

The City Council of the City of Columbus, Texas met in regular session on Monday, April 27, 2020, at 5:30 p.m., in the Council Chambers of City Hall located at 605 Spring St., Columbus, Texas, with the following present:

Mayor	-	Lori An Gobert
Mayor Pro Tem	-	Chuck Rankin
Councilman	-	Keith Cummings
Councilman	-	Michael Ridlen
Councilman	-	Gary Swindle
Councilwoman	-	Sandra Frnka
City Manager	-	Donald Warschak
City Secretary	-	Bana Schneider

Other City Staff present included:

Police Chief	-	Skip Edman
Code/Fire Assistant	-	Duane Naiser
CCIDC President	-	Bruce Tesch

10. Call to Order.

Mayor Lori An Gobert called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

11. Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.

Gobert led the Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.

12. Consent Agenda:

- a. Approval of Invoices
- b. Approval of Minutes of the April 3, 2020 Special Meeting
- c. Approval of Minutes of the April 13, 2020 Regular Meeting
- d. Approval of the Investment Report for the Quarter Ended March 31, 2020

Councilman Swindle made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Councilman Rankin seconded the motion.

The vote was as follows:

Ayes: Councilmen Cummings, Ridlen, Swindle, and Rankin; Councilwoman Frnka

The motion passed.

4. Consideration and Action to Approve an Invoice for Colorado Valley Veterinary Services.

Councilman Cummings made a motion to approve the invoice. Councilman Rankin seconded the motion.

The vote was as follows:

Ayes: Councilmen Cummings, Swindle, and Rankin; Councilwoman Frnka
Abstain: Councilman Ridlen

The motion passed.

5. Citizens' Presentations and Comments. ¹

There were no citizen comments.

6. City Manager's Report Including Sales Tax, the Water Filtration Project Update, the Water Well Rehab Project, and the North River Bridge Project Updates.

City Manager, Donald Warschak, gave his report, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. He stated the sales tax payment the City received for the month of April was \$134,592. The payment for this time last year was \$119,182. The County saw an increase as well, and the Cities of Eagle Lake and Weimar saw decreases in their sales tax revenue.

Regarding the filtration project, Warschak stated the filter systems at both the Tait and Spring Water Plants are in service, and WesTech is scheduling the startup visit for the Hill location. They are unable to travel because of COVID-19. Mayor Gobert asked if WesTech had submitted additional billing to the City. Warschak stated they had not.

Warschak stated the contractor had pulled, and camera surveyed the Pool Well. They indicated there were no signs of any structural issues with the well during the initial camera survey. Warschak said the contractor is currently chemically cleaning the well.

Warschak stated the TxDOT contractor has started the rehab project on the old North River Bridge. They have been working on the bridge deck and installing the containment system so painting can begin.

There was a discussion regarding the status of the construction of the East River Bridge.

Councilman Swindle asked about the progress of the grant waterline replacement project. Warschak stated the contractor is tying the service line connections from the old to the new lines. Swindle asked about funding for the waterline replacement for the other side of town. Warschak stated once we have the final numbers for the grant project, we would be able to see how much funding would be available.

7. First Reading of Resolution 206-20, a Resolution Approving the CCIDC Community Development Project "City of Columbus COVID-19 Utility Assistance Program."

The Mayor stated CCIDC approached the City about giving a subsidy to local businesses experiencing economic hardship during the pandemic. City Secretary, Bana Schneider, explained the aging report Council received for both commercial and residential utility accounts.

Councilwoman Frnka asked about the new system, and if leaks were brought to the attention of residents. Schneider stated the utility billing clerks did receive alerts if leaks were detected in the system, and letters are sent to the account holders. Schneider stated in many instances, residents cannot afford to have the leaks fixed. She also indicated the City works with those customers, and sets up payment plans for those struggling to pay their bill.

Councilman Ridlen asked if there were any commercial accounts delinquent over four months. Schneider stated there are no active commercial utility accounts delinquent for that length of time; however, there are some closed accounts that are outstanding.

Gobert read the resolution.

She stated in order to expedite the program; she would like to have a special phone in meeting on Friday for the second reading and vote on approving the program.

Councilman Rankin asked how many accounts might receive funding from the program. CCIDC Board President, Bruce Tesch, stated there are approximately 200 commercial accounts that would be eligible. There was a discussion about the program authority and the City Attorney's advice for administration. Ridlen asked if the program was only for active utility accounts. Schneider stated yes, closed accounts would not be eligible.

8. Consideration and Action to Approve Modifications and Extension of the Disaster Declaration.

Mayor Gobert stated this item was included on the agenda since she did not know what the Governor was going to do at his press conference today. She said we should not need to take any action. The prior ordinance under the health code was still in effect.

There was discussion regarding the Governor's declaration, and what activities will be allowed and not allowed by businesses.

Gobert stated she has been contacted by several restaurants. They have given her their plans for following the Governor's guidelines. Ridlen asked if the City provides occupancy load for businesses so they can determine how many people can be inside the establishment and still meet the Governor's order. Warschak stated most businesses had received certificates of occupancy when the business first opened. The Fire Marshal can determine the occupancy load for those businesses without a COA. There was a discussion whether the percentage of occupancy allowed inside a business included staff. There was also discussion regarding the enforcement of the guidelines. Gobert read the strict guidelines for restaurants from the Governor's Report to Open Texas. Gobert stated our library may open, but we were not planning on opening playground equipment or City Hall lobby. She stated the golf course will be reopening, and she read a letter from the CMGA regarding their plans. A copy of the letter is included in these minutes.

Ridlen stated the intention of the original orders were to flatten the curve of the spread of the virus so our hospitals would not be over run. Since our resources have not been hindered here, many people are starting to complain about their liberties being taken away. He also stated he can understand that other places need these stricter guidelines. Gobert cautioned that the return to "normal" activities could have a negative effect. Some other countries that have opened back up are now closing again because of a surge in cases. She stressed the importance of following the plans as laid out by the Governor. Swindle asked how long these guidelines would be in place. Gobert stated these orders go into effect on May 1st, and the next phase would not open until the 18th. It is scheduled in at least a 14 day interval because the virus has a 14 day cycle.

Swindle asked if a demographic of those who died would ever be available. Gobert stated the DSHS breaks the demographics out in numerous ways.

Gobert stated she felt the City would probably not need to make any new declarations, and hopefully in a few weeks the ordinance concerning the parks can be repealed.

No action was taken.

9. Consideration and Action Regarding Payment Plans for Hotel Occupancy Tax.

Schneider stated she had attended a webinar put on by the Hotel and Lodging Association of Texas regarding Hotel Occupancy Tax. The comptroller has some recommendations regarding payment plans and due date extensions. Those recommendations would include collecting a down payment of 25% of the tax due, allowing for a 90 day grace period for the due date of the tax and forgoing penalties and interest if payment in full is made by the end of the 90 day grace period.

She also indicated the City had received HOT payments for the quarter ended March 31, 2020 from 4 of the eight properties that collect the tax. Schneider stated she had received an inquiry from one of the hotels regarding an extension for the payment which is due on April 30th and that she would probably receive a request from 2 of the other properties.

Schneider stated she wanted to get Council's input since it will most likely require an ordinance to amend the current HOT ordinance to allow for payment plans and to forego penalties and interest. Cummings asked if this would be a temporary amendment. Schneider stated depending on the wording, it could be temporary or permanent. Schneider explained the laws regarding HOT funds for both cities and hotels.

Frnka asked what type of time frame would we be looking at for collections. Schneider stated that would be up to Council. Ridlen asked how much money was in question. Schneider stated between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

There was a discussion regarding hotel operations during the pandemic.

Rankin stated he would be hesitant to let it go beyond 90 days, but is concerned the delay would be perpetual. There was discussion regarding different payment options including installment payments.

No action was taken.

10. Consideration and Action, if Necessary, Regarding the Fire Marshal Report.

Duane Naiser gave the Fire Marshal report, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. He stated inspections have been postponed and the fire department has made procedural changes because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

No action was required.

11. Consideration and Action, if Necessary, Regarding the March 2020 Code Enforcement Report.

Naiser also gave the Code Enforcement report, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. He gave an overview of the permits issued for the month, including building permits. He also stated the substandard property at 902 Rampart had been demolished.

No action was required.

12. Consideration and Action, if Necessary, Regarding March 2020 Police Report.

Chief Edman gave the police report, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. Edman highlighted department training and the downturn of calls for service during the month. He indicated the call volumes were now on the rise.

Councilman Ridlen asked if there had been an uptick in domestic violence. Edman stated they had not seen an increase, but he is worried about an increase in child abuse.

Swindle asked about petty juvenile crimes. Edman stated they have decreased significantly because one of the leaders has been in juvenile detention.

Edman also stated he was glad basketball hoops are not going back up at the parks just yet.

No action was required.

13. Items from Councilmembers.²

Councilman Cummings – None

Councilman Ridlen – Since people will be getting out more, he thought the Oscar Mayer community wiener roast on May 2nd would be a great event to promote. Oscar Mayer is advertising for families to have a barbeque in their driveways so they can greet their neighbors from a distance.

Councilman Swindle – None

Councilwoman Frnka – Thanked the Mayor for the amazing job she had done during this trying time. She also thanked the local grocers, pharmacies, and all of the other businesses making life a little easier for all of us.

Councilman Rankin – None

Mayor Gobert – Stated everyone had received the revised resolution supporting the second amendment along with the comments from the attorney.

14. Announcements.

Gobert stated there would be a special phone-in meeting on Friday, May 1, 2020 at 12:30 p.m. for the second reading of Resolution 206-20, and the vote on its approval.

15. Adjournment.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 6:37 p.m.



Mayor, Lori An Gobert

ATTEST:



Bana Schneider
Bana Schneider, City Secretary

¹During this agenda item, citizens may comment for the record on items, which are not on the agenda. However, the Council may not participate in discussion or deliberation on any item that is not on the agenda. Citizens may request that a topic be added to a future agenda.

²Limited to statements. Issues raised by councilmembers under this item cannot be deliberated by Council. The Open Meetings Act does not allow Council to deliberate items that don't appear on the agenda.