

**CULTURE & NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES
COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021
2:00 PM
VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Members Present:	Councilmember Roberto Treviño, <i>Chair, District 1</i> Councilmember Jada Andrews-Sullivan, <i>District 2</i> Councilmember Rebecca Viagran, <i>District 3</i> Councilmember John Courage, <i>District 9</i> Councilmember Clayton Perry, <i>District 10</i>
Staff Present:	Lori Houston, <i>Assistant City Manager</i> ; Shreya Shah, <i>Assistant City Attorney</i> ; Venessa Rodriguez, <i>Assistant City Attorney</i> ; Scott Zimmerer, <i>Assistant City Attorney</i> ; Veronica Soto, <i>Director, Neighborhood & Housing Services Department</i> ; Edward Gonzales, <i>Interim Assistant Director, Neighborhood & Housing Services Department</i> ; Sara Wamsley, <i>Housing Policy Manager, Neighborhood & Housing Services Department</i> ; Ian Benavidez, <i>Neighborhood Housing Administrator, Neighborhood & Housing Services Department</i> ; Nancy Cano, <i>Office of the City Clerk</i>
Others Present:	Christina Trejo, <i>Attorney, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid</i> ; Ileana Riojas, <i>Project Administrator, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid</i> ;

Call to Order

Chairman Treviño called the meeting to order.

Public Comment

None

Councilmember Treviño asked if there were any announcements for the Spanish speaking audience. He stated that he would like to see a statement on translation services and how the public could access it.

1. Approval of the minutes from the February 12, 2021 Culture & Neighborhood Services Council Committee Meeting.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan moved to approve the Minutes from the February 12, 2021 Culture & Neighborhood Services Council Committee Meeting. Councilmember Courage seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Briefing on the Right to Counsel program. [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager; Verónica R. Soto, FAICP, Director, Neighborhood and Housing Services]

Veronica Soto provided a briefing on the Right to Counsel Program. She gave an overview of the background information, current services, accomplishments, continuation of services, legal services, new legal kiosks, and next steps.

Councilmember Courage asked if 94% of the clients listed avoided eviction. Ms. Soto clarified that of the 349-household listed, not all were facing eviction. She stated that some received assistance in the form of repairs or vouchers.

Councilmember Courage asked if the property owners who were facing foreclosure were given legal advice to ask for a jury trial. Ms. Christina Trejo stated that was not the recommended strategy.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan asked for a more proactive approach at the eviction diversion process to get ahead of the default judgements. Mr. Ian Benavidez stated that the CDC moratorium was a great tool, however, it required the resident to fill out a form and show up to the court hearing and present it.

Councilmember Perry asked of the exact number of households that faced eviction and amount of money that was spent per family. Ms. Sara Walmsley stated that there were exactly 167 clients that faced eviction. Ms. Soto stated that the contract totaled \$200,000.00, however, the eviction support was not the only component. Councilmember Perry requested that an itemized breakdown be provided of the multiple areas.

Councilmember Viagran asked if assistance had been provided to small business owners who had been evicted. Christina Trejo stated that the Right to Counsel Program did not provide small business assistance, however, there was a team that was assigned to assist small businesses.

Councilmember Courage asked of the court process regarding the validity of the CDC paperwork that property owners filled out citing COVID-19 factors. Sara Walmsley stated that the Declaration form was a signed statement, and there had been instances where the landlord challenged its merit, and those cases were set aside for their own eviction hearings.

Councilmember Perry asked of the 167 households that were assisted, how many had requested a trial by jury. Ms. Walmsley stated that 1% of jury requests was the court team's observations of all of the hearings that occurred in the county, but not specific to the program.

Councilmember Viagran moved to forward Item 2 to the full Council. Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan seconded the motion. The motion prevailed as followed:

Ayes: Treviño, Andrews-Sullivan, Viagran, and Courage

Nays: Perry

3. Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) and Texas Eviction Diversion Program (TEDP) Update [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager, Verónica R. Soto, FAICP, Director, Neighborhood & Housing Services]

Mr. Edward Gonzales provided a briefing of the Emergency Housing Assistance Program. He gave an overview of the program's creation, eligibility, assistance provided, phases, total assistance approved, allowances, average assistance per household, referral system update, and EHAP application.

Mr. Gonzales then provided an overview of the Texas Eviction Diversion Program. He outlined the program's creation, eligibility, total rental assistance provided, and eviction hearing outcomes.

Councilmember Treviño asked if funding could be set aside from the Homeless Assistance Grants for relocation assistance. Ms. Lori Houston stated that staff would work on a recommendation and get back to the Committee.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan asked how much funding was left in Phase 3, and how long would that last until we are using Phase 4. Mr. Gonzales stated that there was \$11 million left in Phase 3 and it would last a couple of weeks before going into Phase 4.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan asked of any updated communication plan on the outreach information that had been provided on the funding. Mr. Gonzales stated that after Council approved the contract, their website was updated, COVID-19 pages were updated, and individuals were brought in to create marketing materials that were ready by the end of the month.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan asked if any barriers had been encountered or services been difficult for families to connect with. Mr. Gonzales stated he was not aware of any.

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:04 pm.

Roberto Treviño, Chair

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Cano, Office of the City Clerk