

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Monday, February 1, 2021

Discussion: COVID-19 Relief Spending/Housing Security Plan Petition.

Mayor Byrd started the meeting at 8:00 p.m. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom.

In attendance were Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Emmett V. Jordan, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, and Mayor Colin A. Byrd.

Staff present were Nicole Ard, City Manager; David Moran, Assistant City Manager; Todd Pounds, City Solicitor; Bertha Gaymon, City Treasurer; Liz Park, CARES Director; Terri Hruby, Planning and Community Development Director; Scott Crawford, Public Information Producer/Coordinator; and Bonita Anderson, City Clerk.

Also present were Ric Gordon, Bob Rand, Renaud Brown, Matthew Inzeo, Konrad Herling, Bill Orleans, and others.

COVID-19

Mayor Byrd opened the meeting emphasizing the need for sustainable solutions to address housing security and ongoing COVID-19 relief. Ms. Davis called for immediate action to prevent a surge in housing insecurity. Mr. Jordan highlighted that current rental and utility assistance offered only temporary relief and stressed the importance of a long-term plan.

Mayor Byrd proposed a \$1.3 million COVID-19 relief package to support housing, food, utilities, transportation, business grants, and healthcare. The Council recognized the need for this relief; however, they preferred to wait for budget stabilization due to financial uncertainties.

Ms. Gaymon, City Treasurer clarified that the \$1.1 million now earmarked for relief was not surplus, but funds originally reserved for abatements; she further recommended cautious spending given potential future claims.

Mayor Byrd encouraged the Council to focus on practical solutions using available resources, regardless of the final relief amount. Dr. Liz Park from Greenbelt CARES then reviewed the City's aid programs, noting that \$400,000 in federal funds had been allocated to housing and utility assistance, primarily for rental aid, with limited mortgage assistance for those denied forbearance.

Dr. Park highlighted the vital support provided by community organizations, including the Greenbelt Interfaith Leaders Association (GILA) and the Good Samaritan Fund, which have assisted struggling households, though resources are running low, with 23 households helped and 10 awaiting assistance. Other resources, like St. Hugh's Food Pantry, continue to meet high demand through weekly food distributions. She also informed Council that the county would soon resume its rental assistance program and promised to keep them updated on application availability.

Ms. Davis expressed concern about seniors and other residents without internet access struggling to apply for assistance. Dr. Park assured them that CARES Community Resource Advocate Christal Batey had been helping residents register by phone. She also shared that Greenbelt CARES was expanding mental health services, hiring new counselors for group counseling and support to the police department. Dr. Park noted rising anxiety among residents facing unemployment, past due rent, and potential foreclosure.

Councilmembers highlighted the importance of collaborating with property owners to address housing stability. Mr. Putens suggested that property owners might have eviction lists to share with the city, facilitating early intervention. Ms. Davis supported this, warning that widespread homelessness could overwhelm city resources. Council agreed on a constructive dialogue with property owners, recognizing the significant pressures facing both renters and landlords during the pandemic.

Mr. Rand proposed that the city explore the possibility of offering pro bono legal clinics for renters, an approach that had proven effective elsewhere. He suggested forming a task force of staff and residents to address housing insecurity, advocating for a united community response. The city had already issued ordinances to prevent evictions and rent increases, but Ms. Davis expressed frustration that some landlords seemed unaware of these regulations. To address this, city staff confirmed that all property owners had been reminded of the ordinances.

Mayor Byrd emphasized the need for a unified, proactive strategy based on both data and community insights, reminding Council of their responsibility to safeguard residents' well-being.

The meeting ended at 12:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonita Anderson

Bonita Anderson
City Clerk