



Virtual Annual Meeting for Metro Cities Board Elections: Mark Your Calendar

Each April Metro Cities holds an annual meeting to conduct the election of new Board of Directors officers and members. This year's annual meeting was scheduled for April 16th and was cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Metro Cities will host a virtual Annual Meeting to conduct Board elections, on Thursday, April 30, 2020 at 4:00 pm. Official notice of this meeting, which will include officials recommended for Board positions by the 2020 Nominating Committee and quorum requirements, will be emailed to city administrators and managers on Monday, in accordance with Metro Cities' bylaws. The meeting will include the elections of officers and new Board members and remarks by Metro Cities' President Mark McNeill, and incoming President Myron Bailey. Please be sure to mark your calendar!

Stay tuned for information early next week. RSVPs should be sent to Metro Cities Office Manager Jennifer Dorn. Her email is jennifer@metrocitiesmn.org. Please contact Patricia Nauman at patricia@metrocitiesmn.org or 651-215-4002, with any questions.

State COVID Briefings

Governor Walz has been providing daily COVID-19 briefings and on Wednesday extended the Stay at Home order to May 4th. That order is included on Metro Cities' COVID-19 web page, and information on the briefings from earlier this week are in the April 7th newsletter. On Thursday, Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka issued a statement saying that he disagreed with the continuation of the stay at home order to May 4.

At Thursday's briefing, the Governor noted the extension of sales and use tax payments to May 20, 2020, and said he is expecting to take action to help septic workers get back to work, and to authorize the Department of Health to waive certain requirements to allow for free standing medical sites and larger hospital bed capacities.

For the last several weeks the Governor has been asked to share details about the UMN School of Public Health model that has guided the state's decisions related to the coronavirus. On Friday, state officials discussed the new web page for the model and plans to continue its refinement as new data becomes available. There was also a media-only presentation describing how the model works and how it has changed since its first iteration. Click [HERE](#) to view the website and click [HERE](#) for the slides from Friday's presentation on the model.

Metro Cities will post this and other updates and information as it is available, on our COVID-19 web page.

House and Senate Will Hold Floor Sessions Tuesday

The House and Senate have been conducting floor sessions remotely, and both bodies will hold floor sessions next Tuesday. The Senate COVID-19 working group will also meet on Monday, to take up a number of items, including an open meeting law bill (see separate article on this topic below). Legislators have been working behind the scenes on a number of items. Metro Cities will post additional information as it is available. The Legislature this week passed legislation to provide a workers' compensation presumptive clause for COVID-19 costs for first responders, and

this legislation is now signed into law. Metro Cities is continuing to work with the LMC and other organizations to support state funding for these costs and has communicated with the Governor and legislators to express the association's support. Metro Cities is also asking city officials to contact your local legislators to support state funding for this purpose. See Metro Cities' April 7 newsletter for additional information. Your assistance in this effort is greatly appreciated.

Metro Cities COVID-19 web page is updated daily with new information. Please check it frequently for updated COVID-19 resources.

Open Meeting Law Bill Passes House Committee

Legislation, [HF4507 Koegel](#), that provides additional flexibility for public bodies when a member cannot be physically present, was passed by the House Government Operations Committee on April 8. The bill changes [Open Meeting Law](#) requirements in Chapter 13D. Metro Cities signed a letter with the LMC and other city organizations in support of the bill.

A version of this bill was considered last year, at which time an exception was made in the law for military duty, but not for medical exceptions. The bill that passed the House Committee this week is more limited with regard to medical exceptions than the language that was considered along this line last year in that it can only be used if an emergency has been declared, with the expectation that it would be used once an emergency is lifted.

Background

Local governments are using M.S. 13D.021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to allow virtual meetings to be held during declared emergencies. MS 13D.021 can only be used if there is a declared health pandemic or emergency. HF 4057 does not affect meeting activity conducted under M.S. 13D.021.

The bill allows a member of a public body, up to three times per calendar year, to participate from a location other than the regular meeting location if the member has been advised by a health care professional against being in a public place for personal or family medical reasons. Again, it is expected that this language would be used after a state of health emergency is lifted and elected officials are sick or advised to quarantine as a result of the health emergency, or if local governments choose to have in person meetings during an emergency and one elected official is sick or advised to not be in public.

Legislators questioned why the new language is limited to three meetings in a year. Non-partisan House staff explained the bill is focused on occasions when a particular official cannot participate in the regular meeting location, for example a health quarantine, and would allow a quorum to be met. Current open meeting law in 13D.021 allows meetings by telephone and other electronic means when triggered by an emergency declaration in Chapter 12 or a health pandemic. That section of the law covers when a remote meeting is held, rather than an in-person meeting in the regular meeting location.

The committee also had an informational hearing on draft legislation that would allow counties, cities, and townships to accept documents or signatures electronically, by U.S. mail, or facsimile. The proposal was not in bill form and no action was taken.

The proposal would allow the alternate forms of submission for:

- planning and zoning applications and permits under Minnesota Statutes, chapters 394 and 462
- land use documents under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 505

- land conveyance documents under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 507
- documents requiring the signature of a licensed architect, engineer, or landscape architect under Minnesota Statutes, sections 326.03, subdivision 3, and 326.12, subdivision 3
- applications for birth and death certificates under Minnesota Statutes, section 144.225
- recording a notary commission under Minnesota Statutes, section 359.061

These changes would relax the in-person requirements for these submissions only during a peacetime public health emergency related to COVID-19.

Contact Charlie Vander Aarde at charlie@metrocitiesmn.org with any questions.

House Subcommittee on Elections Discusses Elections Bill

An informational hearing was held Wednesday in the House subcommittee on elections to discuss a draft elections bill. No votes were taken. The bill, which would only apply during a peacetime emergency, does the following:

- Allows MN to run elections primarily by mail. If passed, the bill would allow the Secretary of State (SOS) to send all registered voters an absentee ballot prior to the election.
- Gives the SOS the authority to close, consolidate, or relocate at-risk polling places. Several polling places across the state are in senior living facilities.
- Gives elections administrators more time to process ballots. The bill proposes that ballots begin to be counted 14 days before election day and that administrators have until 7 days after the election to finish the count.
- Allows nominating petitions to be signed electronically considering the health risk of traveling door-to-door.
- Allows for training health care workers to administer absentee balloting, to protect elections workers from having to enter nursing homes and other facilities.
- Authorizes the use of HAVA funds included in the CARES Act for COVID-19 elections planning.

The committee heard testimony from Secretary of State Steve Simon in support of the legislation. Some committee members raised concerns about election security, the capacity of the USPS to handle the increased number of ballots, and the timing of the election process according to this bill. Two elections administrators as well as the MN League of Women Voters also testified in favor of the bill.

Metropolitan Council Addresses Current Operations

Metropolitan Council staff walked through the agency's COVID-19 related [responses and budget impacts](#) at its April 8 meeting.

The Community Development division is conducting limited housing unit inspections and emergency maintenance on Council-owned rental units. Virtual inspections are a new strategy being employed to preserve housing quality while reducing person to person interactions. The previously planned parks visitor study has been delayed until 2021.

Livable Communities Programs

All Livable Communities (LCA) grants remain on schedule other than the Local Housing Incentives Account, which is applied for through Minnesota Housing. See the [April 3 Metro Cities News](#) for additional information on MHFA's Consolidated RFP. Community Development staff are also extending some existing grant agreements. Metro Cities is working with Council LCA staff on a virtual outreach plan regarding the negotiated housing goals for LCA programs, which need to be updated every 10 years.

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES)

Environmental Services staff largely remains onsite (80 percent), to manage wastewater operations. The Council's only identified staffer with a confirmed COVID-19 case is an MCES employee. Staff is monitoring the Mississippi River level for spring flooding mitigation measures. The Council does not have an updated SAC forecast. Staff explained a SAC shortfall would be first covered by the SAC reserve fund and they will review monthly data. No cities have reported concerns paying wastewater bills. MCES is planning upcoming virtual customer workshops on MCES' budget. Metro Cities will publish this information when it is available.

Transportation/Transit

Metro Transportation Services and Metro Transit are seeing greatly reduced ridership numbers, about 75 percent overall. Most MTS workers are teleworking. Metro Mobility and Dial-A-Ride trips are primarily for medical and grocery trips, with limited work rides. Shared ride trips have transitioned to single ride trips with vehicle cleaning between passengers. There are no changes to Metro Mobility service hours, though service requests are greatly decreased. Service levels are also reduced. Council staff did not have updates to financial projections and noted Transportation Policy Plan TPP) language was drafted pre-COVID-19. The department is facing a decreased bus driver and light rail operator pool due to illness, self-quarantine, childcare and home care responsibilities. Northstar, regular route and light rail ridership are down dramatically.

A number of COVID-19-related fiscal impacts on the Council's budgets were reviewed. These include severe reductions in transit farebox recovery, motor vehicle sales tax (MVST), tenant rent share, and the Sewer Availability Charge (SAC).

While no new MVST forecast has been issued, budget officials have run some predictions which include a 50% reduction for April-June and 25% reduction for state FY21, which adds up to a \$115 million reduction over the next 15 months. This number affects transit planning because MVST covers 46% of bus operating revenues. The Council expects to receive \$226 million from the federal CARES Act, which is shared with regional providers.

HRA

Minnesota's allocation of CARES Act money for housing through the Metro HRA is not known.

Public Comment Process Explained

At the April 8 Met Council meeting, Chair Zelle explained that public comment will be taken during Council meetings via emails to Council members whose email addresses are published on the [Council website](#). The traditional public comment period is held at the beginning of full Metropolitan Council meetings at its Saint Paul headquarters. With the Council meeting remotely and meetings viewable through the Council website, the traditional in person comment period is not available. Metro Cities staff is monitoring Council meetings and is in contact the Council's members and staff on issues affecting cities.

DEED Solicits Employer Feedback on Workplace Social Distancing

As the state reviews employer requests to open additional economic sectors, DEED has created a web survey to receive input. If your city has received inquiries or suggestions from employers, or if you have feedback, the [survey can be accessed here](#). The survey lists several work settings, including construction and transportation, customer facing, industrial, repair services, and office/professional and allows respondents to write suggestions on how best to create social distancing spaces in workplaces.

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.

If you'd like to sign up to receive Metro Cities News, please email newsletter@metrocitiesmn.org and provide the following: Name, Title, Employer and Email address. Thank you!

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