



**PUBLIC SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

February 1, 2021

The Public Safety, Health and Environment Committee meeting was called to order Committee Member at 4:09 p.m. on February 1, 2021 at Grand Prairie City Hall, Council Briefing Room; 300 W. Main St., Grand Prairie, Texas.

Attendees:

Committee Members John Lopez and Jeff Copeland (few minutes late) and Chairman Cole Humphreys were present. Staff members present: Deputy City Manager Steve Dye, City Attorney Megan Suarez, Solid Waste and Recycling Manager Dr. Patricia Redfean, Code Compliance Manager Steve Collins, Director of Management Services Cathy Patrick, Manager of Utility Customer Service Cora Snyder, Assistant Chief of Police Ronnie Morris, Deputy Chief of Police Brad Leonard, Traffic Sergeant Eric Hansen, City Manager Assistant Andrew Fortune and Recording Secretary Lana Yancey.

Consider Minutes of January 4, 2021

Chairman Cole Humphreys motioned to approve the minutes as presented, Committee Member John Lopez in favor. Minutes passed as presented.

Resolution authorizing the City Manager to accept a Selective Traffic Enforcement (STEP) grant from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) for the enforcement of safety belt, child safety seat, speed, intersection traffic control, distracted driving and DWI laws in the amount of \$309,849.57

Chief Ronnie Morris briefed the committee on this item. He explained that the first year the city matches funds in the amount of \$186,058 and TxDOT funding will equal roughly \$123,000. The focus of citations for this grant is specifically moving violations. September 2019 through September of 2020 we issued approximately 20,000 citations. There are no quotas to meet, and as a result of this program there has been a decrease in traffic collisions and speeding. We did adjust our strategies during the pandemic, but we have continued our enforcement. We supply numbers to the state monthly to show what we are doing with the funds. This will also be on the City Council Agenda for tomorrow night. Grand Prairie is one of the top funded cities in the state. Motion to show support for this agenda item from the Public Safety, Health and Environment Committee was agreed upon. No further discussion.

Resolution authorizing the City Manager to apply for a STEP Commercial Vehicle Enforcement grant from the TxDOT, Texas Department of Transportation, to conduct commercial motor vehicle enforcement in the amount of \$58,717.19

Sergeant Eric Hansen briefed the committee on this item. He advised that this funding will help free up patrol officers from having to address truck route violations and other Commercial Motor Vehicle moving violations. We will have specific officers working this enforcement. Motion to show support for this item from the Public Safety, Health and Environment Committee was agreed upon. No further discussion.

Price Agreement for 150 12-gauge less lethal shotguns from Kiesler Police Supply, in the amount of \$60,162.00

Chief Morris briefed the committee on this item. We are looking to supply every patrol officer with another less lethal option in case it is needed. Currently we only have a handful of officers on duty at a time that are equipped with a less lethal shotgun. When an incident arises, and a less lethal option is needed that officer is called to the scene as soon as possible. The less lethal shotguns are regular shotguns, but the insides are changed to shoot an orange bean bag round, which is what impacts the person. The less lethal shotgun will be stored in the patrol vehicle with the patrol officer. This will help to prevent having to take any lethal action specifically in a mental illness situation. All Committee Members are in support of this item and are happy that we can make this purchase. Nothing further.

22nd Quarterly Judicial Report

Judge Bryan Arnold briefed the committee on this item. The 2020 Judicial Activity Report was submitted to committee members to look over. The Office of Court Administration has still restricted jury trials until at least April 1st, and frankly I think it will get pushed again. In June of 2020 we submitted a plan to have jury trials and had them certified but recently we had to resubmit and have them recertified. Cindy Mendez helped us to get in contact with the people we needed to do that. We are having zoom hearings only right now in which we can supply the technology to persons that need to have a hearing. The lobby at the courthouse is still open for people to come and take care of their tickets. Council Member Copeland loved all the information in the Trending Twelve Month report. Chairman Humphreys asked what the difference is between a search warrant and DWI blood search warrant. Chairman Humphreys also asked, out of 242 blood draws search warrants that were taken in 2020 is that how many convictions we got? Unfortunately, that is not something that Judge Arnold can answer because those cases go to county and it can take two years to convict. DWI search warrant specifically allows a blood draw if the offender doesn't consent. The 19 DWI blood search warrants we had in December 2020 are the ones that didn't consent to the blood draw, so a warrant was required. Council Member Lopez asked if we still have juvenile programs available. Judge Arnold advised we do not right now because we cannot see the juvenile and parents in court. We are resetting them for now and in the future we will continue to assign them community service and the HELP Mentoring Program. Mr. Copeland asked if we have done a review on our fines lately. Judge Arnold says he wasn't sure but last time we did he believes that we are in the median level compared to surrounding agencies. Mr. Dye suggested Steven Cherry with the Municipal Court and Judge Arnold come back in March or April with those numbers. Council Member Copeland would like to see the fine amounts and see if we need to raise them a little to be at average. Chairman Humphreys thanked the Judge for the report submitted. No further discussion.

Rental Assistance Update Presentation

Andrew Fortune briefed the committee on this item. We were successful in applying for and receiving \$363,000 in additional funding to help with rental assistance. These funds are rent specific, we have other funds that can be used for utility bills if needed. Clients still must show proof of economic impact, like lost wages, disaster related unemployment or increased household cost like childcare. We can help pay six months of assistance per client which includes unpaid rent balances up to three months. Grand Prairie United Charities is our 3rd party administrator who is now partnering with Lifeline for Families, so any families that meet their criteria will be sent to Lifeline. Due to the volume of clients that we are seeing now, Lifeline helps with case work only they do not disseminate rental funds. There is a 10% administration fee that Lifeline and GPUC will work out and fairly split between themselves. We anticipate that we will have funds left over after these new funds are used. Council Member Copeland wants to make sure that GPUC keeps receiving the funds and disperses them as they see fit. He doesn't want the city to allocate money to any other entity other than GPUC. Chairman Humphreys was worried about it sounding like Mr. Copeland, a Lifeline board member, was wanting to give money to a board that he is on. Council Member Copeland explained that no, he doesn't want to give it to Lifeline, he wants it to go directly to GPUC.

That way we can track our money directly to GPUC and not to multiple entities. Andrew Fortune has lunch meetings with directors of both GPUC and Lifeline and everyone is on the same page for the 10% administration fee going to GPUC and then it will be dispersed accordingly. All our Council Members that are on boards within the city can contact City Attorney Megan Suarez and she will advise if there is an ethical issue and you need to excuse yourself. All Council Members were on the same page and thanked Andrew for this information. Andrew will bring another report next month. No further discussion.

Garbage and Recycling Collection Service Delivery Survey

Dr. Patricia Redfearn and Mr. Steve Dye briefed the committee on this item. Mr. Dye explained that it has taken forever to get numbers back from Republic on pricing for garbage and recycle cart service, but it could be an increase of \$2 per month. We are still waiting on the numbers in writing from Republic and will not push anything out until we have that. We can go to trash carts and keep the recycling bins that we have now and there will not be an increase in price, but in full transparency we think just going to trash carts only is not a good idea. If we do that, we will still receive the many complaints we normally get on recycle bins. Council Member Copeland hopes that the citizens of Grand Prairie take this survey seriously. There are many different things to look at when deciding if someone wants the carts. Chairman Humphreys is generally against the carts due to the designs of different homes. We could add another question emphasizing, "If the city adds garbage cart service and not recycle carts service the price would remain the same." Currently, Dr. Redfearn advised that if we go to garbage and recycle carts with Republic the price will go up \$1.83 per month. Mr. Dye explained that Dr. Redfearn has been tenacious in getting the price down to \$1.83, which is the lowest that we have seen. Council Member Copeland had a discussion with his wife about the cart service since she takes care of it in their family and she originally didn't want them because they are big and ugly and she didn't know where she would keep the cart throughout the week. After a four-hour conversation she was for the cart service and thought it would be better. Due to there being a lot of zero lot line neighborhoods in Grand Prairie and if someone is keeping their cart on the side of their house, technically that neighbor can tell the other neighbor to get their trash off their property. Mr. Dye hopes that we can get enough response back to go one way or the other and put this issue to bed for a couple of years. He thinks that we are ready to send this survey out with the latest dollar amount from Republic. If we add a cart storage question on the survey, we don't think it would solve whether we go trash cart only or trash and recycle carts. Council Member Copeland thinks combining question 4 and 5 would make sense because it seems like we are asking twice if citizens want to go to both cart service. Mr. Dye explained why we didn't combine those questions, because it gives us higher data percentages which will help us decide if we go to both cart services or not. Council Member Humphreys realizes that some people would be badly affected by a \$2 increase per month on their trash service. Dr. Redfearn advised that we could go out for bid to find a different company to use, but that is nuclear option and we recommend not to go that way. Mr. Dye also reemphasized that this survey is not going out until we have the numbers in writing back from Republic. We can bold and capitalize "AND" in question number five to make sure that citizens understand the question. Council Member Lopez brought up that the carts will go all over the place if we go to the cart service. Council Member Copeland asked about theft of carts. Dr. Redfearn suggested the homeowners put their house number on the cart to help identify it and that there is a replacement fee to get another cart if it is stolen. Mr. Dye suggested to list the collection date may change and it would only be once a week. If as a Committee we feel that it will be a good change I say we go all in, although we know that change takes time for everyone to get used too. Surveys will be sent out just as soon as numbers come back from Republic without coming to this committee again. No further discussion.

Short Term Rentals

Steve Collins briefed the committee on this item and how we are locating short term rentals. Host Compliance is the company we are using to locate short term rentals to collect tax dollars that are due to the city. The Manager of Utility Customer Service, Cora Snyder and Director of Management Service Cathy Patrick are present today in case anyone has any questions about hotel occupancy tax. Hopefully by March we will be ready to roll this program out and get all short-term rentals registered. Host Compliance monitors address identification, compliance, rental activity, tax collection, online permitting and registration and they have a dedicated hotline for 24/7 issues that neighbors or renters may have. Host Compliance will also send out letters to each address identified as a short-term by rental websites (AIRBNB, VRBO, etc.) to communicate any issues that come up and to keep them compliant. Mr. Collins receives a weekly report from Host Compliance with added short-term rentals and shows all the complaints they receive. Host Compliance has a dashboard that is visible to Mr. Collins that will have an array of information about all issues with each short-term rental. Each short-term rental will be required to have a 24/7 contact number and a mailing address for the owner, just in case the owner has a different address than the short-term rental. Host Compliance hotline will interact with 911 in case of emergencies. Host Compliance uses a 3rd party company called Stripe that the owners of these short-term rentals will make hotel occupancy tax payments. A lot of these websites are charging the hotel occupancy tax but not paying the city. The city has only ever received a tax payment from AIRBNB. Host Compliance has recommended that we create a door hanger for the short-term rentals for anytime the city makes a visit to these locations in case of concerns. Citizens will have multiple numbers to call in case of concerns anytime of the day or night. Host Compliance will send out a press release to all outlets to notify citizens of this service and the city will be sending this out as well via social media and website. When citizens call 911 with an issue, we will send an Officer out to address it. Host Compliance also sends fire safety paperwork to all short-term rental owners and locations. Mr. Collins wants to view the registration form and Ms. Snyder wants to make sure the payment section is ready to go before we go live with this website. Host Compliance has located over 150 short term rentals in Grand Prairie thus far. It is free to register a short-term rental, there is a fee if you have not registered which we think is \$25, but we will look into that and let this committee know. At this time Host Compliance have located 66% of short-term rentals due to the parcels we gave them not matching, but they are still investigating. There are also Apartment Complexes that have apartments set aside for short term rentals. Council Member Copeland asked how much this service has cost the city. Mr. Collins said he thinks it was \$30,000 for the first year and we don't know how much the renewal fee will be. We will get the cost and get back to the committee. Council Member Copeland thinks this was the best \$30,000 we have spent. All the short-term rental addresses will be added to the Police and Fire computer aided dispatch system. This will help them know what they are responding to when and if the time comes. Chairman Humphreys asked what the problem is with short-term rentals. Mr. Dye explained that there is a multitude of issues that have come up to include litter, parking issues, drinking violations, noise nuisance and Chief Morris explained sometimes the short-term rentals are used for illegitimate and illegal purposes rented by teens. Unfortunately, there is case law and it is hard to restrict short-term rentals, so having a harsher system to use to get them aligned is the way to go. Council Member Copeland thinks that we should know what is going on in our neighborhoods and is glad that we have this company finding the short-term rentals for us. Mr. Collins agreed and explained that the short-term rentals must re-register every year and when ownership changes. Host Compliance monitors when there are special events going on in the area as well. Council Member Copeland advised that we should send a letter to the comptroller to collect the occupancy tax so they can't get away with not paying hotel occupancy taxes, but instead Host Compliance will collect that for us now through the Stripe credit card service. Chairman Humphreys asked if the main problem is noise violations with the short-term rentals, and asked about the land use regulations, which is single family occupancy. Mr. Collins advised that these short-term rentals are used more like hotels. Due to case law we can't zone short-term rentals separately. Chairman Humphreys concern is the cost for the

homeowner is going to be high and the renters are only getting a small fine if they get cited by a police officer and nothing is accomplished. Mr. Dye explained that the party house renters may get arrested and/or fined for multiple violations, but the property owner will get the registration violation and will be held accountable for paying hotel occupancy taxes. Chairman Humphreys thinks that most are unaffected by this process. Short-term rentals by law must pay hot taxes, so that isn't a city policy that is a state requirement. The websites that the property owners list their short-term rentals on walk them through the process that they need to do which includes paying hot taxes. When a property owner doesn't pay hot taxes on their short-term rental that is tax evasion. After a long discussion, everyone was appreciative of this new service and thanked Mr. Collins for his work on this. No further discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 5:46 p.m.

Executive Session

There was no executive session.



Cole Humphreys, Chairman