

**CITY OF LAREDO
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
M2020-SC-02
LIVE WEB LINK: <http://laredotx.swagit.com/live>
1110 HOUSTON STREET
LAREDO, TEXAS 78040
March 31, 2020
5:30 P.M.**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pete Saenz called the meeting to order.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Pete Saenz led in the pledge of allegiance.

III. MOMENT OF SILENCE

Mayor Pete Saenz led in a moment of silence, asking the community to keep in mind the victims of the COVID-19 virus.

IV. ROLL CALL

In attendance:

Pete Saenz	Mayor
Rudy Gonzalez, Jr.	District I
Vidal Rodriguez	District II
Mercurio "Merc" Martinez, III	District III
Alberto Torres, Jr.	District IV, Mayor Pro-Tempore
Norma "Nelly" Vielma	District V
Dr. Marte Martinez	District VI
George J. Altgelt	District VII
Roberto Balli	District VIII,
Jose A. Valdez, Jr.	City Secretary
Rosario Cabello	Co-Interim City Manager
Robert Eads	Co-Interim City Manager
Kristina L. Hale	City Attorney

Citizen comments

Jose A. Valdez, Jr., City Secretary, read public comments into the record:

Dionisio Gonzalez de Castilla, Association of Logistics and Forwarding Agents President,

noted that due to President Trump's extension of the Social Distancing Act through April 30, 2020, his industry is concerned about the City and County measures that can be taken regarding the following topics: the unemployment plan to help any laid-off citizens; plans for helping laid-off citizens with their utility bills, water plans, or taxes; and incentive plan to help citizens with mortgage payments, gas, utilities, etc.

Robert Eads, City Manager, confirmed that staff are assessing the magnitude of the COVID-19 impact on the local economy. Bridge revenues and sales are also greatly impacting the community right now; City officials are working with the private sector and other agencies for a game plan to address the questions posed by Mr. Gonzalez de Castilla. He could not provide any feedback on how the City would assist businesses past City entities at this point, but there is a dedicated team focusing on the recovery of the business community as a whole. He could not confirm any specific details but noted that staff will have information in the future; currently, the priority is to secure the City's own ability to provide essential services and protect their workforce.

Dr. Martinez noted that he is a small business owner as well and reminded the public to utilize federal and state assistance, though they have not yet trickled down to the local community. A lot of these monies are applied if the businesses keep their employees and pay them rather than laying them off.

Omar Gonzalez Longoria, Association of Logistics and Forwarding Agents Vice-President, asked if, due to the curfew applied by the City ordinance and taking into consideration that the World Trade Bridge is open after 10:00 p.m., if employees and drivers in the forwarding and transportation are allowed on the streets after curfew when they are still conducting their business. He also asked if the City could approach Customs and Border Protection to clarify if there is any document for employees of the forwarding and transportation industry to enter the United States to perform essential operations for trade and transportation.

Mr. Eads reminded the public that at this time the curfew only applies to juveniles aged 17 and under from 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. Local CBP offices can provide guidance on Mr. Longoria's question to documentation of essential operations.

Hector Llanas of the Laredo beauty industry asked what the City is doing to help small business owners, especially the Laredo beauty industry which is being directly affected by the emergency ordinance. He asked if it is possible to pass an ordinance to help them not pay their rent at their business location or allow them to work at a limited capacity or with the stylists and clients all wearing masks.

Kristina L. Hale, City Attorney, reminded Council that, in light of the recent executive order passed by the Governor of Texas prohibiting the operation of these businesses until April 30, Mr. Llanas's request to allow these businesses to practice is not something that Council can authorize. Tax breaks or breaks on their rental space could be a Council matter, but only if Council is waiving eviction processes. Mayor Saenz shared his sympathy and empathy with the business community during these uncertain times, noting that no business is considered "non-essential" in the eyes of Council, but this action is required at this time.

After a brief recess to address some technical difficulties, Mr. Valdez read a public comment from Joan Kim asking Council to delay and cancel interest and late payments on unpaid 2019 property taxes lawsuits and allow taxpayers the ability to make contract payment plan for both homestead and commercial accounts.

V. GENERAL COUNCIL DISCUSSIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Request by Mayor Pro-Tempore Alberto Torres, Jr.

1. Discussion with possible action on amending the Emergency Ordinance that was passed by City Council on March 16, 2020, and extending the Declaration of Public Health Emergency and Order to Stay at Home Work Safe that was signed by the Mayor on March 27, 2020 in light of the growing number of COVID-19 cases, and any other matters incident thereto. (Co-Sponsored by Council Member Robert Balli, Council Member Dr. Marte A. Martinez, and Council Member Vidal Rodriguez)

Robert Eads, City Manager, asked Council to amend the emergency ordinance, declaration of public health emergency, and order to stay at home work safe through April 30, 2020 to match the State of Texas order and to allow management to follow a state of disaster declaration so that the City can ask for state support.

Kristina L. Hale, City Attorney, clarified that an additional ordinance is not necessary for an extension unless Council wished to pass any additional action regarding regulations or restrictions. Although Council can add more restrictions, they cannot prohibit those businesses or services that the Governor of Texas has already declared to be essential.

Dr. Marte Martinez noted that there has been an incremental increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases, but it has not been exponential. He asked if this means that the City's preventative measures are working or if more restrictions are needed. He voiced his concern about the speed of transmission of this virus and its ability to claim human lives. Dr. Hector Gonzalez, Health Director, explained that he and Dr. Victor Treviño agree with the medical community that the preventative measures against local transmission are working. The majority of the public are staying at home, parks are closed, and extra effort is being made to keep people off the streets in the evenings or over the weekends. He reminded Council that most of the positive cases are clusters among extended family members. Dr. Martinez reiterated that this clustering is important to show the public that, over the course of two weeks, a patient that is relatively healthy progressed from slightly feverish with cold symptoms to being intubated and deceased due to this virus. When officials tell the public to shelter-in-place and stay home unless they absolutely have to, it is because of the rapid progress that this virus naturally takes. Staying home is not a mere recommendation, it is necessary in order to save lives. He urged Council to do their part to talk to their constituents about the importance of staying home. People are listening, but not taking the matter of sheltering-in-place seriously enough. He has observed people making daily trips to the grocery store or taking their cars to the car wash. It is the utmost importance to stay home unless you absolutely have to go out.

Dr. Gonzalez agreed with Dr. Martinez's arguments, noting that the medical community is just as emphatic about staying home as much as possible. Not only is the virus clustering, but most of the positive cases start with mild symptoms that worsen around the seven- to ten-day mark. Most of the patients with respiratory symptoms recovered well, but the ones that did not required hospitalization. Three have been discharged, which is great news, but all 11 requiring hospitalization had respiratory problems around seven or ten days after contracting the virus. He noted that one particular family cluster was because those family members continued to have several family events with each other even though they do not all share the same home. The community has to prioritize social distancing and staying at home.

Dr. Victor Treviño stated that the measures in place are appropriate and will work if the community takes them seriously. He recommended extending the order to match the Governor's declaration of emergency. Cm. Vielma initiated a motion to this effect.

Cm. Altgelt voiced his understanding that the local curfew is only applied to juveniles aged 17 or younger. He proposed an amendment that the curfew be expanded to include all citizens in Laredo with exceptions for emergency or essential reasons, adding his opinion that there is no reason for anyone to be out of their home for any reason other than emergency medical reasons. The order lacks meaningful enforcement, and if everyone is subjected to the curfew, then being out of the house at all past curfew provides reasonable suspicion.

Cm. Vielma asked that Council take one issue at a time and declined Cm. Altgelt's amendment, asking him to bring the matter up after the vote for the order extension.

Motion to amend the Order to Stay at Home Work Safe and extend it until April 30, 2020.

Moved: Cm. Vielma

Second: Cm. Gonzalez

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Cm. Altgelt initiated a motion to extend the curfew restriction to all residents in the community from 10:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. except for emergency and/or essential errands as defined by the Governor of the State of Texas. MPT Torres seconded the motion but asked that the motion provide for a letter that an individual could carry from their employer showing that the individual is out of the house past curfew on essential business or for an essential service, such as a nurse or doctor to display to law enforcement. He noted that he will only support this motion if there is some way for curfew breakers on legitimate business to prove their exception. Cm. Altgelt accepted the amendment.

Cm. Vielma noted that the City has some small businesses have employee identification and that employee IDs be included in that letter, which Cm. Altgelt accepted as an amendment. Mr. Eads asked about someone who has a sick child and needs to go to Stripes for cough syrup at 11:00 p.m., asking if officers could be given discretion to determine if these people who do are out of the house for non-work reasons but still have a valid necessary for being outdoors after curfew. Dr. Martinez assumed that the officers would exhibit that discretion

already; Mr. Eads countered that Council just amended the motion to require officers to ask for employee IDs and letters. The general public will call the City Manager's Office tomorrow with questions as to these special circumstances, asking for clarification.

Mrs. Hale noted that her office could draft a letter template to assist with furnishing these letters. Cm. Altgelt added that some cities will post a link where employers can download the letter template and edit it for their employees. However, the situation ultimately comes down to officer discretion; it is up to law enforcement to ask the tough questions and determine if someone is out past curfew for a legitimate reason or not.

Dr. Martinez conceded that it may seem very innocent to get together with family and friends right now to the general public, and these discussions may seem extreme; however, he assured the public that they are necessary and that orders must be enforced. He voiced his full support of this proposed measure. Claudio Treviño, Police Chief, confirmed that officers are seriously enforcing the current orders and taking the matter seriously. Whatever Council directive is given at this meeting will be passed along to officers for implementation. He voiced his appreciation and support from management and Council.

Mayor Saenz voiced his understanding that Police officers will have discretion to best enforce these changes to the order. He clarified that the curfew hours remain from 10:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. To the question of when this motion would go into effect, Cm. Altgelt suggested that it go into effect immediately. Mayor Saenz countered that the City needs at least 24 hours to get the word out so that the public is adequately informed.

Cm. Altgelt added that he has seen images of City staff members sitting together on a sofa in violation of the social distancing requirements without face masks. He asked staff to ensure that the recommended or required protocols are being followed by all employees. He agreed to giving the proposed changes a grace period so that officials are better able to enforce them and amended the motion to that effect.

Cm. Rodriguez asked how much fines will be for these violations; Mayor Saenz suggested no more than \$1,000 but that these violations still carry the potential for arrests. Mrs. Hale confirmed that the current citation schedule is up to \$1,000 and arrests up to six months as these violations are Class D misdemeanors.

Motion to extend the curfew restriction to all residents in the community from 10:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. except for emergency and/or essential errands as defined by the Governor of the State of Texas and allow for curfew breakers to furnish a letter prepared by their employer showing their exception to the curfew requirements while they work on official business for an essential service and that the employees present their employee ID cards if they have one, and also giving police officers discretion to determine whether individuals are out of the house past curfew for legitimate or emergency/essential reasons and to direct staff to put these directives into effect at 12:01 a.m. Thursday, April 2, 2020, as amended.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt
Second: MPT Torres

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Mrs. Hale confirmed that the City Attorney's Office will include a web link to download the letter template.

MPT Torres initiated a motion to cancel all delinquent City tax sales and auctions for the months of April and May, 2020. This will go in line with Council's suspension of evictions since now is an unsafe time to remove people from their homes.

Motion to cancel all delinquent City tax sales and auctions for the months of April and May, 2020.

Moved: MPT Torres

Second: Cm. Gonzalez

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Cm. Vielma initiated a motion to require employees of restaurants and those handling money to wear face masks or face coverings and gloves. To the comment that this is already a requirement, Cm. Altgelt relayed reports that this is not being followed or enforced, seconding the motion to underscore the mandate. He offered an amendment to require everyone leaving their home to wear a face mask or covering when they are out running essential errands. This is currently being done in City Council meetings.

Mayor Saenz asked that Council handle issues one at a time and focus on Cm. Vielma's motion for restaurant employees at this time. Cm. Altgelt countered that his amendment is simple but conceded.

MPT Torres stated that Cm. Vielma's motion is already included in the order, but the current order states, "as available" due to the nationwide shortage of face masks. If businesses do not have masks and cannot access them, they are washing their hands more often. He suggested that Council reiterate "as available" so as not to punish businesses who are unable to access face masks.

Dr. Gonzalez confirmed that the order's qualifier "as available" is standard, and if a business does have masks or gloves, they likely do not have enough to change them between each handling or transaction. In this case, they can reuse gloves or masks but have to sanitize them between each transaction. This needs to be relayed to the businesses or employers along with the directive to at least wash their hands between each transaction. Officers are checking businesses to ensure that they are complying with the social distancing requirements and other measures. He reiterated that there are shortages of gloves, and most restaurants do not have enough to switch gloves throughout the day. However, they can sanitize their gloves with hand sanitizer or alcohol prep with a cup of bleach in a gallon of water.

Mayor Saenz voiced his opinion that based on the discussion, the motion is not needed at this time. Cm. Altgelt countered that there is a need for the motion because now Council is

mandating that people keep their faces covered and wash their hands or sanitize gloves at repeated intervals, which is the best practice and should be mandated at this time. Cm. Vielma amended her motion to allow for face coverings if face masks are not available.

Dr. Martinez reminded Council and the public that the use of face masks is not necessarily to keep oneself from contracting the virus but for protecting another person if one is an asymptomatic carrier. Masks protect others, not yourself; they are a means of self-sacrifice, not self-preservation.

Cm. Rodriguez asked how many restaurants have been inspected to ensure that they are complying with the Mayoral order and keeping their sanitation standards up to par during the COVID-19 situation. Dr. Gonzalez confirmed that all 1,600 restaurants are inspected monthly, even during the pandemic. Staff continues to inspect them, including mobile vendors. Chief Treviño reported that the Police Department visited over 1,700 businesses since March 18, including restaurants and convenience stores selling food. The Department responded to over 646 complaints regarding different issues at these businesses. Enforcement has been very active. He noted that he could work with Dr. Gonzalez to provide more targeted information regarding food handling complaints at a later Council meeting if Council wished.

Motion to require face masks or face coverings and gloves for restaurant employees and those handling money, as amended.

Moved: Cm. Vielma

Second: Cm. Altgelt

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

MPT Torres agreed with Dr. Martinez's arguments for the use of face masks as a community protection, whether it be a medical or homemade mask, a scarf, or a bandana. By requiring people to wear face coverings as suggested by Cm. Altgelt, the City will likely see a decline in the number of transmissions and help flatten the curve. He initiated a motion requiring everyone that leaves their home to keep their mouth and nose covered with a mask, scarf, bandana, handkerchief, or any cloth. Violations of this motion would result in a \$50 fine for each incident. If Council is to pass this motion, then he noted that fabric stores should be deemed an essential business so that people can purchase fabric to make their own face coverings. After the motion received a second, he amended the motion to make this change go into effect at 12:01 a.m. Thursday, April 2, 2020, so that the public has time to be informed and to make the necessary arrangements.

Cm. Altgelt suggested keeping the citation fee structure the same as the other directives so as not to complicate the matter. This will also press upon the public the severity of the situation and to let them know that these directives are not requests but are orders. He requested an amendment to the motion to reflect a fee structure that mirrors the other directives. Mrs. Hale asked for clarification as to whether Council intends to make fabric stores essential or any store that also sells fabric. MPT Torres noted that Hobby Lobby has a fabric section and could be allowed to open.

Dr. Martinez voiced his opinion that craft or hobby stores that have fabric sections should be incentivized to manufacture masks, not open to the public as that will be counterintuitive to keeping people at home. Mrs. Hale noted that allowing craft or fabric stores to open to the public would violate the Governor's order; they could be allowed to make masks. She suggested that Council either allow craft or hobby stores to *only* sell masks or to only allow solely fabric stores to open if they only sell fabric.

MPT Torres attempted to amend his motion to this effect, but Mr. Eads urged Council to reconsider reopening stores like Hobby Lobby or other craft stores because it defeats the City's mission to encourage people to stay home as much as possible. He agreed with Mrs. Hale's suggestion to narrow the scope of this motion to only allow solely fabric stores to be open. Dr. Gonzalez added that these stores would have to strictly adhere to the social distancing requirements as the City wants people to stay away from commerce and gathering. Mrs. Hale clarified that any store allowed to open must abide by all aspects of the order.

Cm. Gonzalez voiced his understanding of Cm. Altgelt's suggestion to keep the fine schedule the same as the other order directives but voiced his support with MPT Torres's proposal for \$50 fines. If the public continues to disregard the order, then he would agree to increasing the fine amount. Cm. Altgelt countered that if there are no real consequences to not covering one's face, then the Council is not fulfilling its purpose of keeping the community safe. Cm. Gonzalez argued that while \$50 may seem small to Cm. Altgelt, it is a very large amount for a lot of people in the community and will be taken seriously, especially since many community members have extra expenses like hand sanitizers and personal protective equipment (PPE) or losing their jobs or opportunities to work during this time.

Cm. Altgelt noted that it is also very expensive to bury a loved one after the community has not followed safety and prevention precautions. He reiterated his opinion that the fine schedule should be consistent throughout the order. MPT Torres decline his amendment.

Dr. Martinez conceded that \$50 is serious to many people, meaning that a \$1,000 is even more unaffordable. Council is encouraging people to wear masks in order to save lives. Schools and businesses have been shut down in the community because officials have seen how fast this virus is affecting its residents. The whole point of this motion is to get people to use masks when they leave their home so that no one else has to lose a loved one to COVID-19. He urged Council to make a meaningful directive so that everyone *has* to use masks. Mayor Saenz added that the Municipal Court Judge has the discretion to waive or reduce fines if he determines a special circumstance.

Cm. Rodriguez noted that the order is already meaningful as people are being cited for gathering or being out after curfew. He voiced his opposition to the City becoming rich from restricting the people too severely; \$50 is sufficient to show the gravity of the situation. Cm. Altgelt disagreed, noting that emergency operations meetings have raised the question of storage capacity in the City morgue. Since Laredo borders a country who is not taking the issue seriously, he noted that the City needs to take even more precautions as a

countermeasure to safeguard the public. He reminded Council that police officers have discretion to avoid citing someone who is uninformed or financially struggling while urging them to comply in the future. However, others who are arrogantly refusing to comply with the directives need to have the full weight of the law brought down on them for their reckless actions.

Cm. Vielma asked about gloves since the virus can live on an unloving surface for about three days; when one considers this information when thinking about shopping at the grocery store for essential goods, she asked if Council can take action requiring the use of gloves as well. Dr. Gonzalez confirmed that the COVID-19 virus could live up to 72 hours on inanimate objects, but the mode of transmission is through droplets, usually through coughs or sneezes. Therefore, her concerns are valid but not critical at this point. Dr. Treviño agreed, noting that education is key to informing the public on how best to protect themselves and the people around them. He would only recommend that people wear gloves if they sanitize them regularly as if they were sanitizing their hands. Dr. Gonzalez stated that if people are wearing gloves, they will have to change gloves every time they touch anything. A better practice would be to wash their hands, which is why he recommended not requiring the use of gloves.

Mrs. Hale confirmed that if Council leaves the fines consistent, then the Municipal Court Judge could exercise discretion to minimize the fee to \$50. Dr. Martinez reminded Cm. Rodriguez that Council's intention is not to be overly punitive to the citizens of Laredo but to get the severity of the situation across about this virus that can kill.

MPT Torres amended his motion keep the fines consistent with the rest of the order and give the Municipal Court Judge discretion when reconciling those citations.

Motion to require everyone leaving their home to have their mouth and nose covered at all times with a mask, scarf, bandana, handkerchief, or cloth covering and the fine for each violation consistent with the rest of the order, and to further categorize fabric-only stores as an essential business for the sole purpose of selling fabric so that the public may make their own face coverings as long as social distancing and other order directives are followed and to put this directive into effect at 12:01 a.m. Thursday, April 2, 2020, as amended.

Moved: MPT Torres

Second: Dr. Marte Martinez

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

MPT Torres noted that the food bank has assisted many other families; the Laredo Regional Food Bank has been assisting local families but are running low. The food bank organizer said that they need \$10,000 to provide 1,600 families with meals for the month of April. He initiated a motion to provide the Laredo Regional Food Bank with \$10,000.

Cm. Altgelt suggested that Council also include assistance to the Joseph's Pantry in the same amount given their delivery of food to families and the Laredo Regional Food Bank. MPT Torres declined the amendment, asking that Council take the issues one at a time.

Motion to provide the Laredo Regional Food Bank with \$10,000 to continue providing meals to local families during the month of April, 2020.

Moved: MPT Torres

Second: Cm. Gonzalez

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Cm. Altgelt initiated a motion to provide the New Mission/Joseph's Pantry with \$10,000 as well. He confirmed that this mission donates food rather than selling it to the public. Cm. Balli clarified that the Joseph's Pantry has a store in one program that sells food given to them from suppliers, but they also have a program where they deliver food to senior citizens for free. Cm. Altgelt clarified the intention of his motion was to give money to the program that donates the food rather than the store program.

Motion to provide the New Mission/Joseph's Pantry of Laredo with \$10,000 so they may continue providing food to the poor and elderly free of charge.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt

Second: Cm. Balli

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

MPT Torres noted that the South Texas Food Bank also helps the community in much larger volumes. They deliver 800,000 pounds of food and have helped 11,316 families. They were the first entity to reach out to the City offering to help the people of Laredo during this time. \$25,000 will get them one trailer of food. He initiated a motion to provide them with \$100,000 for the month of April, which is reimbursable up to 75% by FEMA, meaning that the City could actually end up contributing only \$25,000 out-of-pocket.

Mr. Eads voiced his understanding of the motion but countered that the 75% reimbursement is not guaranteed. He asked Council to consider committing just \$25,000 in case the funds end up not being reimbursed, which will result in a \$75,000 shortfall. There will be other Council meetings where Council can continue to address this.

Cm. Rodriguez and Cm. Vielma suggested that the City earmark any revenues from fines collected from order violations to help offset the costs to the food banks, since food is an essential service that the community needs. MPT Torres emphasized that the City has to support these food banks; if management proposed cuts or cost savings to make this funding happen, then Council should take that action knowing that it was necessary action. Taking this matter on a case-by-case or weekly basis is not sufficient because the need is moving too quickly. He amended his motion to City personnel trace the funds for the support of these food banks and request backup for the purchase of food items so that the City can account for the expenditures.

Dr. Martinez agreed with Mr. Eads regarding the uncertainty of being reimbursed for these expenditures. MPT Torres's solution injects citizen money back into the community. Council's responsibility is to feed its community in a time of crisis. Despite budget constraints, he

voiced his opinion that Council must make these difficult budgetary decisions for the good of the community. Mr. Eads suggested that Council challenge its community partners and the private sector to join the City in this effort, confirming that the City will follow Council directives.

MPT Torres and Dr. Martinez noted that in a short amount of time, they were able to raise a significant amount of money and provide their own donations for community efforts such as this.

Motion to provide the South Texas Food Bank with \$100,000 for the month of April and to direct City personnel to trace the funds for the support of these food banks and request backup documentation and receipts for the purchase of food items so that the City can account for the expenditures, as amended.

Moved: MPT Torres
Second: Cm. Vielma
For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Motion to earmark the revenues collected for COVID-19-related fines for the purchase of emergency supplies.

Moved: Cm. Vielma
Second: Cm. Gonzalez
For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

MPT Torres reported receiving phone calls from employees working at essential businesses and practicing the social distancing but are exposed to possible transmission of the virus because they do not have access to masks or gloves and work in groups that might facilitate transmission. If they cannot go to work, then they will lose their jobs; these employees have asked MPT Torres what will happen to them if they lose their jobs. He suggested that the City give these employees the option to take leave without pay if they need to miss work to avoid the risk of virus exposure and that their job be protected and that the business owner be fined personally if they fire an employee who must stay home as a precaution against virus exposure when they do not have gloves or masks.

Mrs. Hale noted that the only businesses that should be open are those that are considered essential to the infrastructure and safety of the United States, and those are expected and have the responsibility to keep regular hours. Therefore, the City would not be able to compel any employees to not go to work except for reasons that are specifically allowed. The Labor Department imposed some specific exceptions like if an employee is sick or has a child at home. Aside from the specified exceptions, these employees are allowed and have a responsibility to go to work if their business is considered essential.

Cm. Torres voiced her agreement to Mrs. Hale, noting that the suggestion is counterintuitive; if essential employees do not go to work, then essential businesses do not have employees. MPT Torres clarified that he had no motion on the floor but was just posing a consideration

given the phone calls that he had received.

Dr. Martinez noted that despite Council's priorities to safeguard the city at all costs, at some point they will need to consider ways to help the community recover economically from this situation.

Cm. Vielma shared a concern that the order prevents people from visiting their family members in other homes. However, she reminded the public that they are able to check in on their family members through phone calls and virtual visits. She asked about whether forcing businesses to close because they are deemed non-essential is a violation of their First Amendment rights. Mrs. Hale explained that the Governor's order and the executive order allows non-essential businesses to operate via online technology, though their physical location must be closed.

Cm. Vielma initiated a motion to make it known that businesses considered non-essential and use technology to continue conducting their business. Mr. Eads reminded Council that this is already in the order; Mrs. Hale explained that it is called minimum operations and includes Cm. Vielma's motion already.

Cm. Rodriguez suggested that Council move forward with this motion just to make it obviously clear to the public.

Motion to amend the order to make it known that businesses considered non-essential can utilize technology to conduct their business though their physical location remains closed.

Moved: Cm. Vielma

Second: Cm. Rodriguez

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Dr. Martinez asked if Council can consider forming an economic recovery committee to incentivize the recovery moving forward. Mrs. Hale noted that while Council can discuss this, she discouraged them from taking any action as that would amend the emergency ordinance. Dr. Martinez agreed not to initiate a motion but asked management to bring this item to the next City Council meeting for him to present to Council.

Mr. Eads clarified that staff already has a working committee consisting of the Economic Development Department, Texas Workforce Solutions, MileOne, Laredo Economic Development Corporation, and similar groups. This committee is already working on the issue of economic recovery and will bring a report to Council. Dr. Martinez countered that this committee needs business leaders, not just MileOne and similar groups.

Cm. Altgelt noted that there is a lot of non-essential personnel working from home who call the Health Department and 311 but nobody gets back to them. He asked if it would be a good idea to cross-train these non-essential employees so that they can field calls from home and direct people to the appropriate services or connections.

Mr. Eads noted that officials have pursued this matter and furthered it by taking in County employees, as well; he confirmed that staff is repurposing these individuals at home and making sure that they are well-trained and competent to take calls from the public with the right information. Cm. Altgelt initiated a motion to this effect.

Melina Bermudez, Human Resources Director, reported that 46 employees have already been cross-trained at the City alone; this number does not include County employees who are assisting with this effort. Mr. Eads added that he can realign these positions within Human Resources as long as the realigned employees are not placed in a higher grade than what they currently occupy. He confirmed that management will continue with this endeavor.

Cm. Rodriguez questioned why this item is in the form of a motion when management is already performing this task. Mr. Eads noted that this duty is already a Charter allowance granted to him; he does not need any Council directive to perform this responsibility. He has already taken action on this matter.

Cm. Altgelt noted that he did not want there to be confusion and wanted to encourage management to repurpose staff members who are being paid to be at home. He reiterated his understanding that the Health Department is not returning phone calls. Giving management this encouragement before the City actually experience the apex of this virus's transmission may be needed. Dr. Gonzalez clarified that many people are complaining about not getting answers because they do not like what is being told to them when they call the hotline. Staff is answering every single questions; the 15 operators on the hotline have a script and are on rotation 24 hours a day. If a question does not relate to Health questions, this staff is still tasked with assisting the caller.

Cm. Altgelt countered that the feedback he has heard is not related to not liking the answers that callers receive but rather that they are being told, "I can't answer that question for you; let me call you back" and then not getting a call back. This nonresponse has been given to someone calling from a clinic with an urgent inquiry. He also questioned whether 15 operators are enough for a population of almost 300,000 people. He reiterated his motion. Mr. Eads clarified that these 15 operators are only on the hotline; this does not include the operators for 311, 211, 911, or 795-2800. There is a host of operators answering the phones at the other contact lines. This is also not the only hotline available, as 211 takes a caller to a statewide hotline for help.

Cm. Mercurio Martinez noted his discomfort in the path being taken regarding personnel by Council; management is already on top of this issue and are already rerouting employees. The motion on the table is walking the fine line towards micromanagement, which he was not elected to do. He urged Council to leave this issue to the City Manager to continue managing his employees as he deems necessary. Dr. Martinez noted that he is not trying to micromanage but sees that the City is dealing with a significant number of concerned community members. He read a communication from a coworker who said that the first time they called, they were told to go get a strep throat and flu test as well as a chest x-ray. If those tests come back negative but something shows up on an x-ray, this coworker was supposed to call back, which they did. This coworker was then directed to another phone

the collective medical personnel, personal protective equipment, hospital beds, and intensive care capacity in order to spread out any COVID-19 positive patients if needed. This would mimic the New York medical strike force as it relates to the deployment of additional resources like making use of additional facilities to serve as hospital beds.

Dr. Gonzalez clarified that this is exactly what the current medical committee is already doing with the guidance of Dr. Treviño and the community's infectious disease specialist, among other medical professionals. The committee is also addressing all of the local standalone emergency rooms for additional resources, as well. This plan has already been activated by the medical committee, who have already assessed the community's resources and made purchases on behalf of the local medical needs.

Cm. Altgelt amended his motion that the medical committee include a neonatologist and a pediatrician as well as the directive that Council be provided with a daily report from that committee regarding the COVID-19 apex.

Cm. Vielma thanked the medical professionals who have provided their guidance and expertise. She asked if there are any projections being done to determine the peak of positive COVID-19 cases in the next two weeks. Dr. Gonzalez noted this was a question directly addressed by the committee over the weekend. The committee identified 100 beds at this time with projections to increase them if the standalone emergency rooms offer up their beds. Requests have been made already to the Emergency Management Coordinator, who is responding with more equipment to ensure that the medical community can continue to provide service, especially if COVID-19 complications increase.

Dr. Martinez noted that physicians are already changing their practices in response to circumstances and directives coming down from the State of Texas. He observed that Dr. Gonzalez and the medical committee have put together a plan that will help Council make tough decisions if the situation worsens. Nobody is taking the situation lightly, but he noted his opinion that Laredo does not need its doctors reporting to Council every single day; what Laredo needs of its doctors is to take care of their patients. He voiced his opposition to Cm. Altgelt's motion for a rapid response committee.

Cm. Altgelt withdrew his motion.

Motion to direct staff to add a neonatologist and pediatrician to the existing medical committee to properly assess the collective medical personnel, personal protective equipment, hospital beds, and intensive care capacity in order to spread out any COVID-19 positive patients if needed and to direct the committee to provide Council with a daily report regarding the COVID-19 apex, as amended.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt
Second: Cm. Vielma
Motion withdrawn.

Cm. Altgelt initiated a motion to direct the Health Department report to Council on the current

medical resources on hand right now so that Council can respond intelligently to their constituents' inquiries.

Motion to direct the Health Department report to Council on the current medical resources on hand right now so that Council can respond intelligently to their constituents' inquiries.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt

Second: None

Motion dies for lack of a second.

Cm. Vielma initiated a motion to add the COVID-19 prevention measures to the Health Department's restaurant inspection investigations and to further direct the Health Department to publish in those investigated restaurants passed the specific COVID-19 portions of their inspections and to assess a fine in accordance to Class B misdemeanors up to \$1,000 if the restaurant is noncompliance to the face mask and glove requirements.

Mrs. Hale confirmed that this motion is in order because anything in the emergency ordinance is subject to that fine schedule.

Motion to add the COVID-19 prevention measures to the Health Department's restaurant inspection investigations and to further direct the Health Department to publish in those investigated restaurants passed the specific COVID-19 portions of their inspections and to assess a fine in accordance to Class B misdemeanors up to \$1,000 if the restaurant is noncompliance to the face mask and glove requirements.

Moved: Cm. Vielma

Second: Cm. Mercurio Martinez

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Cm. Rodriguez asked if the City is still allowing residents to walk outside or ride their bikes for exercise if a curfew has been implemented and the City is encouraging everyone to stay inside their home or face a fine. Mrs. Hale noted that the City has to encourage or allow people to take part in physical exercise as long as they maintain social distancing outdoors while they are doing this.

Cm. Altgelt suggested getting a group of seamstresses together to manufacture face masks for healthcare providers. Olivia Varela of the Laredo Economic Development Corporation told him that they would be able to lead this effort but would need City support. He reported that he was approached by individuals who have plasma and 3D printers to make face shields or other PPE if necessary. He initiated a motion to direct management to reach out to the Laredo EDC and coordinate to the extent possible to assist them with securing seamstresses to manufacture PPE. He clarified that the purpose of this PPE would be for healthcare professionals, not the community at large.

Dr. Martinez asked if homemade masks by seamstresses would meet the specific standards necessary for healthcare professionals as they treat patients. He also asked how the City

would go about disbursing these masks to the medical community. Cm. Altgelt noted that he would leave it to the City Manager to figure out those details. If the do-it-yourself masks are not usable by the medical community, then he agreed that the City Manager could direct those resources elsewhere.

Cm. Balli noted that with the previous action passed to require all citizens to wear face masks when they leave the house, local seamstresses will probably become too busy to meet the demand; some seamstresses are already manufacturing masks. Mrs. Hale and MPT Torres clarified that the face covering for citizens to leave the house does not necessarily have to be a mask; it can be a cloth or scarf or bandana.

Dr. Treviño noted that the public can be encouraged to fashion their own masks since many people in the community knows how to sew. He added that 3M has a filter that can be placed between layers of material in homemade masks that would help prevent most of the droplets and particles that transmit the virus. Dr. Gonzalez noted that the medical community is excellent and providing care throughout this pandemic. Medicine is changing to where a phone consultation is being treated as an in-person visit, so doctors are being reimbursed through insurance. He commended the City Manager and Deputy City Manager for proactively reaching out to broker the purchase of PPE for the medical community and directing the Purchasing Agent to do so, as well; this must be a coordinated endeavor. He confirmed that masks for the medical community are a different and more particular grade than what is acceptable for public use. Trials have begun to test the efficacy of new pharmaceuticals for treatment of COVID-19 patients.

Cm. Altgelt reiterated that the purpose of the motion is to facilitate a group of “Rosie the Riveters” to make PPE that meets the medical standards for healthcare professionals since the community needs as much help as it can get.

Steve Landin, Fire Chief and Emergency Management Coordinator, informed Council that the City has already received through Nathan Rubio two shipments of PPE for the purposes of sharing directly with the hospitals and Fire Department. They also received another larger shipment. That does not mean that more is not necessary, and there are still orders pending from the City and the various facilities; this is a multi-prong approach with a lot of moving operational components at play. He asked Council to provide the policies that they want but to let officials work and manage the operations of this emergency.

Dr. Martinez asked Cm. Altgelt not to pursue a motion to this effect but to simply ask staff to research it since it would need to be retracted if it does not work out. Cm. Altgelt agreed, withdrawing his motion.

Motion to direct management to reach out to the Laredo Economic Development Corporation and coordinate to the extent possible to assist them with securing seamstresses to manufacture personal protective equipment.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt
Second: Cm. Vielma

Motion withdrawn.

Cm. Martinez reported receiving texts regarding the mandate of using masks or face coverings; the inquiries ask what the individual is supposed to do when they arrive to their work. Cm. Altgelt voiced his understanding that these people would continue wearing their masks at work. MPT Torres agreed, noting that individuals would use the masks when they are exercising or biking, as well, out of the house. Mrs. Hale confirmed that the policy is set by Council, but the previous motion was that people cover their nose and mouth any time that they leave their home.

Cm. Altgelt noted that if someone is in their own home with their isolation group, then there would be no need to cover their faces. MPT Torres voiced his opinion that people wear their masks or face coverings when they are outside, whether they are a safe social distance away from someone else or not. If employers are providing their employees with PPE like masks, which they are supposed to be doing, then the employees are obligated to wear the masks anyway while working.

Mrs. Hale noted that Council can take action to protect the public as long as it is as necessary as possible; Council cannot be more restrictive than needed. If the health authority says that someone would need to wear a mask while they are in their car, then Council can take that action; otherwise, they cannot.

Dr. Treviño stated that it is appropriate to wear the masks when one is in a group, at work, or outside of the house. However, when one is completely alone in their home, it is not necessary. Cm. Balli agreed, noting that it is not necessary to require wearing a mask when one is alone. He reminded Council to exercise common sense on this matter. He voiced his opinion that Council not require the use of masks when one is by oneself or exercising (alone) or in their car. He initiated a motion to amend the order so that the use of a mask or face covering is not required when in one's personal automobile, when exercising outdoors if it is being performed alone, or when one is practicing proper social distancing.

Cm. Vielma requested an amendment to remove the portion regarding the waiver of a mask when one is practicing proper social distancing since that can change. Cm. Balli declined the amendment as practicing proper social distancing will help prevent the spread of infection, but he added the exclusion of when a person is in their own home with members of their shelter group.

Dr. Martinez reminded Council that the use of masks is for when someone is going to be in close groups; if someone is just passing someone by once, the probability of transmission is very low. It is when someone is going into buildings or joining a crowd that social distancing becomes problematic and transmission probabilities rise. Maintaining social distancing as a vague term is a difficult thing to do.

Cm. Balli noted that the concern seems to be if someone is entering a building or someone else's residence, the mask needs to be worn. If someone is going to be in a wide expanse of space, mostly alone, then there is not much of a need for a mask or face covering. He

the community and make effective choices in light of any changes in the behavior of the virus. Mr. Eads thanked Council for their patience during this ordeal.

VI. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn.

Moved: Dr. Marte Martinez

Second: Cm. Mercurio Martinez

For: 5

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Cm. Gonzalez, Cm. Rodriguez, and Cm. Vielma were not present.