

City of San Antonio



Minutes Governance Committee 2023 – 2025 Council Members

Mayor Ron Nirenberg, Chair

Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4 | Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6

Manny Pelaez, Dist. 8 | John Courage, Dist. 9

Monday, November 20, 2023

3:00 PM

City Hall Complex

The Governance Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Media Briefing Room at 3:03 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

Members Present: Ron Nirenberg, *Mayor, Chair*
Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, *Member*
Melissa Cabello Havrda, *Member*
Manny Pelaez, *Member*
John Courage, *Member*

Members Absent: None

Approval of Minutes

1. Governance Committee Meeting on October 18, 2023.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to Approve the minutes of the October 18, 2023 Governance Committee meeting. Councilmember Pelaez seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Nirenberg, Rocha Garcia, Cabello Havrda, Pelaez, Courage

Briefing and Possible Action on

2. Council Consideration Request by Councilmember Adriana Rocha Garcia (District 4) regarding a Declaration of a Housing Crisis. [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager; Veronica Garcia, Neighborhood and Housing Services]

Director of the Neighborhood and Housing Services Department, Veronica Garcia, outlined the Council

Consideration Request (CCR) for the development of a Housing Crisis Index that would set criteria for City Council to declare a Housing Crisis, make recommendations for appropriate responses and outline how to activate responses.

Garcia stated that the City's 10-year Strategic Housing Implementation Plan (SHIP) acknowledged a need for housing and called for a collection of annual community metrics. Garcia noted that the number on the housing choice voucher waitlist had increased to 90,000 and the average rent had increased 10% since 2021. She reported that the median home price in 2021 was \$283,000 with a median family income of \$83,500. In 2022, home prices increased by \$37,000 while the median family income increased by \$5,000 according to Garcia. She added that responses to the need for housing included increased production, preservation and services focused on those most in need.

Garcia stated that SHIP responses to the housing crisis included programs to help with housing instability such as: rental assistance, relocation assistance, free legal services in eviction courts and an online affordable housing locator. Garcia stated that the City had helped homeowners remain housed by: increasing funding for home rehabilitation programs, lowering property taxes, assisting homeowners with applying for property tax exemptions and protesting their property taxes and partnering with non-profits to help people navigate and apply for resources. According to Garcia, the department coordinated homeless response systems by: focusing efforts on unhoused individuals, adding emergency shelter options, and rapid rehousing resources as well as increasing the use and production of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) units.

Garcia stated that to further advance the SHIP, the City was working to accelerate housing production and preservation. She reported that the \$150 million Affordable Housing Bond approved by voters in 2022 was being utilized to expand funding for deeply affordable housing; prioritize affordability, choice, quality and accessibility; connect priority populations to housing; expand permanent supportive housing and incentivize housing near jobs and transportation.

Resident support included home preservation through increased funding for Home Rehabilitation Programs from \$11 million to \$26 million which was a 136% increase since FY 2021 according to Garcia. Garcia also stated that the department had expanded title remediation services and was mitigating demolitions by supporting vulnerable residents with Operation Rebuild.

Garcia reported that support for renters included eviction protection and Right to Counsel, rental and relocation assistance, affordable housing locator service, diversion funds, and utilities assistance. She indicated that additional support was provided to boost incomes with Ready to Work, expand Housing Vouchers and ongoing Case Management.

Garcia stated that supportive Housing included a focus on creating additional housing options for individuals experiencing homelessness, including increased capacity for low-barrier shelter, housing vouchers and rapid rehousing funding for long-term rental assistance with a prioritization on PSH units. Garcia noted that there were 1,357 units operating as scattered site PSH across the community, but an additional 1,000 units were needed and the Housing Bond was expected to support 308 new PSH units.

Garcia indicated that Development Code and Process Improvements included recommendations from the Housing Commission's Removing Barriers Subcommittee for updates to the Unified Development Code (UDC) which were adopted in November 2022 as well as a Technical Working Group on Transit Oriented Development & Affordable Housing established in October 2023 and the creation of the Development Services' Affordable Housing Team.

DISCUSSION:

Councilmember Rocha Garcia commented that she had submitted her CCR because there was no official determination as to when a housing crisis would be declared and noted that other cities such as Seattle, Portland, Honolulu and others had metrics that considered rates of poverty, wages, evictions, utility disconnections, voucher wait lists and unemployment to determine if there was a housing crisis. Assistant City Manager Lori Houston stated that staff would review other cities' policies and metrics. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that the City had declared a housing crisis in 2021 but there was no reason to downgrade that and she recommended that staff provide an update to the Planning and Community Development Committee (PCDC).

Councilmember Cabello Havrda commented that affordable housing was still an issue and supported the policies behind the SHIP. She asked if there were new criteria that might not have been established under the SHIP. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that when the SHIP was developed, the community provided feedback and data was collected and continued to be tracked as a part of the SHIP. Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked what would become of the CCR. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that key goals and objectives were being tracked in the SHIP dashboard and she committed to regularly briefing PCDC using the key indicators already being collected.

Councilmember Courage expressed concern that some people who were homeless, living out of a car or on a friend's sofa did not show up on the point in time count so it was hard to determine how bad the crisis was. He requested a comparison of the 95,000 people waiting on a housing voucher versus how many were already on a voucher and the availability of units that would accept a voucher. Garcia stated that the department worked with Opportunity Home and other partners to track vouchers and help residents find a unit once they had a voucher. Councilmember Courage asked how the average person would find the dashboard and asked of the number of hits on the website. Garcia explained that the dashboard was listed under the SHIP Update within the NHSD website and the department performed outreach and marketing to the community.

Councilmember Courage noted that there was a Federal Law prohibiting discrimination against Veterans, but many did not know this information so they were deterred from getting a unit. He recommended an educational program for residents and housing providers. Debbie Klein, Deputy City Attorney, stated that their office would assist with training programs to ensure providers understood the legal requirements.

Item was for briefing only so no action was taken.

3. Council Consideration Request by Councilmember Jalen McKee Rodriguez (District

2) on Encampment Abatement Notification Policy. [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager; Melody Woosley, Director, Department of Human Services]

Melody Woosley, Director of the Department of Human Services (DHS), reported that encampment abatement protocol had been developed with eight City departments, the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDoT), and non-profit partner agencies and was recently updated to include input from street outreach.

Woosley stated that encampment sites were assessed for health and safety concerns, inhabitants were provided outreach and written notification prior to site abatement for the 680 site abatement events coordinated by DHS in FY 2023. Woosley reported that the FY 2024 Budget added additional positions in DHS and funding to Solid Waste and would support 700 site abatements events in FY 2024 as well as a faster response (two weeks) resolution to 3-1-1 calls for service.

According to Woosley, DHS currently collected encampment location, notification date, abatement date, number of residents engaged, number of individuals that accepted services, partner agencies, tons of debris removed and project cost data. She reported that the new policy would provide notification to the Councilmember 48 hours in advance, when possible, with a goal to notify Councilmembers as soon as an abatement was scheduled.

Woosley recommended providing quarterly Summary Reports to City Council which would include: the location of the encampment abated, estimated number of inhabitants of the encampment, number of outreach attempts and dates, organizations conducting outreach and dates of attempts, number of encampment residents who accepted or denied assistance and/or shelter, reasons for denial of services, and if an abatement was recurring, how much the sweep(s) would cost.

Woosley recommended continuance of weekly online public updates of upcoming abatements scheduled, quarterly summary of outreach activity by council district, and quarterly summaries to City Council of abatement activity, by council district, to include data points identified by the CCR.

DISCUSSION:

Councilmember Cabello Havrda commented that encampment abatement was a vicious circle noting that as soon as an encampment was cleared, another would crop up. Councilmember Cabello Havrda supported the dashboard and notification to the Councilmember but expressed concern that 48 hour notice was not long enough, noting that other cities provided a two week notice. Woosley committed to responding to complaints and perform investigations within two weeks. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that the 48 hours was a minimum and often the staff had been working with an encampment for one to two weeks before the notice of abatement was given.

Councilmember Courage noted that many encampments were in drainage areas and creeks that could be a health and safety issue and recommended review by the Stormwater Management Division and coordination with the San Antonio River Authority (SARA). Woosley stated that DHS currently worked with the Public Works Stormwater Management Division and would reach

out to SARA. City Manager Walsh stated that SARA did encampment cleanups along the river and any creek ways that they maintained.

Councilmember Courage recommended that outreach workers asked the campers why they were at a particular location noting there was an individual in his neighborhood who wanted to be there because that was where he grew up; suggesting that the housing opportunities needed to be in all areas of town with more units available. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that shelter was available at Haven for Hope and some of them did not want to go there because most did not want congregated shelter; some wanted to stay in their community and would choose to be on the street instead.

Mayor Nirenberg recommended a B Session convening of all housing providers so City Council could learn more about the services available. City Manager Walsh stated that the B session was scheduled for January 17, 2024 and would be held in Council Chambers. Mayor Nirenberg lauded the efforts of the City of San Antonio with the SHIP and Housing Bond, noting that it was a complex discussion but overall, we were doing better than many cities across the country.

Mayor Nirenberg recommended the creation of a dashboard consisting of all dashboards on the City's homepage linking the data through a single portal to assist the public and City Council in finding the metrics.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda made a motion to refer the Item to the Public Safety Committee for regular updates. Councilmember Pelaez seconded the motion.

Aye: Nirenberg, Rocha Garcia, Cabello Havrda, Pelaez, Courage

4. Council Consideration Request by Councilmember Teri Castillo (District 5) on Opioid-Related Overdoses and Access to Narcan. [María Villagómez, Deputy City Manager]

Deputy City Manager Maria Villagomez outlined the CCR which sought to designate opioid-related overdoses as a public health crisis and focus on the following efforts: budget/plan with harm reduction strategies for the expenditure of funds related to the Opioid settlement; expand availability, training, and use of Naxalone (Narcan) for community-based non-profits and public-facing COSA departments and fund a City of San Antonio sponsored program for pregnant individuals and new mothers experiencing Opioid addiction.

Deputy City Manager Villagomez outlined the following programs included in the FY 2024 Budget: \$488,000 for the San Antonio Fire Department's Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program (MIH), Opioid Program Crisis Response, Poly-Opioid Program Crisis Response, \$638,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds awarded through Metro Health to non-profits for harm reduction programs (\$638,000 over two years), and \$100,000 managed by DHS to provide medically assisted treatment (MAT) for 30 individuals with substance use disorders. Deputy City Manager Villagomez mentioned that the City anticipated receiving \$6,072,227.37 as its share of an opioid litigation settlement, to be paid out over 18 years with \$1.3 million having already been received. Deputy City Manager Villagomez reported that staff was

developing a plan to utilize opioid settlement funds that addressed the efforts highlighted in the CCR. The plan would be presented to the City Council as part of the FY 2024 Three Plus Nine (3+9) Financial Report in February 2024.

DISCUSSION:

Councilmember Cabello Havrda noted that one of the primary goals was to use the Federal funding to expand access to NARCAN. Deputy City Manager Villagomez stated that expanding access to NARCAN was a goal, but the program would address addiction to other drugs besides opioids. City Manager Walsh stated that the funding could also include harm reduction programs and would be discussed with the Committee.

Councilmember Courage supported including services for pregnant women as recommended by Dr. Lisa M. Cleveland PhD, Professor at the School of Nursing and School of Medicine-Department of Pediatrics at UT Health San Antonio.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia made a motion to refer the proposal to the Community Health Committee for discussion prior to the presentation of the 3+9 Financial Report. Councilmember Pelaez seconded the motion.

Aye: Nirenberg, Rocha Garcia, Cabello Havrda, Pelaez, Courage

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:04 p.m.

Approved

Ron Nirenberg
Mayor

Debbie Racca-Sittre
City Clerk