

**City of Columbus
Special City Council Meeting
(Via Teleconference)
03.20.20**

The 03.20.20 meeting of the City of Columbus City Council was called to order at 10:04 a.m. by Mayor Preiner at the City Hall. Present were Council Members Janet Hegland, Jeff Duraine, Denny Peterson, and Shelly Logren (via phone); City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko, City Attorney Bill Griffith, and Public Communications Coordinator Jessica Hughes (via phone).

Also in attendance were: Public Works Superintendent Jim Windingstad.

A. CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

1. Call to Order – Special Meeting 10:04 a.m.

B. CONSENT AGENDA

3. Motion – Agenda Approval

Motion by Hegland to approve the Consent Agenda. Seconded by Duraine. Motion carried unanimously. Roll call vote; Peterson - aye; Hegland - aye; Mayor Preiner - aye; Duraine - aye; Logren - aye.

C. PRESENTATIONS

4. Resolution Extending the Period of a Mayor-Declared Local Emergency

Mursko reported that this meeting is being held due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. This is a special meeting to pass a resolution from the City Council extending the period of mayor-declared local emergency.

Last Friday, 03.13.20, President Trump and Governor Walz declared a state of emergency. In response, on Tuesday 03.17.20, Mayor Preiner declared a local state of emergency for the City of Columbus.

Once a state of local emergency is declared, the City Council is required to hold an emergency meeting within 72 hours. This special meeting will serve as that emergency meeting.

The resolution that Mursko has presented to the Council along with the Mayor's declaration of a state of local emergency allows for meetings to occur over telephone due to the pandemic. The resolution also indicates that the City will continue to follow statutory requirements unless there is a situation where no City Administrator, City Attorney, or City

Council member is healthy enough to work.

Mursko continued to explain that the resolution includes allowing for reimbursement of costs to administer the emergency situation, when and if funding becomes available from the Federal or State government. City Staff are ensuring that all expenses related to the emergency situation are being well documented. In the near future, there may be costs incurred to update software and hardware to be compatible with video conferencing technology.

At this time, City Offices are still providing services to the public. However, the process for providing service looks different than in the past. As a matter of practice the City Employees are social distancing, using electronic means of communication more often, and a plexiglass shield has been installed at the front counter. The resolution allows the City to suspend services, but as a practice Columbus will continue to provide services until further extenuating circumstances arise. In addition to City Offices providing services, Public Works is continuing to work as well. All employees have been instructed to stay home if they are sick.

Duraine asked Mursko to discuss how the Council meeting will be run next week. Mursko began by noting the workshop on 03.25.20 has been canceled, and the City Council meeting is still scheduled to take place. Because City Offices is continuing to accept applications and provide service, Mursko is continuing to add topics to the Council agenda as usual. No typical items will be removed from the agenda unless it would require something that is not allowed by the situation (a meeting of more than 50 people, for example). Work is being done to purchase video conferencing software and hardware for upcoming City Council meetings. Mursko said that the software she is considering purchasing costs \$15 per month. Griffith noted that there is a different statute that applies for interactive meetings, such as meetings conducted through video conferencing. Before that system is established, he will work with Mursko to ensure that the City is in compliance with the statute.

Mursko continued to say that Council Members are not required to be present at City Offices for the meeting. The base requirement is that a City Administrator, City Attorney, or single Council Member must operate the software to initiate the call. Griffith noted that some Cities have instituted a policy that only one person will be present to initiate the call for each meeting. For Columbus, the decision for a Council Member of whether to attend in-person or dial-in remotely is theirs. However, the public will not be allowed at the meeting, and will instead be given the option to dial-in to the meeting remotely. Instructions for dialing-in will be posted on the City website.

Mursko added that during the Planning Commission meeting on 03.18.20 there was an option for the public to email the City Offices account to participate. She said that this will continue to be an option during City Council meetings, and City employees will be monitoring the email account's inbox during the meeting to ensure all public comments are heard.

City Attorney Bill Griffith encouraged the Mayor to be deliberate in making sure everyone provides input on topics during Council meetings held via teleconference. He added that everyone speaking should also intentionally slow down and enunciate when speaking.

Griffith added that he has been working with a number of cities in this situation, and noted that Columbus' approach is a hybrid of what he has seen other cities doing.

Logren noted that on the declaration of a local emergency, the virus is called COVID-10 rather than COVID-19 in two locations. Mursko said that will be changed and a new version will be signed by Mayor Preiner.

Logren followed up by asking if the resolution requires sharing information between the City Administrator and the City Council and Mayor? Griffith replied that the statute does not require that City Staff run every decision by the City Council and Mayor, however he would recommend it as a best practice when possible. The reason the statute does not require this level of communication is because in serious emergency situations there may not be time for that. Mayor Preiner said that he has been visiting the office regularly to stay in tune with what is happening.

Griffith recommended adding an agenda item to future meetings in order to cover any decisions that have been made regarding the COVID-19 situation.

Motion by Hegland to direct staff to add an agenda item on following Council meeting agendas to report on any contracts entered into or decisions made outside of normal operating procedures. Seconded by Duraine. Roll call vote; Peterson - aye; Hegland - aye; Mayor Preiner - aye; Duraine - aye; Logren - aye. Motion carries.

Motion by Hegland to approve Resolution 20-05, a resolution enacted pursuant to Minnesota Statute Section 12.29 Extending the Period of a Mayor-Declared Local Emergency. Seconded by Duraine. Roll call vote; Peterson - aye; Hegland - aye; Mayor Preiner - aye; Duraine - aye; Logren - aye. Motion carries.

Mayor Preiner asked if every meeting going forward is considered an emergency meeting? Griffith replied that they are not. All scheduled meetings going forward are regular meetings but Resolution 20-03 allows the City to hold them via teleconference.

Duraine asked what the plan will be if a Public Works employee becomes sick? Windingstad replied that Jim Fraley is available to work if needed. He added that because of the nature of Public Works' work, they rarely have to be in close proximity. As opposed to the nature of work in the City Office, Public Work's employees can complete their work without ever interacting or being in close proximity with each other. Windingstad noted that at this time one Public Works employee is self-quarantining at home after traveling to a high risk area for

COVID-19, and all essential services are still operating as they should.

In terms of the Building Department, Mursko noted that Building Official Leon Ohman is currently out of the office due to reasons unrelated to COVID-19. To cover his workload the City is utilizing contract services for inspections. The only Building Department services that have been suspended during this time is plan review. The City has indicated to contractors that we will continue to process requests and conduct inspections. Mursko added that the Council could make a decision to suspend Building Department inspections. Hegland noted that work is being done to ensure that Ohman and Public Works' employees have adequate protective equipment to do their jobs outside of the office.

Mursko finished by saying to the Council that if there was a scenario where at least 75% of the office fell ill, there would be a significant disruption in the level of services that the City could provide.

Griffith noted that City Staff and Council Members may begin receiving questions about whether the City will continue requiring payments for things such as taxes or utility bills. He said that before the next Council meeting he will research this question and provide guidance for how the City Council can handle these concerns. Mursko added that the State of Minnesota has given guidance that Cities are not to shut off resident's water at this time, but the Council does have discretion over whether or not to waive late fees.

Hegland thanked staff for their hard work during this time. It has been impressive to see how everyone is working together to figure out how to continue providing services to the public.

D. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Duraine to adjourn. Seconded by Hegland. Roll call vote; Peterson - aye; Hegland - aye; Mayor Preiner - aye; Duraine - aye; Logren - aye. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 10:59 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jessica Hughes, Public Communications Coordinator