

The City Council of the City of Columbus, Texas met in special session on Friday, April 3, 2020, at 2:00 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 (Via Telephone)
Councilman	-	Keith Cummings
Councilman	-	Michael Ridlen
Councilman	-	Gary Swindle
Councilwoman	-	Sandra Frnka
City Manager	-	Donald Warschak
City Secretary	-	Bana Schneider

Other City Staff Present:

Police Chief	-	Skip Edman
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1. Call to Order.

Mayor Lori An Gobert called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.

Gobert led the Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.

3. Citizens' Presentations and Comments.¹

Citizen spoke during specific agenda item.

4. Consideration and Action to Approve the Modification and/or Extension of the Disaster Declaration.

The Mayor stated the City Secretary had attached the newest information regarding the Disaster Declaration and the ordinance amending the health and safety code. Citizen, Vince Leibowitz addressed Council, via telephone, regarding COVID-19. He stated he appreciated the efforts the Mayor has taken to mitigate the spread of this virus, but he felt more could be done. He stated parks should be closed, including the playground at the elementary school. The City should also consider putting warning signs in the parks if they are not going to be closed. He stated masks should be mandatory, and restrictions should be put in place limiting the number of people allowed in stores and essential businesses. He also said he felt soda fountains at gas stations and convenience stores should be closed or make it mandatory to use single dispensing lid and straw containers. Also, essential businesses should be made to put up shields, and if they cannot afford to, perhaps they could receive help from the CCIDC. Again, he thanked the Mayor and Council for all they are doing during this pandemic.

Mayor Gobert stated she could not close the parks because of the Governor's order, but the ordinance is limiting the hours parks can be utilized. The equipment has been roped off and the basketball hoops have been removed. Additionally, she stated the school has jurisdiction over their property. Gobert also said HEB has changed their protocol regarding the number of people in their store. She said pharmacies are only operating as drive-thru only. She stated she would need to check with the City Attorney regarding some of the other items Leibowitz listed.

Councilman Rankin, via telephone, stated between the resolution and ordinance, there are two different fine amounts. He asked if that makes a difference. Gobert stated the fines were different because the resolution was applicable to section 418 and the ordinance is section 122.

Councilman Swindle made a motion to approve Resolution 203-20 which extends Declaration of Disaster 2020-D-3 until terminated by further action. Councilman Ridlen seconded the motion.

The vote was as follows:

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

The motion passed.

5. Consideration and Action Regarding Ordinance No. 232-20 Concerning Actions and Rules Necessary or Expedient to Promote Health and Suppress COVID-19 Within the City of Columbus.

Gobert stated this was an emergency item to the agenda. She indicated several items were included in the ordinance, which amends the health and safety code. This was required in order to have some stricter rules and remain compliant with the Governor's order. The items included in the ordinance are an extended curfew for those under 17, parks utilized only from sunrise to sunset as long as social distancing is maintained, households are required to isolate if someone tested positive for COVID-19, and the City will provide essential services, other than emergency response, via drive-thru only.

Councilwoman Frnka asked if there was a posting of the fines. Police Chief, Skip Edman, stated fines are not posted, but the way the ordinance reads, if the sun can be seen, the park is open and if you can't see the sun, the park is closed. Councilman Swindle asked if the police department has seen any problems. He stated they are still getting calls for service, but for the most part everyone is complying with the orders in place. Councilman Ridlen asked if this included the baseball fields, softball fields, basketball courts. Edman stated it included all City parks.

Councilman Swindle made a motion to approve Ordinance No. 232-20. Councilwoman Frnka seconded the motion.

The vote was as follows:

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

The motion passed.

6. Items from Councilmembers.²

Councilman Cummings – Asked the consequences for violating the ordinance. Chief Edman stated a warning would be issued first. The intent is to limit public contact so arrest would never be on the table, but habitual offenders could be fined.

Councilman Ridlen – Asked about the plan going forward; the need for more meetings and restrictions. Gobert stated she would answer during her comments.

Councilman Swindle – Thanked public works for trimming the bush on Milam Street.

Councilwoman Frnka – Asked if they would be called concerning new cases. The Mayor stated she would inform the City Secretary whom would then send the information to Council.

Councilman Rankin – Stated the Mayor has done a great job responding to COVID-19.

Mayor Gobert – She has been in non-stop meetings, and it has been a tough week for Columbus, especially economically. She stated she was a victim of being a non-essential business. The Governor's executive order took out much of a City's "teeth" in making restrictions. He did close non-essential businesses. A letter was handed out to the non-essential businesses in town. Most had already closed on their own, and the others were amenable. Economic stimulus is coming down from Congress. Applications for financial aid are coming out. She explained the procedures for applying for the Paycheck Protection Program as well as the situation with our local banks. Gobert stated FEMA is doing a lot of stuff behind the scenes. Some of the things on Facebook are just untrue like the streets are being closed and tanks would be coming.

She highlighted the hospital plans in a worst case scenario situation. Today, the President signed Title 32 full-time National Guard duty on a fully reimbursable basis. Finally she stated she is doing a

Facebook Live presentation everyday at 3:45 p.m. to disseminate information. She extended an invitation to the other Council members to join her if they would like.

7. Announcements.

City Manager, Donald Warschak, stated there has been a disturbance to the water system during construction of the waterline near the Junior High. He said complaints about water clarity may come in. He also stated the filter systems are doing their job, and the water quality remains improved. Warschak also discussed the final filtration system at the Hill Plant. Edman stated he was able to source KN-95 masks for the police department today.

8. Adjournment.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 2:44 p.m.



Mayor, Lori An Gobert

ATTEST:



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 council members 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.