

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

**MAYOR CURRY STATE OF EMERGENCY PROCLAMATION**

**Remote meeting via teleconference**

**July 1, 2020**

**4:00 p.m.**

**Location:** Remote meeting via teleconference

**In attendance:** Council Members Tommy Hazouri (President), Danny Becton, Aaron Bowman, Michael Boylan, Matt Carlucci, LeAnna Cumber, Randy DeFoor, Garrett Dennis, Rory Diamond, Al Ferraro, Terrance Freeman, Reginald Gaffney, Joyce Morgan, Sam Newby, Ju’Coby Pittman, Brenda Priestly Jackson, Ron Salem, Randy White, and Scott Wilson

**Also**: Paige Johnston and Jason Teal – Office of General Counsel; Jessica Matthews – Legislative Services Division; Mayor Lenny Curry, Brian Hughes, and Stephanie Burch – Mayor’s Office; Chief Powers – JFRD; Cheryl Brown – Council Secretary/Director; Steve Cassada, Melanie Wilkes and Eric Grantham – Council Support Services; Anthony Baltiero and Yvonne Mitchell – Council Research Division; Kim Taylor, Phillip Peterson and Trista Carraher – Council Auditor’s Office

**Meeting Convened**: 4:05 p.m.

Council President Hazouri called the meeting to order and asked for a rollcall of the council members in virtual attendance. Council Member DeFoor gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dr. Cheryl Brown, Council Secretary, explained the public meeting participation procedures and provided the meeting identification code, password, and other pertinent information. Jessica Matthews, Chief of Legislative Services, read the call/notice of the meeting into the record.

Mayor Lenny Curry provided updated statistics relating to COVID-19 in Duval County noting the cumulative positive cases and total deaths. The Mayor stressed that he has been in continuous contact with the top medical professionals and hospital chiefs of Duval County and that the consensus is that there is still plenty of capacity for additional patients across the hospitals within Jacksonville. The Mayor put focus on the mandatory mask element of the proclamation noting that he has a long record of encouraging mask usage throughout the pandemic and that this proclamation makes the encouragement mandatory. The Mayor talked about the six (6) additional testing sites that will be going online in the coming two weeks and noted the capacity of the mobile testing sites. The Mayor said that his staff will remain in the meeting to answer any questions relating to the mandatory mask order and closed by stressing that everybody continues to wear masks in public, frequently sanitize hands and surfaces, and to maintain proper social distancing habits.

Council Member Carlucci applauded the Mayor’s proclamation. He asked if there is any way that the Council could help to speed up the COVID-19 testing process, particularly referencing getting quicker results back for tests conducted at Lot J.

Brian Hughes, Mayor’s Office, provided an explanation of the testing process. He noted that there are over two dozen (24) testing sites and that the labs that conducting the actual testing are extremely backlogged. Mr. Hughes explained that there are some private labs that have a twenty-four (24) hour turnaround for test results, but those labs are typically reserved by hospitals for extreme cases. He also noted that city-wide testing has steadily increased which causes additional backlogs.

Council Member Bowman applauded the Mayor’s proclamation, but aired his concerns over using Ordinance Code 674 as justification for the order calling it a “stretch”. He asked if someone from the Office of General Council could speak on the rationale for using this particular Code.

Jason Teal, Office of General Counsel, explained that Ordinance Code 674 provides the Mayor with a very broad authority to declare a state of emergency as was the intent of the Code. Mr. Teal said that using this Code is based on the State Statute that the Governor used for declaring a state of emergency.

Council Member Bowman was thankful for the explanation and noted that he was worried about potential legal actions against the City.

Jordan Elsbury, Mayor’s Office, explained that the Mayor’s Office was advised by the Office of General Counsel that the two options to enact this type of action would be through an Executive Order or through the regular legislative process. Given the severity of the situation, the Executive Order was chosen to establish immediate implementation. Mr. Elsbury also noted that there will not be any comp time issues for City employees with this order because it is mainly geared toward the general public.

Council Member Boylan talked about the emails that he has been receiving from constituents that deny the effectiveness of mask usage and say that they refuse to wear masks as it goes against their civil rights and asked if the local medical professionals could provide more readily available verifying mask usage’s effectiveness.

Brian Hughes said that the Mayor has been working with medical professionals to further spread the word about the benefits of mask usage.

Council Member Salem asked about the dates for the opening of the six (6) new testing sites. Mr. Salem asked if tests are prioritized by symptoms and if the additional testing sites will only make the testing backlog worse.

Brian Hughes explained the contract process for the new sites and noted that some, if not all, of the new testing sites will be fully operational in two weeks. Mr. Hughes said that testing is not triaged by symptoms and that the testing turnaround time depends on where the patient presents their symptoms, again noting that hospitals have access to the labs with quicker turnaround times. Mr. Hughes said that more testing is definitely a good thing, but new testing sites will add to the backlog.

Council Member Priestly Jackson shared her support of the Mayor’s order and noted that this action helps to put the City inline with other entities, including DCPS that are implementing mask usage and social distancing dividers.

Council Member Freeman shared his concerns about inmates that are released from jail or prison and put back into the population either without proper testing or with no place to go following their release and the rise in drug overdoses during the pandemic.

Stephanie Burch, Mayor’s Office, provided information about a $6,000,000.00 HUD program that uses some of the funds to house the local homeless population at a hotel that has been quarantined for individuals that are infected with COVID-19 and other communicable ailments. Ms. Burch noted that released inmates could potentially benefit from this program.

Council Member Becton asked for the percentage of the Jacksonville population that is currently sick with COVID-19.

Brian Hughes said that he would have to default to the medical professionals for those types of statistics, but noted that he does know that 0.02-0.03% of the Jacksonville population are currently hospitalized and deemed as having a “serious illness”.

Council Member Becton asked how many people died from COVID-19 in Jacksonville over the last thirty (30) days.

Brian Hughes reiterated that those types of questions are better answered by the local medical professionals. Council President Hazouri asked if staff could check and see if someone from the medical community was available in the meeting to comment. In the meantime, Council President Hazouri asked Chief Powers if he had anything to add.

Chief Powers, Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department, referenced back to comments made by Council Member Carlucci noting that a change of testing labs is in the process and the change in labs could result in quicker test result turnaround times.

Council Member Becton opined on the issue of mandated mask usage as it relates to a specific illness and how this precedent might impact the way other illness are handled. Mr. Becton also shared concerns over the validation of mask usage.

Brian Hughes talked about the impact of COVID-19 responses on other areas of the medical industry. Mr. Hughes reiterated that masks are a good way to limit community spread without having to go back to a full City shutdown.

Council Member Becton asked about the basic principles of mask usage as it relates to the spread of illnesses between sick and healthy people.

Brian Hughes explained the basic principles of mask usage noting that the ultimate goal is to limit the chances of passing on an illness through community spread.

Council Member Becton said that he does not support the mask mandate and feels that it is an overreach of government.

Council Member Dennis shared his support of the mask mandate and asked about the enforcement mechanism of the mandate. He also asked about the Republican National Committee (RNC) and the safety benchmarks that were met to make the mandatory mask decision and for future events, and contact tracing.

Brain Hughes talked about the benchmarks noting that the recent rise in cases statewide has put Jacksonville back to a rate of infection the matches the peek of the illness. As such, the Mayor used that as an indicator that action needed to be taken.

Jordan Elsbury talked about the issue of enforcing the mandate noting that people are expected to do the right thing and adhere to the mandate. Mr. Elsbury referenced the RNC and said that due to the fluid and unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic that the Mayor has decided to keep planning for events and to make the appropriate health and safety decisions as the event approaches.

Brian Hughes talked about the different meanings and facets of contact tracing and noted that the City mirrors the contact tracing procedures of the Health Department and Center for Disease Control as it relates to the infection, or possible infection, of a City employee.

Council Member Ferraro opined on the mask mandate and shared his support of the usage of masks noting that he receives calls and emails from constituents that feel that this action is a government overreach.

Council Vice President Newby shared his support of the mandate noting his personal experiences with COVID-19.

Council Member Dennis asked if it is possible to give every inmate that is leaving jail or prison a rapid response COVID-19 test before being released into the general population.

Brian Hughes said that he is under the impression that the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office (JSO) has conducted tests on every inmate and that it has only been within the last day or two that it has come to light that some inmates were being released with a positive diagnosis and referred back to the $6,000,000.00 HUD program.

Council President Hazouri shared his support of the mandate and opined on the various issues mentioned during the meeting noting that many of these issues comes down to personal responsibility and wearing masks for the protection of everyone. Mr. Hazouri talked about upcoming meetings and the possibility of the meetings being conducted in-person.

At the request of Council President Hazouri, Council Member DeFoor brought the meeting to a close with a benediction.

**Meeting adjourned:** 5:13 p.m.

Minutes: Anthony J. Baltiero, Council Research Division

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