

**CITY OF PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2020, 2:00 P.M.**

COUNCILMEMBERS PRESENT: Carey, Cummings, Matthews, Miller, Prafke

CITY EMPLOYEES PRESENT: Kristin Simeone, Finance; Rick Keeney, Public Works; Tom Jackson, Utilities; Phil Wickstrom, Human Resources; Joan LeBeau, Urban Design; Pamela Davis, Police; Ray Briggs, Fire; City Attorney Levin; City Manager Kunik; Deputy City Clerk Welch

Mayor Prafke called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. She then provided a brief overview of the agenda.

City Manager Kunik noted in accordance with Executive Order 20-112, the City Engineer had implemented a new seating arrangement which would allow 17 attendees. He then read into the record citizen comments from Messrs. Rick Sarkisian, Jack Price and John Byrne regarding reopening the City's parks and associated amenities; Mr. Ian Smith regarding continuation of social distancing.

NOTE: New Business was heard following Citizens' Comments.

NEW BUSINESS

Florida Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Response (COVID- 19)

Update

Mr. Joseph Pepe, Florida Department of Health (FDOH) Administrator, presented an update on COVID-19, reporting on case numbers and trends and actions taken to minimize the pandemic.

Councilmember Carey inquired as to any guidance regarding precautions required of business owners.

Mr. Pepe replied the FDOH was developing a guide on best practices for various industries and a webinar regarding infection control for business owners, adding a certificate for business owners would be available upon completion of the webinar. He anticipated those resources would be available the following week.

Councilmember Miller noted there had been a spike in case numbers the week prior, questioning if the focus should be on the rate of positive cases as opposed to total case numbers.

Mr. Pepe replied two spikes the week prior were caused by an increase in testing and the return of a significant number of test results as bulk data, agreeing the focus should be on the rate of positive cases. He stated he was looking for the number of daily cases to remain stable and for new cases to become sporadic, noting such a trend

would indicate the pandemic was nearing an end. He explained FDOH was looking for trends over a two week period when monitoring the situation.

Discussion ensued regarding the trends in case numbers and testing availability and accuracy, with Mr. Pepe indicating work was being done to make sustained drive-up testing available throughout the County.

Mayor Prafke commented favorably on FDOH's COVID-19 dashboard.

Mr. Pepe added vulnerability data would soon be available on the dashboard.

Councilmember Cummings inquired as to the timeframe for healthcare facilities to resume elective procedures.

Mr. Pepe replied healthcare facilities were preparing to screen patients as part of the surgical workup for elective procedures and were working to ensure personal protective equipment was available.

City Manager Kunik announced City Departments would provide overviews of their response to COVID-19.

Fire Chief Ray Briggs noted the Fire Department's call volume was lower than this time last year; however, the severity of the calls was more urgent. He announced two firefighters tested positive for COVID-19, noting the Fire Department's facilities had been fogged with disinfectant and other City facilities would be fogged over the weekend.

Discussion ensued regarding cases within City limits and the severity of the pandemic.

Councilmember Miller inquired as to any testing in physical rehabilitation facilities.

Fire Chief Ray Briggs expressed uncertainty regarding cases in those facilities, explaining aggressive testing continued to be performed in communal living facilities with at-risk populations.

Police Chief Pamela Davis reviewed changes to the Police Department's procedures, stating there had been no negative feedback regarding same. She stated calls for service remained steady, noting vehicular burglaries, criminal mischief and bicycle thefts had been reported over the past month, with out-of-school youths likely responsible for same. She noted the Police Department had received 233 calls related to behavior in the parks which was not in line with the Governor's Executive Order; however, the number of contacts made regarding same was decreasing over time.

Mr. Mark Gering, City Engineer, announced the Public Works Department had made a few changes to their protocols, adding a concrete contractor had temporarily removed his crews from a project due to concerns regarding COVID-19. He then reviewed changes to staffing arrangements, scheduling and meetings with work crews.

Mr. Tom Jackson, Utilities Director, reviewed changes to field crews' and plant personnel's scheduling and staffing arrangements, noting the majority of administrative staff was working from home. He stated progress on the Reverse Osmosis (RO) Water Treatment Plant continued and production of test water would begin the next day, anticipating construction would be complete in June 2020.

Mr. Brad Schuette, Information Technology (IT) Director, explained IT was supporting approximately 40 staff members working from home and was providing technical assistance to all staff remotely when possible. He briefly reviewed the status of projects involving the IT Department, concluding work would continue.

Ms. Joan LeBeau, Urban Design Manager, explained work had shifted to focus on scopes of work, research and development. She stated Code Compliance staff continued to work in the field and the Building Division continued to process permits, noting the number of permit applications received had not declined. She explained staff had begun meeting with developers virtually and was assisting other Departments with creation of signage regarding social distancing.

Ms. Kristin Simeone, Finance Director, reported on staffing arrangements for the Finance Department, Procurement Division and Billing and Collections Division.

Mr. Phil Wickstrom, Human Resources Manager, stated he expected employees working from home would feel trepidation upon returning to their offices, explaining plans were in development to ensure safety for employees and customers. He commented favorably on the City's support of employees.

City Attorney Levin explained he continued to work from his law firm and was drafting an ordinance to revise the City's sign code, estimating same would be ready in May 2020 for Council's discussion.

Information Resources

Ms. Melissa Reichert, Communications Manager, reviewed the COVID-19 resources and information available on the City's website.

Mayor Prafke inquired as to whether nonprofits and other organizations were included in the City's distribution list for the Weekly Highlights Report.

Ms. Reichert replied affirmatively, noting anyone could subscribe through the City's website.

Discussion of Future City Action

City Manager Kunik explained Council needed to determine how they wished to proceed following Executive Order 20-112, noting the Fire Department was working to establish a definition of 25% occupancy for retail stores.

Fire Chief Briggs announced information regarding calculation of permitted occupancy would be available by tomorrow morning, explaining store owners would divide the square footage of their store by 100 to determine the total number of individuals which could be in a store at one time.

Councilmember Carey inquired as to the permitted occupancy for small restaurants in the City.

Fire Chief Briggs replied he could only advise people to abide by the 25% occupancy requirement.

Discussion ensued regarding calculation of the allowable occupancy for retail stores and restaurants.

Police Chief Davis noted the Police Department would work to educate the community on complying with the new requirements.

City Manager Kunik announced the City received a request from the Downtown Farmer's Market to begin providing more than pick-up service, noting staff would discuss the market's operation with representatives from the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Farmer's Market.

Discussion ensued regarding the site plan and the number of vendors, with consensus of Council to allow the Downtown Farmer's Market to operate on a limited scale in accordance with social distancing guidelines and to offer the same opportunity to the History Park Farmer's Market.

City Manager Kunik questioned if Council desired to reopen parks and associated amenities, opining demand for certain amenities would result in crowding not in alignment with social distancing guidelines.

Mayor Profke questioned if sitting in the parks in accordance with social distancing guidelines should be allowed.

Councilmember Carey spoke in favor of allowing individuals to do so, noting the public needed to understand appropriate precautions were still necessary.

Councilmember Matthews expressed concern the Police Department would be required to constantly monitor the parks if the seating areas were reopened. She opined the City's number of cases was low due to its diligence, expressing preference to wait to open the parks to a greater degree.

Discussion ensued regarding individual responsibility and adherence to social distancing guidelines, with consensus of Council to allow sitting in the parks and for Ponce de Leon Park's beach to remain closed.

City Manager Kunik inquired as to reopening the tennis courts on Cooper Street and at Gilchrist Park.

Discussion ensued, with consensus of Council to reopen the tennis courts in concurrence with Charlotte County reopening theirs.

City Manager Kunik confirmed consensus of Council was not to reopen the Gilchrist Park basketball courts, Gilchrist Park playground or Laishley Park splash pad. He then inquired as to Council's preference regarding reopening the Gilchrist Park pickleball courts.

Mayor Profke stated the PicklePlex Board had requested permission from Florida Southwestern State College to reopen their pickleball facility, suggesting the Gilchrist Park pickleball courts remain closed until the PicklePlex reopened.

Consensus of Council was for the Gilchrist Park pickleball courts to remain closed until such time.

City Manager Kunik inquired as to Council's preference regarding reopening the Hounds of Henry Street Dog Park.

Councilmember Matthews noted the dog park was used heavily and in close quarters, expressing preference to wait to reopen same.

Consensus of Council was for the dog park to remain closed at this time.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS

CAREY: Emphasized the City was doing what it could to help the community.

PRAFKE: Expressed appreciation to those taking action to help the community.

- Suggested individuals looking for a way to help consider making a donation, noting the Giving Challenge had raised a record level of donations.

MATTHEWS: Noted an individual was facilitating transportation of food donations to local food banks.

- Stated a food drive would be held in Burnt Stores Isles this weekend.

Mayor Profke noted donations would be accepted at the corner of Monaco Drive and Tripoli Boulevard.

MILLER: Commented positively on the community's response.

CUMMINGS: Encouraged residents to continue to support local restaurants by placing take-out orders.

MATTHEWS: Noted Carmelo's, Visani and Bella Napoli had worked in cooperation to donate meals to hospitality and restaurant workers who were out of work.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS

Citizens' comments were read into the record at the beginning of the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:27 p.m.

Mayor

City Clerk