

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

**MAYOR CURRY DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY RE: CORONAVIRUS (COVID19)**

**City Council Chamber, 1st floor, City Hall**

**March 16, 2020**

**11:30 a.m.**

**Location:** City Council Chamber, City Hall – St. James Building; 117 West Duval Street

**In attendance:**

[in Council Chamber] Council Members Scott Wilson (President), Matt Carlucci, Randy DeFoor, Reginald Gaffney, Ju’Coby Pittman, Ron Salem

[via telephone] Council Members Danny Becton, Aaron Bowman, Michael Boylan, LeAnna Cumber, Garrett Dennis, Rory Diamond, Al Ferraro, Terrance Freeman, Tommy Hazouri, Joyce Morgan, Brenda Priestly Jackson, and Randy White

**Excused:** Council Member Sam Newby

**Also**: Jason Gabriel, Peggy Sidman, Paige Johnston and Jason Teal – Office of General Counsel; Crystal Shemwell – Legislative Services Division; Mayor Lenny Curry, Brian Hughes and Nikki Kimbleton – Mayor’s Office; Cheryl Brown – Council Secretary/Director; Steve Cassada, Melanie Wilkes and Carol Owens – Council Support Services; Chief Keith Powers and Steve Woodard – Fire and Rescue Department; Jeff Clements and Yvonne Mitchell – Council Research Division

**Meeting Convened**: 11:34 a.m.

President Wilson called the meeting to order and called the roll of council members physically present and present by telephone.

Mayor Lenny Curry expressed his displeasure at the number of private gatherings being held over the weekend at bars, restaurants and churches drawing large numbers of people in contradiction to the advice of health professionals to keep social distancing and avoid large crowds. Citizens must take this issue seriously and limit their contact with large groups to avoid spreading the virus to others.

The mayor announced that facilities with occupancy certificates for 50 people or more are required to limit attendance to no more than 50 people at a time as of 5 p.m. today per Centers for Disease Control guidelines, except for food stores and medical facilities. Alcoholic beverage sales are henceforth prohibited between midnight and 8 a.m. Stores are urged to keep full stocks of cleaning supplies and to spread out those supplies so as to avoid concentrating crowds in one place.

The Mayor announced that Council Member Sam Newby has tested positive for COVID-19 and Council Member White who visited him is self-isolating as a precaution.

Jacksonville will be a drive-up testing city as designated by the federal government and local hospitals are gearing up for more testing. Hospitals are strictly limiting visiting to patients to keep the virus in check.

The Mayor said this situation will get worse before it gets better and social distancing is required. He urged the public not to get a false sense of security by the low numbers of cases reported to date. Those cases were contracted weeks ago and more are coming. He urged reduced personal interactions, avoiding big groups, encouraged working from home, shopping at off-peak times, and trying restaurant and grocery delivery services. All City public assembly facilities are now closed. Schools are closed this week; food will be available for pick-up at schools for those who qualify for free and reduced-cost meals. The primary election goes on tomorrow as scheduled and voting facilities will be heavily sanitized. He said the City is working with homeless providers to meet their needs. City offices are open but running on essential staff only. Jury trials are suspended for 2 weeks. All City Council, committee, and board and commission meetings are cancelled. JTA is adjusting bus service.

The Mayor cautioned that people naturally feel uneasy about this situation and there is some pushback about these restrictions, but he said this IS NOT an overreaction. The virus is dangerous and we’ve got to stop its spread sooner rather than later. He urged citizens that if they think they have the symptoms of COVID-19 to call their doctor or a hospital first and get advice before going in and possibly infecting others.

Questions and answers

Council Member Morgan said her thoughts and prayers with Councilman Newby. She asked if it would be prudent for all council members to be tested because of their potential contact with Council Member Newby who has tested positive. Dr. Bradley Elias, medical director for the EMS, said that testing needs to be limited for now to only those who really need it (first responders, health care professionals). They are not recommending testing for asymptomatic people as of now.

Council Member Gaffney shared Ms. Morgan’s concern about when council members can get tested because of their potential exposure. He said everyone he’s been in contact with over the past couple of weeks is nervous and wants to know if he’s been tested and he needs to know what he can tell them. Dr. Elias reiterated that asymptomatic people don’t need to be tested; there will be more testing available later as federal assistance ramps up and testing kits are more available.

Council Member DeFoor asked about the possibility of an economic stimulus package for impacted businesses. Mayor Curry said his team is talking internally about what might be possible, possibly in conjunction with a federal stimulus package.

Council Member Pittman what is being done about the homeless and non-profit organizations that serve them. The Mayor said his team is in talks now with the non-profit community about what to do. Ms. Pittman especially asked for guidance about how feeding for the homeless should be handled, inside or outside?

Council Member Salem expressed a need to deal with churches, many of which are still operating as usual. Mayor Curry highly recommends going to virtual services, and repeated the ban on more than 50 people in 1 place. Mr. Salem urged further restrictions by shutting things down now to save more problems later.

Council Member Carlucci thanked Council Member Newby for being proactive and staying away from City Hall early on before his diagnosis. He thanked the Mayor and Council President for showing good leadership and dealing forcefully with the problem. He asked what the plans are to do the very necessary business of the Council and how will that get handled in a timely manner, especially things like the JEA board appointments and the School Board sales tax referendum. President Wilson said action by May 3rd will give the 180 days necessary to call the referendum on the school sales tax for the November ballot. JEA currently has 4 active board members so they can act for now. He said the State allows its boards and commissions to meet electronically and he hopes the Governor will think about extending that to local governments during this crisis.

Mayor Curry said that Jacksonville can’t afford to let its excellent medical care system get overwhelmed by COVID-19 as a result of people at low risk ignoring reasonable precautions and being carriers of the virus to others who may be at higher risk.

Emergency Preparedness Director Steve Woodard said the Emergency Operations Center has been activated and is ready to assist as needed.

Council Member White expressed his appreciation for all the good wishes; he has no symptoms and doesn’t see the need to be tested.

Council Member Hazouri thanked all of the mayors (Jacksonville, the Beaches and Baldwin) for being diligent and trying to get in front of the issue. He asked Mayor Curry to send out a press release with everything he said this morning for future reference.

President Wilson said that council members will get continual updates from the intergovernmental operations team.

**Meeting adjourned:** 12:04 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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