

REPORT
ST. LOUIS COUNTY COUNCIL
JUSTICE, HEALTH AND WELFARE COMMITTEE
1:00 P.M., WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2020
Approved June 16, 2020

The St. Louis County Council’s Justice, Health and Welfare Committee met on Wednesday, June 3, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. by videoconference to discuss the effects of COVID-19 in disadvantaged communities in St. Louis County.

ATTENDANCE AT THE MEETING

Committee Members present were Chairwoman Rochelle Walton Gray, Tim Fitch and Lisa Clancy. Councilwoman Rita Heard Days attended via phone.

Councilwoman Kelli Dunaway and Councilman Ernie Trakas were also in attendance.

Representatives of St. Louis County Departments present were:

Spring Schmidt	Department of Public Health
Theda Person	Office of the County Executive – Community Engagement

Diann L. Valenti, Acting Administrative Director for the Council, Gen Frank, Associate County Counselor, Chris Grahn-Howard, Budget Policy Coordinator for the Council, and Chuck Henderson, Information Technology (IT) Manager, were present as well.

Also present were Reverend Gabrielle Kennedy, Director of Faith & For the Sake of All, and Mr. Jason Purnell, Associate Professor at Washington University & lead member of the COVID-19 Regional Response Team.

MEETING CONVENED

The Chair called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. and stated the purpose of the meeting. Chairwoman Walton Gray stated, “The Committee takes official notice of and admits into evidence all St. Louis County Ordinances and Resolutions.”

INTRODUCTION REMARKS BY CHAIRWOMAN ROCHELLE WALTON GRAY

Chairwoman Walton Gray thanked everyone in attendance and proceeded to the next Order of Business.

REPORT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Chair recognized Spring Schmidt, Acting Director of the Department of Public Health (DPH). Ms. Schmidt proceeded with some key updates regarding DPH, COVID-19, and the vulnerable communities.

Testing for COVID-19

Ms. Schmidt reported that as of yesterday, June 2, 2020, the County had reached an overall total of 5,084 confirmed cases of COVID-19. She also reported that the County has exceeded the initial goal of tests completed per day and are currently testing an average of 1,100 County residents per day. Additionally, Ms. Schmidt explained they've expanded the criteria for testing which has helped to reduce the overall positivity rate. Based on the goal set at the national level, St. Louis County is doing well.

In addition to the approximately 400 tests DPH has administered to community members, they've also tested 319 members of Justice Services and Corrections Medicine. She reported that DPH will continue to move forward with the goal to have testing throughout all of the Justice Center as including during intake.

Ms. Schmidt reported they've also partnered with long-term care facilities to complete additional testing. She noted the state, as well as other partners, are also assisting in getting tests administered throughout those facilities.

Masks/Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Per a previous discussion with Council members, Ms. Schmidt stated that DPH is in the process of putting language together for the Council members. The Council members can then use said language in an email to reach out to mayors, organizational leadership, senior living facilities, etc. within their respective districts in order to follow up and inquire as to whether or not they need any personal protective equipment. She noted any masks provided at this time will be disposable masks, but further mentioned they will be submitting an Invitation for Bid (IFB) for cloth masks in the near future.

Ms. Schmidt explained that the County Office of Emergency Management (EOC) has been distributing other healthcare PPE as well, mainly for first responders, EMS workers, fire departments, etc. She further explained that DPH has been partnering with the EOC to build new dashboards to better compile and report the related data and tracking in a more simplified manner.

Participatory Budgeting

Ms. Schmidt reported that the application to participate in DPH's participatory budgeting is available on stlcorona.com. She explained they are looking for residents from the zip codes that have been identified as having the greatest need. Those residents will work with DPH to identify services they need in their areas as it relates to use of the CARES funds.

Report from the Department of Public Health – Continued**DPH Clinics**

Ms. Schmidt stated that DPH continues to plan out 2021, keeping new and current needs in mind as they develop the infrastructure, including the clinical services.

She noted the DPH clinics, such as the John C Murphy building and the others that have been temporarily shut down, will be fully reopening on June 15th. Chairwoman Walton Gray requested that Ms. Schmidt elaborate a bit more regarding the clinical operations. Ms. Schmidt explained that the North Central location (Jennings) and South County clinic remained open over the last couple of months; however, patients were not being seen at the John C. Murphy building. She further explained patient volume has been down since many people have stayed at home.

Later in the discussion, Councilwoman Days circled back and inquired about the on goings related to the mental health realm. Ms. Schmidt stated they are currently providing direct care services at the clinics. She explained a bit more about the participatory budgeting process in relation to the \$2 million of the CARES funds delegated for mental health services and supports. Councilwoman Days expressed some concern about the general public's knowledge regarding mental health services. Ms. Schmidt explained they've been using a similar process with ReCAST and have had tremendous results. Additionally, mental health experts and subject matter experts are involved throughout the process. Chairwoman Walton Gray asked when those discussions would begin. Ms. Schmidt stated they'll begin in approximately a week and a half since they are still recruiting.

REMARKS FROM REVEREND GABRIELLE KENNEDY, DIRECTOR OF FAITH & FOR SAKE OF ALL

The Chair recognized Reverend Gabrielle Kennedy, Director of Faith & For the Sake of All and Pastor of Buren Chapel AME Church, and welcomed any comments from the Reverend at this time. Rev. Kennedy greeted the Committee and those present and thanked everyone for taking the time to meet and discuss the given topics.

Rev. Kennedy explained that she's been speaking with other clergy and faith leaders in the community and they've been discussing their concerns regarding how they can be supportive in slowing the spread of COVID-19. She stated many pastors have been agreeable to hosting pop-up testing at their church sites in the hopes that more individuals will be open to getting tested in such a setting. She noted that CareSTL Health (formerly Myrtle Hilliard Davis clinics) has partnered with the church sites and agreed to come perform the testing for those pop-up clinics.

Rev. Kennedy explained that Faith & For the Sake of All is a community-based organization which comes out of the Emmanuel Episcopal Church and they are committed to racial equity in the St. Louis region. As such, they've been placing emphasis on testing in predominantly black neighborhoods, especially in North County and North City. They place their focus on areas in

Remarks from Reverend Gabrielle Kennedy – Continued

which they see the highest prevalence of the virus. Rev. Kennedy noted some upcoming dates and locations of the pop-up testing sites. She further noted that Masks For The People, a national cooperative, will also distribute masks and hand sanitizer during some of the pop-up events.

Chairwoman Walton Gray referenced a previous discussion pertaining to the lack of trust from the black community and asked Rev. Kennedy to elaborate a bit more on how they can go about dispelling that distrust or lack of trust. Rev. Kennedy explained that as many are aware, there is an issue of distrust, especially when it comes to something new such as the coronavirus, in terms of how the black community responds to general health issues. She stated she's personally had to communicate over and over again the importance of prevention and addressing any COVID-related concerns in the black community. She explained that historically speaking, there are examples of times in which what was good for the general public was not good for the black community, hence the distrust or lack of trust. Because of that distrust, Rev. Kennedy stated she believes that's why it's important for black faith communities to continue to address the situation even more so. She stated that even when there's an overall decline in the number of positive cases or resulting deaths, that does not necessarily mean that's the case for the black community. Rev. Kennedy noted there's many reasons for that, specifically mentioning the following potential causes: underlying health issues, the disproportionate number of black individuals who are essential workers in forward-facing positions, and the level of poverty that exists in many of the black neighborhoods. Because of those reasons, in addition to other factors, the black community is often affected disproportionately, and typically in a negative sense. Rev. Kennedy explained that even though the state is generally reopening, many black pastors and clergy are still encouraging their parishioners to avoid going out primarily because "there are too many x-factors" and they are being affected disproportionately. Furthermore, the pastors and leaders are continuing to strongly encourage and push parishioners and community members to get tested, to continue to practice proper social distancing when they are out, and to wear a mask while out. The hope is that hearing it from their faith leaders will help alleviate some of that aforementioned distrust.

Councilwoman Days addressed Rev. Kennedy and inquired as to the efforts put forth to reach out to the church leaders or other clergy that may not be associated with any of the organizations, alliances or groups. Rev. Kennedy explained that initially it was more of a clergy coalition effort but they realized the importance of opening it up to any church or faith leader who would be interested in hosting pop-up clinics or assisting in the community outreach efforts. Councilwoman Days asked who is contacting the ministers or leaders that may not be part of any alliance. Rev. Kennedy explained a lot of this is already happening but it is largely taking place via word of mouth and networking.

REMARKS BY JASON PURNELL, MEMBER OF THE PANDEMIC TASK FORCE AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

The Chair recognized Mr. Jason Purnell, Associate Professor at Washington University & lead member of the COVID-19 Regional Response Team, and welcomed any comments from him at this time.

Mr. Purnell reiterated the importance of and expressed his gratitude for the work and efforts of Rev. Kennedy.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

(Scrivener's Note: Discussion took place throughout the presentation sections of the meeting.)

PUBLIC COMMENTS – OTHER INTERESTED PERSONS

Diann Valenti, Acting Administrative Director, reported that there was one public comment submitted for this meeting. Per Chairwoman Walton Gray's request, Ms. Valenti read the following public comment, as submitted:

Mr. Tom Sullivan, 751 Syracuse Avenue, University City, MO 63130: "Madam Chair and Committee Members, I have a few things to mention. When looking at the map of where the COVID-19 hit the hardest, it's mainly far North County and far West County. Has there ever been an explanation for this since the demographics are so different? Another question I would have is why it took so long for the County to distribute face masks in North County. It was in the first week of March that it was known of the first person to be infected with coronavirus in St. Louis County. Yet it was the last week of May that County Executive Sam Page announced a bunch of face masks would be handed out in North County. By that time most everyone already had a mask. They were needed two months earlier. On March 3, the County Council foolishly and irresponsibly approved \$15.3 million as an upfront payment to expand the downtown convention center. Every member of this committee turned your back on the needs of the community and voted to approve it. These are surplus funds that could have immediately been used for any general revenue purpose -- including face masks or testing for coronavirus. A total of \$240 million of county tax dollars will be going to support the convention expansion -- despite the Convention & Visitors Commission unable to fill up convention dates for the facilities they currently have. North County is supposedly considered a "Disadvantaged Community." Maybe "neglected community" would be more like it. A few years ago a senior citizen center in North County was closed for lack of funds. Yet Councilwoman Walton Gray would rather send hundreds of millions of dollars of tax dollars downtown for an expanded convention center. The retail base continues to decline in North County and nothing is being done about that. Jamestown Mall has turned into a rat-infested eyesore and nothing is being done about it. Many other retail businesses have also left and more will likely be leaving, along with many residents. There are also food deserts in North County and nothing is being done about this either. Thank you for listening to my comments."

Public Comments – Other Interested Persons – Continued

At this time, Ms. Theda Person, Community Engagement Coordinator for St. Louis County, asked to make a few comments. Chairwoman Walton Gray welcomed Ms. Person. Ms. Person addressed Ms. Schmidt, Rev. Kennedy and Mr. Purnell to offer the Community Engagement office's assistance in their efforts and processes in order to ensure they are meeting the needs of the community as much as possible. Ms. Schmidt reviewed some of the ways DPH and the Community Engagement office, or Ms. Person, have worked together. Rev. Kennedy noted that as they've moved forward, they have found churches outside of the North County area that also want to participate or offer their support so they are beginning to face some challenges in the coordination process. With that, Ms. Person provided her email address, tperson@stlouisco.com.

There being no other public comments, the Committee proceeded with the next item on the Order of Business.

DISCUSSION AND ADJOURNMENT

The Chair called for comments from the Council Members.

Councilwoman Clancy noted that some of the CARES Act funds will be going to the ReCAST program and asked for a status update on the program relative to the CARES Act money it will be receiving. Ms. Schmidt explained that although DPH is using the ReCAST core model, they have to separate the processes and funds since ReCAST is a federally-funded program. The ReCAST model of working with the community members is helping to set the tone in order to identify the resources needed within the community. She noted that in using the ReCAST model over the last four years, she's seen and participated in some of the most robust conversations she's ever had regarding program development within communities. She further praised the thoughtfulness of the community members in identifying and setting the scope of work within the communities. Ms. Schmidt reported that ReCAST has disbursed approximately \$4.5 million to 30-35 organizations in that previously mentioned four-year time period. Councilwoman Clancy thanked Ms. Schmidt for the information. She additionally thanked her for providing clarification regarding the fact that the ReCAST program is not receiving the CARES Act funds, but rather DPH is simply using the ReCAST participatory budgeting model as they allocate and disburse the CARES Act funds.

Moved by Council Member Fitch, seconded by Council Member Clancy and carried to adjourn the meeting at 1:52 p.m.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Chairwoman Rochelle Walton Gray
Hon. Rita Heard Days

Hon. Tim E. Fitch

Hon. Lisa D. Clancy