to expansion of the Small Business Grants Program, Ms. Phillips explained that additional smaller grant programs will be created to target specific needs and gaps, as follows:

- Grants to licensed childcare facilities to mitigate impact of low enrollment and increased costs due to COVID-19
- Reimbursement matching grants of up to \$10,000 to assist Target Industry businesses in implementing COVID-19 health and safety precautions
- A micro-grant program through Creative Pinellas to support professional artists, arts and creative businesses, and non-profit art organizations
- A business diversity micro-grant program to provide financial assistance and capacity building for businesses impacted by COVID-19 with barriers to participation

In response to query and comments by Commissioner Gerard, Ms. Phillips, Mr. Burton, and Assistant County Administrator Lourdes Benedict indicated that the County will remove barriers for individuals applying for the Financial Assistance Program by removing the income-eligibility requirement, only asking for those documents required for audit purposes and requesting that individuals sign an attestation form regarding their income and assets, rather than asking for bank account information. Ms. Benedict also indicated that individuals can submit a picture of the documents required, rather than having to scan them.

For public health mitigation and response, Ms. Phillips indicated that the remaining third of the CARES funding under Phase 2 will be allocated to build local capacity for testing, contact tracing, skilled nursing, personal protective equipment (PPE), community health educators, and other public health measures, in addition to reimbursing local government for costs incurred related to COVID-19 mitigation and response.

In response to query by Commissioner Gerard regarding how much of the CARES Act money has been spent, Mr. Burton indicated that the County has spent over \$5 million on PPE; that there has been an increased need to support nursing homes, hospitals, and first responders; and that as a result of that need, the County will be purchasing more PPE and testing equipment to keep up with future needs.

In response to queries by the Commissioners, Mr. Burton, Ms. Phillips, and Ms. Benedict provided information regarding the following topics:

- Broad authority of the County Administrator under the proposed resolutions to plan for future needs, such as increasing nursing staff to address hospital staffing needs

- Prevalence of repeat applications for the Financial Assistance Program from individuals each month, and the expansion of the program to reach more individuals
- Role of the navigators in partnering with the Juvenile Welfare Board, Chambers of Commerce, and other community partners to help individuals access the Pinellas CARES programs
- Eligibility of small businesses under the Business Grants Program to apply for funding based upon their 2019 revenue and whether the program would be accessible to small businesses who started in 2020
- Ability for small businesses to re-apply for funding under Phase 2 of the Business Grants Program, even if they received money in Phase 1
- Criteria used for determining the grant award amount for small businesses
- Communications to individuals who already received funding under the Financial Assistance Program to let them know about increased availability of funding under Phase 2
- Staffing capacity to handle an increased volume of applications
- Enforcing compliance by landlords to accept rent money received through the Pinellas CARES programs
- Potential ineligibility of small businesses to receive money from the Pinellas CARES programs if they have already received federal funding or if the businesses are of a certain type, such as consulting firms

In response to queries by Commissioners Seel and Welch and referring to a list provided as part of the meeting materials, Economic Development Director Michael Meidel, Ms. Phillips, and Mr. Burton explained that the expanded list of small businesses eligible to receive funding under Phase 2 is mainly focused on those businesses who were not forced to close themselves, but whose customers were forced to close; that there is flexibility in the proposed resolutions for the County Administrator to adjust the criteria for eligibility; and that Target Industry businesses that receive matching grants under the Pinellas CARES program will not be able to also receive funding under the Business Grants Program.

In response to queries by Commissioner Eggers, Mr. Burton indicated that he is in discussion with the local municipalities regarding how to appropriately distribute funds, including required documentation regarding how the money is spent, and Ms. Benedict and Mr. Meidel provided information regarding the status of individuals and small businesses who applied for the Pinellas CARES programs under Phase 1.

In response to queries by Commissioner Gerard regarding individuals who did not have a job before COVID-19 and who are now having trouble finding employment, Ms. Phillips, with input from Mr. Burton and Ms. Benedict, explained that some of the Pinellas CARES funding under Phase 2 is being allocated to non-profits that assist individuals with basic needs; that 2-1-1 Tampa Bay Cares refers citizens to various programs; and that staff at 2-1-1 Tampa Bay Cares are trained to handle such types of inquiries.

In response to concerns expressed by Commissioners Gerard and Long regarding the over 3,000 people in the queue waiting to receive funding from the Financial Assistance

Program, Mr. Burton, with input from Ms. Benedict and Ms. Phillips, explained that the County is trying to simplify the process during Phase 2; that the attestation form will make it easier for individuals to apply by lessening the documentation requirements; and that in addition to the attestation form, the only other written requirement will be proof of Pinellas County residency.

Discussion ensued regarding the following topics:

- Availability of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding for local municipalities
- Availability of funds for existing Target Industry businesses
- Amount of money that each business and individual will be eligible for under the two micro-grant programs for the arts and business diversity
- Request for more information regarding the specific allocation of funding under the Pinellas CARES programs for public health programs
- Impact of COVID-19 and delays in rent-assistance funding for individuals who are being evicted and how to provide money to legal aid and landlords to prevent evictions
- Criteria under Phase 2 for allocating funds to non-profits

Upon call by the Chair for public comment, the following individuals expressed their concerns:

David Waddell, Clearwater
Steven Rodriguez (city not provided)
Marilyn Turman (city not provided)
Steven Brown, Palm Harbor
Elizabeth Siplin, St. Petersburg
Tommy Lorden, Boulder County, Colorado
Stephanie McNeal, Clearwater
Juan da Costa, St. Petersburg
Corey Givens Jr. (city not provided)

In response to comments by members of the public, Commissioner Eggers, Ms. Phillips, and Ms. Benedict indicated that individuals could use their 2018 tax return as a substitute for certain documentation required for the Pinellas CARES programs; that there would need to be additional research done to determine whether individuals could redact documentation prior to providing it to the County; and that the attestation form will be posted to the website and provided to the Commissioners.

A motion was made by Commissioner Welch, seconded by Commissioner Long, that the resolutions for Phase 2 of the Pinellas CARES programs be approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

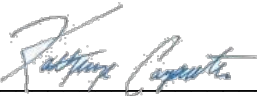
Aye: 7 - Chair Gerard, Vice-Chair Eggers, Commissioner Justice, Commissioner Long, Commissioner Peters, Commissioner Seel, and Commissioner Welch

Resolutions Nos. 20-59 and 20-60 adopted approving Phase 2 of the Pinellas CARES programs and authorizing the County Administrator to make adjustments to the programs as needed.

ADJOURNMENT - 12:41 P.M.


Chair

ATTEST: KEN BURKE, CLERK

By 
Deputy Clerk

