

Federal Stimulus Bill

Metro Cities has reported on the details of the recently passed federal stimulus bill, which includes funding for states. As we have reported, a portion of the recent stimulus bill is directed to local governments over 500,000 in population, which excludes all municipalities in Minnesota.

The federal bill also will distribute funds to state under broad parameters for COVID-19 related costs. Metro Cities sent a letter this week to Governor Walz and legislative leaders, signed by Metro Cities, the LMC, the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities, and the Municipal Legislative Commission to express the need for funding support to local governments as the distribution of these funds is considered. The letter noted the many various critical COVID-19 needs cities will be responding to, and the consequential effects for local operational and fiscal capacities.

Governor's COVID-19 Updates

The Governor and his staff are continuing to deliver daily briefings on the state of the COVID-19 virus in Minnesota and state efforts to respond to challenges as they emerge. Following are highlights from the Governor's Thursday and Friday briefings:

Thursday:

First Responders and Workers Compensation

Governor Walz was asked about proposed eligibility changes to the workers' compensation system to cover first responders infected with COVID-19. The Governor reiterated his desire to resolve this issue and did not rule out executive action. See the [Wednesday Newsletter](#) for more information. Metro Cities supports a separate state fund to reimburse first responders rather than using the workers' compensation system and is working with the LMC and other city organizations to express support to the administration and legislators for such a fund. We encourage city officials to contact your local legislators to express support for state assistance for these costs.

Congregate Living Facilities

Commissioner Malcolm from MDH announced that the department will begin to list congregate care facilities with cases. Their [website](#) also has updated data and graphics.

She also noted that masks can help individuals from spreading the disease, but they won't protect you from being infected and that medical grade masks should be reserved for health professionals. Furthermore, wearing a mask is not a substitute for practicing social distancing.

Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell spoke about the steps the department is taking to limit exposure to virus in the state's prison system. He discussed the challenge of protecting against the spread of COVID-19 while continuing to treat incarcerated individuals humanely. The department is currently reviewing candidates who are close to their release date (within 90 days) for early work release.

Out of Pocket Treatment Costs

The first is that a deal was struck with the Minnesota Council of Health Plans so that patients will not face any out of pocket costs for COVID-19 treatment. There are some restrictions. Namely, the cost-sharing elimination only applies to in-network treatment and the deal does not include

individuals who work for large corporations that self-insure. Policies on copayments will vary from company to company in that case. Click [here](#) for details,

COVID Dashboard

The Governor announced that a public facing 'dashboard' was being built to give Minnesotans a central location for accurate and up to date information on the COVID-19 pandemic. The public can go to this dashboard to see things like the number of cases, deaths, hospitalizations, recoveries, etc.

Friday:

The Governor addressed the state via a livestreamed presentation Friday to give the public some specifics on how his administration is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and its goals for a successful recovery. A key piece of this presentation was the launch of the COVID-19 'dashboard' referred to in Thursday's briefing. The page contains current data on testing, social distancing, hospital surge capacity, critical care supply levels, childcare capacity, and economic security. On the main page you can also find the total number of cases and a breakdown of that number by county. Click [here](#) to access COVID-19 Dashboard. Metro Cities will also include this link on our COVID-19 webpage.

The rest of the presentation was organized around the state's ongoing and future COVID-19 efforts. The initial phase of responding to the virus spurred the creation of working groups focused on hospital surge capacity, procuring supplies, expanding testing capabilities, and managing distance learning and childcare needs. The second phase, long term planning and recovery, is primarily concerned with protecting people most vulnerable to COVID-19, ensuring the strength and stability of the state's food supply, and working with the federal government to provide economic support to people and businesses to help weather this storm.

The Governor said his administration is working closely with the Legislature and federal government to manage funds with the goal of ensuring funds are available quickly so supplies and other necessities can be purchased as needed.

The Governor reiterated several challenges as the state moves forward. Namely, there is still limited data on the virus, models are not perfect, and states and nations are all competing against one another for resources and supplies. He ended with a warning that the peak is still on its way before adding that he is confident in the state's ability to overcome this challenge.

The Governor was asked about what he is weighing as he considers extending the stay at home order. He repeated that he is using the best available science and data. The order will be adjusted as necessary.

Senate COVID-19 Working Group Convenes Remote Hearings

The MN Senate has created a COVID-19 Working Group with the goal of working on the pandemic response in an online and public format. The working group is chaired by Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka and is made up of 11 senators from the majority and minority. Hearings were held on April 2 and 3 this week.

Thursday, April 2

The working group convened a healthcare response meeting on April 2, which included an update from the MN Hospitals Association (MHA), MN Nurses Association, homecare providers, and long-term care providers. The work group heard that Minnesota, like other states, is struggling to acquire many of the materials needed to fight COVID-19 and that hospitals face financial hardship due to the decision to halt elective surgeries as well as costs related to pandemic response.

Hospitals are working to determine their capacity to handle the expected surge of patients anticipated to need care. The state is currently working to identify alternate care sites in the state. The MHA is supporting presumptive eligibility for those staff that have direct contact and have a confirmed test or a physician has determined a likely COVID-19 diagnosis. MHA also advocated for allowing licensed health staff from other states to work in MN in an emergency basis to meet the staffing needs that are expected. The MN Nurses Association testified that many hospitals are asking nurses and other staff to re-use protective equipment in an effort to make the supply last as long as is possible. Majority Leader Gazelka expressed his commitment to working with Governor Walz to address the issues presented to the work group.

Jobs and Economy Meeting

The working group convened April 3 to address the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. DEED Commissioner Steve Grove explained the increase in capacity in the state's unemployment insurance division. He also walked through several of the small business assistance programs highlighted in previous Metro Cities Newsletters, including resources available at uimn.org and [A Guide for Minnesota Small Businesses Who Need Help](#). Commissioner Grove said the critical industries and critical workers list is also posted to help Minnesotans determine if they should report to work.

Minneapolis Federal Reserve President Neel Kashkari drew parallels and differences between previous economic disruptions such as the 2008 Great Recession and natural disasters. This COVID-19 pandemic is hitting the entire U.S. economy at the same time, unlike a natural disaster. He commended state policymakers for focusing on important responses which help the economy recover more quickly. He supported early money to support employers and employees, rather than using the same dollar for recovery after the pandemic ends.

The panel heard from several business representatives who shared stories of hardship and long delays in getting information. They issued requests for delayed tax payments, which would help businesses through this low cash flow period.

The working group will meet next week and hear about the state's agency budgets and COVID-19's likely impacts on the state's budget.

MnDOT Releases 2020 Road Construction Project List

The MN Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has announced that 188 road and bridge construction projects will move forward state-wide in 2020. Some projects, such as the Hwy 5 project near the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport have already begun and are proceeding ahead of schedule due to reduced traffic volumes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. An additional 66 projects to improve airports, ports, transit and railroads are also scheduled. Governor Walz provided an exemption for workers engaged in roadway construction, maintenance and utility projects in the Stay at Home Executive Order 20-20.

Metro projects include:

- [Hwy 5 around the airport](#) – Resurface Hwy 5 and ramps from Mississippi River to I-494
- [I-94 Nicollet to 280](#) – Resurface I-94 and ramps between Nicollet Avenue and Hwy 280, add traffic management system and improve accessibility
- [I-35W MnPASS North](#) – Construct MnPASS Express Lane between CR C in Roseville and Lexington Avenue in Blaine, repave I-35W and ramps, repair and replace several bridges and install seven noise walls

An interactive map of the full 2020 construction program can be found at mndot.gov/construction. For a complete list of projects by highway, visit mndot.gov/roadwork/current.html.

Sanitizer Resources Available

If your city is seeking additional sanitizer resources, several Minnesota-based distilleries have converted their efforts to making sanitizer. The consortium of distilleries, under the moniker All Hands, is selling and donating gallon size bottles of sanitizer. More information on the product as well as how to purchase or request a donation can be found at allhandsmn.org.

TAC Discusses Further Regional Solicitation Changes Related to COVID-19

The Metropolitan Council Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) held their monthly meeting via remote call in this week. TAC members discussed the recent decision to move the Regional Solicitation application deadline to May 15th and whether this date should be moved out further and whether other consideration should be made regarding the application process in response to COVID-19. TAC members discussed the possibility that letters of support from applicant agencies could be received by September 1st. Metropolitan Council staff had received feedback from potential applicants that it would likely be a challenge for applicants to receive letters of support by the May 15th deadline due to the challenges of conducting public meetings.

The TAC also discussed possibly awarding points for outreach efforts that were scheduled for projects under the equity scoring component and changing some traffic data requirements due to the disruption in traffic caused by the current state stay at home order. The TAC is likely to meet again before the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) meeting Wednesday, April 15th to finalize a recommendation to the TAB.

Minnesota Housing Announces Funding Availability, Technical Assistance, Extended Deadlines

Minnesota Housing launched its annual consolidated request for proposals April 2. The 2020 round of the RFP will be open longer this year, with an extension of the application deadline to July 16, 2020. Selection announcements are anticipated to be made at the December 2020 Minnesota Housing Board meeting. New guidance for multifamily application materials and technical assistance contact information is also provided on Minnesota Housing's website.

Single Family Application Submission Deadline

- Thursday, July 16 by noon: Single Family Application deadline

Multifamily Application Submission Deadlines

- Thursday, May 14 by noon: Intent to Apply deadline. Required for all Multifamily applications submitted in the consolidated RFP. Only the basic project information and HIB form are due at this date.
- Thursday, June 18 by noon: Qualification Forms and Site Control deadline. All qualification forms and site control documents must be submitted via the Multifamily Secure Upload Tool.
- Thursday, July 16 by noon: Multifamily application deadline.
Note: the application fee is also due by this date.

At Metro Cities' February 21 housing workshop, Minnesota Housing officials highlighted the technical assistance available to cities. Cities with proposed housing projects are encouraged to communicate with MN Housing staff on the application process.

Single Family Applicants Technical Assistance

- Contact Impact.Fund.MHFA@state.mn.us as you are preparing your application and you will be connected with a staff person who can help.

- View the [2019 RFP recorded technical assistance and New Construction webinars](#) (scroll down to the Impact Fund Training section). Webinars for the 2020 RFP may not be available due to COVID-19. The 2020 RFP has some changes, however, much of the information in the 2019 webinars are still relevant in the 2020 RFP.

Multifamily Applicants Technical Assistance

- Contact TechnicalAssistanceRequest.MHFA@state.mn.us as you are preparing your application and you will be connected with a staff person who can help.
- Questions specific to application rents and maintenance and operating (M&O) numbers can be also be directed to TechnicalAssistanceRequest.MHFA@state.mn.us. Preliminary M&O reviews and ballpark estimates can be provided to the applicant upon request. The last day Minnesota Housing staff will take any new preliminary M&O review requests will be Thursday, July 9, 2020.
- View pre-recorded [training tutorials](#) (scroll down to the training tutorials section).

Questions on single family applications should be directed to [Song Lee](#) - 651.296.2291 and multifamily application questions to [Katie Moore](#) - 651.269.6354.

Metro Cities News is emailed periodically to Metro Cities member mayors, councilmembers, city managers/administrators, and city staff to keep officials and staff abreast of important metro city issues.

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