



City of Phoenix

Minutes

Meeting Location:
City Council Chambers
200 W. Jefferson St.
Phoenix, Arizona 85003

City Council Policy Session

Tuesday, September 7, 2021

2:30 PM

phoenix.gov

CALL TO ORDER

The Phoenix City Council convened in Policy Session on Tuesday, Sept. 7, 2021 at 3:05 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Present: 9 - Councilwoman Yassamin Ansari, Councilman Sal DiCiccio, Councilwoman Betty Guardado, Councilwoman Ann O'Brien, Councilwoman Laura Pastor, Councilwoman Debra Stark, Councilman Jim Waring, Vice Mayor Carlos Garcia and Mayor Kate Gallego

Councilman DiCiccio joined the meeting at 3:11 p.m.

Councilman DiCiccio left the meeting at 3:26 p.m.

Councilman Waring left the meeting at 4:15 p.m.

COUNCIL INFORMATION AND FOLLOW-UP REQUESTS

Councilwoman Guardado noted the tragic deaths of Phoenix Firefighter Miguel Angulo and Phoenix Police Sergeant Tom Craig who had both recently contracted COVID-19. She gave her condolences to both families. The Councilwoman spoke about a community meeting that was scheduled on Sept. 7 at Homestead Park in which discussion of future amenities for the park took place. She invited residents to join her at the Mexican Baseball Fiesta event taking place on Sept. 23 at the American Family Fields in Maryvale. Councilwoman Guardado explained there would be COVID-19 testing and vaccinations leading up to and taking place during the event.

Councilwoman O'Brien gave an update on the District 1 Community Breakfast event that took place on Aug. 27 and was attended by over 70 guests. She

thanked Street Transportation staff for hosting a virtual forum informing residents of upcoming street maintenance and bike lane expansion projects. The Councilwoman also gave her condolences to the families of Phoenix Firefighter Miguel Angulo and Police Sergeant Tom Craig.

Councilwoman Ansari shared her condolences with the Fire and Police departments for their losses as well as condolences for the family of a Downtown Phoenix Ambassador that was struck by a car late last month. The Councilwoman described the effectiveness of the heat relief cooling bus outside the Human Services Campus and highlighted the need to expand service hours to assist those experiencing homelessness. She spoke about community events that had taken place including a meet and greet with the owner of the local restaurant Testal. Councilwoman Ansari gave details about the first Ad Hoc Electric Vehicle meeting and the assigned subcommittees.

Mayor Gallego shared her condolences for the families of the Phoenix employees who had passed away and thanked them for their service. She noted the difficulties that the Phoenix community has had in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19. Mayor Gallego also thanked those who had reached out to her regarding the passing of her mother. She also wished the Jewish community a happy new year. The Mayor congratulated Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett for winning a bet of whether the Phoenix Suns would beat the Milwaukee Bucks in the 2021 NBA Finals.

CONSENT ACTION

This item is scheduled to allow the City Council to act on the Mayor's recommendations on the Consent Agenda. There was no Consent Agenda for this meeting.

CALL FOR AN EXECUTIVE SESSION

A vote may be held to call an Executive Session for a future date.

REPORTS AND BUDGET UPDATES BY THE CITY MANAGER

This item is scheduled to allow the City Manager to provide brief informational reports on topics of interest to the City Council. The City Council may discuss these reports but no action will be taken.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION (ITEMS 1-2)**1 Accelerated Pavement Maintenance Program Update****Discussion**

Mayor Gallego noted the importance of street maintenance efforts and introduced Councilman Waring for opening comments.

Councilman Waring spoke to the bipartisan nature of the street repaving efforts by current and past Councils and thanked Mayor Gallego and City staff for dedicating time and effort to this topic. He introduced Deputy City Manager Mario Paniagua to begin the staff presentation.

Mr. Paniagua gave a brief introduction of the Accelerated Pavement Maintenance Program before turning to Streets Director Kini Knudson and Deputy Street Transportation Director Chris Ewell for their update.

Mr. Knudson shared the success of the Accelerated Pavement Maintenance Program, emphasizing that the program was already 83 percent complete while only utilizing 60 percent of the allotted timeframe. He spoke about innovative aspects of the program like the Cool Pavement Pilot and the Recycled Asphalt Millings projects. Mr. Knudson highlighted staff's outreach efforts to the community in both an online and in-person forums.

Mr. Ewell spoke about recent repaving actions and showed the Council before and after photos of the street paving process.

Mr. Knudson discussed future projects like the Cool Pavement Pilot Phase II and the 36 miles of arterial street mill and overlay planned in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023.

Mr. Paniagua requested Council action to allocate \$18 million in Arizona Highway User Revenue Funds (HURF) for local street pavement in FY 2022 - 23.

Councilwoman Stark thanked the Street Transportation Department for their leadership and outreach efforts in the community. She supported staff's recommendation.

Councilwoman Guardado thanked Street Transportation Department staff for the work being done on the Accelerated Pavement Maintenance Program and noted positive conversations she had with constituents about the staff's efforts on the project. The Councilwoman also highlighted the need to focus on equitable street paving efforts and targeting distressed streets on the west side of Phoenix.

Councilwoman Ansari thanked City staff for their speed and diligence in completing the pavement maintenance project while also emphasizing the program's sustainability aspects and the need for more equitable programs. She stated her support for the motion and asked if staff looked at how traffic accidents influence departmental actions.

Councilman DiCiccio thanked the Street Transportation Department staff and highlighted the need to focus on long-term infrastructure maintenance. He spoke about using federal COVID-19 relief funding for street and infrastructure improvement, saying that Phoenix residents would feel good about the City and property values would rise as infrastructure improved.

Vice Mayor Garcia thanked the Street Transportation Department staff on the work being done and wanted to know more about the variation of staff's community outreach efforts in each Council district. He followed up by saying that staff should work in partnership with the Council offices to create intentional outreach. Lastly, Vice Mayor Garcia shared his excitement regarding the sustainability aspect of the street maintenance program, noting the two Cool Pavement Pilot sites in his district.

Mayor Gallego shared her concern of relying on the gas tax for funding sources, saying that the State must begin to modernize how it funds transportation. The Mayor thanked Street Transportation Department staff for creating a proactive, data-driven process that analyzes where to make investments. She also expressed her hope that the Cool Pavement Pilot project would be expanded soon.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Stark, seconded by Councilwoman O'Brien, that this item be approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 9 - Councilwoman Ansari, Councilman DiCiccio, Councilwoman Guardado, Councilwoman O'Brien, Councilwoman Pastor, Councilwoman Stark, Councilman Waring, Vice Mayor Garcia and Mayor Gallego

No: 0

2 Emergency Rental Assistance Program/American Rescue Plan Act Rent and Utility Assistance Recommendations

Discussion

Mayor Gallego introduced Deputy City Manager Gina Montes to give a staff presentation on the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Rent and Utility Assistance.

Ms. Montes introduced Human Services Director Marchelle Franklin, Water Services Director Troy Hayes, and Housing Director Titus Mathew to give a presentation of the ERA and ARPA programs.

Ms. Franklin gave a recap of the Coronavirus Relief Fund in which the Council approved \$29 million for emergency rent, mortgage, and utility services for Phoenix residents. She highlighted challenges and improvement areas with the ERA program dealing with the completeness of applications and staff resources. Ms. Franklin noted these issues are not unique to the City. She discussed the mitigation tools in dealing with those issues such as hiring an ERA administrator to evaluate the program and application processes, as well as the expansion of Family Service Center hours. Family Service Centers will be open Monday through Saturday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. starting on Sept. 20.

Assistant City Manager Jeff Barton explained the ERA 2.0 and ARPA funding, recalling that the Council had already approved the use of \$10 million in rent and utility assistance under the City's ARPA Strategic Plan. Mr. Barton recommended that Council utilize \$4 million of the rent and utility assistance to applicants with a household income between 80 percent to 120 percent Area Median Income (AMI), \$5 million to Deferred Payment Arrangement (DPA) recovery planning, and \$1 million allocated to the Landlord Incentive Program.

Ms. Franklin stated that staff would follow the same guidelines as the

current ERA Program and introduced Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes noted the Water Services Department launched the DPA Program which allowed water users to defer monthly charges to future months. He explained for the past 19 months the Water Services Department had not enforced revenue and there were no single-family residential water shut-offs or low flow devices installed.

Mr. Hayes stated that the Water Services Department was operating under a \$9.5 million deficit. He explained if the Council approved staff's recommendation, \$5 million of ARPA funding for DPA customers would be applied to DPA balances on Oct. 1. Mr. Hayes stated if a customer paid one-third of the outstanding DPA balance, ARPA funding would be applied directly to the remaining two-thirds.

Mr. Mathews explained that the proposed \$1 million of ARPA funding for the Landlord Incentive program would go towards a \$500 signing bonus for landlords executing a Section 8 Housing Assistance Payment contract. He stated that additional funds would help Phoenix voucher holders to retain and find new housing options.

Ms. Montes restated staff's recommendation to utilize \$10 million of ARPA funds towards Utility and Rent Assistance programs. She recommended \$4 million be allocated to expand ERA Program income criteria, \$5 million toward the implementation of the Water Services DPA Recovery Program, and \$1 million to continue the Landlord Incentive Program.

Mayor Gallego introduced public comment.

Ms. Rola Medanat explained that she was out of work after being infected with COVID-19 and behind on both her APS and water utility bill. She expressed her gratitude to the company Wildfire and the City for helping her catch up on bills through ERA funding.

Mayor Gallego opened the floor for council comments and motions.

Vice Mayor Garcia thanked staff and his colleagues in Council Districts 4,

5, and 7. He noted a sense of urgency to protect tenants in the City as the end of the Federal Eviction Moratorium approaches. Vice Mayor Garcia stated his excitement for the changes in City policy and emphasized the importance of community outreach in communicating the Water Services DPA program.

Councilwoman Ansari thanked staff and noted the financial consequences of the pandemic. She also expressed gratitude to Wildfire Executive Director Cynthia Zwick for partnering with the City.

Councilwoman Ansari asked how staffing changes and updates to processes have impacted the approval of applications. She also asked if the City would need to hire additional staff to improve those processes in response to the Federal Eviction Moratorium being lifted.

Ms. Montes replied that the City would continue to monitor community needs and assess whether additional staff hiring was required. She noted that the City was already hiring 50 additional staff members to assist with applications.

Ms. Franklin replied that she had heard from community members who stated the changes in application processes were beneficial. She also explained that the ability to self-attest was making a positive difference throughout the application process.

Mr. Barton replied that the City continued to negotiate with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) to process applications which would add another opportunity for Phoenix residents to submit applications.

Councilwoman Ansari asked for further elaboration of equitable outreach efforts to landlords for the Landlord Incentive Program.

Mr. Mathew stated that the City follows the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines to deconcentrate poverty in Phoenix. He stated that much of Section 8 housing was located around public transportation and that the Landlord Incentive Program was advertised through email listservs and flyers sent out to landlords and tenants.

Councilwoman Guardado asked if the \$10 million in funds were new ARPA monies or if the funds would come from the \$198 million that hadn't been allocated.

Mr. Barton stated that the \$10 million would come from the \$198 million of ARPA funds that the Council approved on June 8.

Councilwoman Guardado asked what the City could be doing to accelerate the launch of the program and noted the challenges that some community members have with using computers to apply for funding.

Ms. Montes responded that City lobbies were open and applicants could bring documents in-person. She expressed the City's concern with the COVID-19 infection rates but stated that the priority for the City was to staff those service centers.

Councilwoman Pastor thanked City staff for their efforts and noted that the City had helped over 91 households with this process throughout the months of July and August. She also stated the need to accelerate the City's efforts in helping the community due to the Federal Eviction Moratorium being lifted.

Councilwoman Pastor described long wait times for the Rent Relief Hotline and asked if there was a way that community members could leave messages regarding their application and get a call back later in the day. She also asked if agencies contracted by Wildfire were required to maintain a minimum staffing level or if there was a weekly production quota.

Councilwoman Pastor asked if the hiring of additional staff would go to agencies receiving large volumes of applications. She also asked if staff could elaborate on the vetting process for employees and volunteers that review personal data within the application process.

Councilwoman Pastor inquired if the caseload between agencies was being spread out and wanted to know who would manage and monitor that process. She also wanted to know if the City had contracted with

more agencies to try and resolve the six-month backlog of applications. Councilwoman Pastor asked what assistance the City was requesting from DES.

City Manager Ed Zuercher stated that the DES application portal was closed to large cities and the City had requested DES to open the portal to Phoenix residents. He explained that DES would allow the City's use of the application portal if the City closed the Wildfire application portal. Mr. Zuercher said that the City denied that request and was still negotiating with DES.

Councilwoman Pastor asked if the City was still negotiating with DES.

Mr. Zuercher replied that was correct.

Councilwoman Pastor asked if the new hours for the Family Services Centers could begin before Sept. 20 and wondered if applicants could be updated on their application status after submission.

Ms. Montes explained that each agency had developed a caseload process and that applicants could call each agency and get an updated application status. Ms. Montes said that there was a backlog of applications, but the City was working in partnership with the agencies and Wildfire to work through that queue.

Councilwoman Pastor pointed out that the City, each agency, and Wildfire all had different processes and stated that the City should analyze how applications move through the process.

Ms. Franklin, referring to the question regarding the hotline busy signal, stated that the signal should not be happening and that she would speak with staff right away to look into the issue.

Ms. Montes stated that Wildfire had relationships with agencies serving the public and each agency had negotiated the staffing requirement with Wildfire. Ms. Montes explained those staffing requirements were dependent on funding received from the agencies. She stated the administrative cap was 10 percent. Ms. Montes said the processes the

City had related to how community members are served remain the same between agencies and that quotas depend on the dollar amount of each agency.

Ms. Montes added that the City worked with Wildfire on recruitment of other nonprofits and that there were 12 organizations currently serving the public. Ms. Montes said that Wildfire had been working to identify additional nonprofit partners.

Ms. Montes stated that Sept. 20 was a firm date for the change to Family Service Center hours, as the City would need to give employees appropriate notice before changing the schedule.

Councilwoman Pastor asked staff to elaborate on the vetting process for employees and volunteers reviewing personal data within the application process.

Ms. Franklin stated that the City did not have any volunteers reviewing ERA applications and confirmed that only full-time and temporary City staff reviewed applications after going through a rigorous background check. She also stated that the nonprofit agencies partnered with Wildfire had the same requirements with background checks. Ms. Franklin said that she was unsure if Wildfire and its subcontracting agencies utilized volunteers to review sensitive documents but that she would confirm that information.

Councilwoman Pastor stated that she found there were volunteers working with the sensitive documents. She said it was important to know about the vetting process for volunteers.

Ms. Franklin stated she would like to work in partnership with Council to follow up on the volunteer vetting process with Wildfire.

Councilwoman Pastor stated that it could be a cumbersome application process.

Mayor Gallego stated that it was important to continue to improve the program and recognized the success of making programs like this

available to more members of the Phoenix community. She also described her work experience prior to becoming the City's Mayor, with delivering utility assistance to community members. She thanked City staff and partners for continuing their hard work in delivering aid.

A motion was made by Vice Mayor Garcia, seconded by Councilwoman Stark, that this item be approved. The motion carried by the following voice vote:

Yes: 7 - Councilwoman Ansari, Councilwoman Guardado, Councilwoman O'Brien, Councilwoman Pastor, Councilwoman Stark, Vice Mayor Garcia and Mayor Gallego

No: 0

Absent: 2 - Councilman DiCiccio and Councilman Waring

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Council, Mayor Gallego declared the meeting adjourned at 4:18 p.m.

For further information, please call the Management Intern, City Manager's Office, at 602-262-4449.