

Federal Funds Received by State

The state of Minnesota has received a little over \$1 billion federal funding this week, roughly half of state's expected amount of \$2.1 billion from the federal Coronavirus relief fund. The state is awaiting guidance from the United States Treasury on how the funds can be spent. Overall, funding is being distributed for COVID-19 expenses and must be used for expenses incurred between March 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. A portion of the monies will be distributed directly to local governments above 500,000 in population (only Hennepin and Ramsey counties meet this threshold).

Metro Cities is working with other city organizations to advocate that a portion of this funding be distributed to local governments. Metro Cities supports funding for local governments that is flexible to accommodate varying local COVID-19 needs and that is not administratively cumbersome.

Metro Cities sent an informal survey this week to member cities asking about local costs as well as revenue challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Your responses are important and appreciated.

Stay tuned for additional information. Questions? Contact Patricia Nauman at 651-215-4002 or patricia@metrocitiesmn.org

Legislation Allows Restaurants to Sell Beer and Wine To-Go

[SF 4489](#)-Housley, that authorizes bars and restaurants to sell up to 72 fluid ounces of beer (the average six-pack) and up to 750ml of wine (the average bottle) via curbside pick-up, passed the Senate and House this week. Under the bill, a municipality may elect to prohibit the sale of off-sale beverages authorized in the bill, otherwise, eligible establishments will be allowed to add these sales. The alcohol must be in its original package and can only be sold with the purchase of food. The bill passed the Senate 65-2 and the House 129-1. A summary of the bill can be found [HERE](#).

Senate Tax Committee Discusses COVID-19 Relief Tax Proposal

The Senate Taxes Committee on Thursday held an informational hearing to discuss a tax proposal that would extend property tax payment deadlines, increase the school levy referendum equalization, provide for federal conformity, remove the angel investment credit sunset, and other tax items.

The bill would provide a 60-day extension of the July 15 due date for the first half payment of the state general tax for taxes payable in 2020. Counties would be required to make full settlement of all state general tax receipts from the date of the last settlement up to and including July 15th and transmit receipts to the Department of Revenue. A summary of the bill is [HERE](#). Several business owners testified to support provisions in the bill. Questions? Contact Patricia Nauman at 651-215-4002 or email: patricia@metrocitiesmn.org

Governor's COVID-19 Briefings

Below are highlights from the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday briefings from Governor Walz. See the state's [COVID-19 web page](#) for the latest specific health data.

Wednesday:

The Governor discussed the Alec Smith Emergency Insulin Act passed by the Legislature this week, and said the state has opened an emergency 30-day [special enrollment period](#) for uninsured individuals through MNsure with the deadline to apply next Tuesday, April 21. The Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is now able to give an extra 13 weeks of benefits individuals are entitled to, in time for some of the earliest applicants whose initial benefits were set to expire. The Governor congratulated the University of Minnesota for receiving FDA approval for a new low-cost ventilator. The specifications will be published online for others to use.

Thursday:

MN Department of Health Commissioner Malcolm provided an update on COVID-19 cases and deaths, and Kris Ehresmann, the state's Director of Infectious Disease Epidemiology Prevention answered questions about current and future testing capacity. Specifically, officials were asked about the state's ability to meet the 5,000 tests a day that the Governor is calling "the Minnesota Moonshot". Governor Walz has said that getting to that level of testing is a minimum standard that must be reached before sending large numbers of people back to work. The UMN announced that it is ready to test 20,000 per day and is asking for \$20 million.

Friday:

The Governor discussed a recently formed coalition of Midwestern governors who are organizing on a set of principles to align with the recently released federal guidelines on re-opening. Click [HERE](#) to view the press release for details on the partnership.

The Governor has issued two executive orders this week. Executive Order 20-37 extends Executive Order 20-6 for at least 30 days. This order exempted vehicles used in transporting supplies to affected areas of the state from certain weight requirements and exempted drivers from certain limits on hours of service if they were driving vehicles providing assistance to emergency relief efforts in response to COVID-19. Executive Order 20-38 allows for the re-opening of certain outdoor businesses, so long as they can maintain adequate levels of social distancing, including golf courses, bait shops, public and private parks, and shooting ranges.

House and Senate Jobs Committees Discuss Unemployment, Workforce Needs

DEED Commissioner Steve Grove and other DEED officials provided video testimony to the Senate Jobs committee and House Jobs committees during virtual hearings this week.

Business Reopening

Governor Walz's administration and Senate Republicans have opened portals to solicit information on how best to allow closed workplaces to reopen while maintaining social distancing and healthy workplaces.

DEED Commissioner Grove highlighted the administration's [webform on the DEED website](#) that includes breakdowns for types of businesses – customer facing, industrial, construction and transportation, and office. The Senate Republicans' [web portal](#) solicits submissions on industries and jobs that should return to operation and how to maintain social distancing, hygiene and public health best practices. The portal explains that the information gathered will be shared with the Governor's staff.

Senate Republicans also introduced legislation that would establish a process to reopen businesses during a peacetime emergency. [SF4480 - Mathews](#) is scheduled to be heard Monday, April 20 in the Senate Jobs committee. It would allow a business, that was closed or had reduced hours due to the peacetime emergency to submit a plan for safe operation during a peacetime

emergency to DEED. A business seeking to operate would submit a plan for safe operation that includes the following:

- a proposal to minimize, or eliminate if possible, physical interactions among staff and with and between customers;
- a strategy to ensure appropriate health, hygiene, and safety measures are in place in work areas;
- the rationale as to the level of business activity that may be conducted based on the above; and
- any other information that the business determines may assist the commissioner in deciding regarding the safe operation of the business.

DEED would have three days to respond to the application.

Unemployment Numbers and Payments

The state has received over 480,000 unemployment insurance applications in 2020, double the state's 2019 total. 15% of the state's labor force has applied. In testimony, Commissioner Grove highlighted how people of color, as a percentage, have been more impacted by layoffs, explaining that 12.2% of white workers have applied for UI, while 26% of people of color have applied. 25% of UI applicants have a high school diploma or less. 55% of applicants are women and 45% are men. House staff released [Minnesota unemployment compensation recipients by occupation](#) (numbers since the COVID-19 Declared Public Health Crisis). It shows the highest UI sector is food preparation and services at 18% of total UI recipients.

Last week the state authorized the additional \$600/week in federal unemployment funds for unemployed Minnesotans. Mr. Grove explained applicants do not need to take additional steps to access these funds. They will see the funds in their bank account, not in their online account. Additionally, for unemployed Minnesotans nearing the end of their 26 weeks of UI eligibility, an additional 13 weeks authorized in the CARES Act. This will initially assist approximately 8,000 Minnesotans who were near or at the end of their eligibility.

Pandemic unemployment insurance to help self-employed and independent contractors is still not available. Commissioner Grove explained the federal program that will be utilized for those workers is usually deployed under local disaster assistance and that the state is working to scale the localized federal program. While no state has begun paying benefits, DEED is recommending eligible Minnesotans apply to get in the queue, even though the response will initially show a denied application.

The state's UI trust fund remains funded into October based on current payment amounts. The state could apply for federal funds if needed in the future, so support the state's trust fund.

Workforce Development

The House Jobs committee focused on the state's current and future workforce, including funding needs during its April 16 hearing. DEED Deputy Commissioner of Workforce Development Hamse-Warfe and DEED Director of Workforce Training Programs Marc Majors, presented a high-level overview of the agency's workforce development programs and COVID-19 related responses.

Several committee members were concerned that lack of broadband access and closed libraries precluded many people that programs are intended to help. Committee Chair Tim Mahoney explained the state has a \$25 million balance in the dislocated worker program and asked legislators and the agency to determine the state's workforce development needs and associated costs for possible action during the remainder of the 2020 legislative session.

Housing Assistance Proposals

The House Housing committee will hear [HF4541 – Hausman](#) that provides \$100 million in housing assistance to Minnesotans affected by the pandemic. This includes rental assistance, mortgage assistance, lot rent for manufactured homes, utility payment assistance, homeowner association dues, a contract for deed payment and property tax payments. It would also preclude charging late fees or terminating a rental agreement for 90 days beginning March 24, 2020. Upon the end of the peacetime emergency, a landlord could not begin the process for eviction against a tenant except with 30 days' notice. A foreclosure moratorium would also be in effect for 90 days from the issuance of the public health emergency.

Similar legislation was introduced in the Senate on April 16 that funds assistance at \$30 million. [SF4495 – Westrom](#) would also prohibit the governor from extending the eviction and foreclosure moratorium through executive action. Neither proposal issues rental or mortgage holidays.

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

TAB Approves Changes to Regional Solicitation in Response to COVID-19

The Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) approved changes to the Regional Solicitation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Last month, the TAB extended the Regional Solicitation application deadline to May 15th. Metropolitan Council staff solicited for comments on the extension, and comments received did not recommend an additional extension, and the TAB agreed to maintain the May 15 due date.

The TAB and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) discussed proposed changes to the Regional Solicitation:

- Extend the deadline for required letters of support from local partners to September 1, 2020,
- Allow outreach meetings cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak be considered for points in the equity outreach scoring measure,
- Allow the use of StreetLight Insights intersection turning movement count data or data older than three years be allowed in lieu of collecting data when atypical traffic patterns are present.

Some members expressed a desire to have clarification on how scoring would be conducted for points related to a cancelled outreach meeting. Staff explained that it would be up to the scoring committee's discretion, but that planned meetings that were not held would not receive as many points as meetings that were held. Other members stated they would like outreach conducted to ensure that applicants can access StreetLight data and staff agreed that this would be done.

Concerns related to acquiring local matches due to future economic impacts from the pandemic were also expressed.

These recommendations were adopted by the TAB on Wednesday. TAB members discussed whether the date should be moved if a large federal infrastructure bill were to be passed to allow for more local projects to apply. Members also expressed the desire that applicants be encouraged to attempt new ways of public outreach on projects.

The TAB also moved the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) Solicitation deadline from June 1st to July 1st, 2020. HSIP is designed to achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads. The region's Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) includes transportation safety policies strategies, and the HSIP solicitation is consistent with that plan.

To view the TAB business item, click [here](#).

Information related to the impacts of COVID-19 on travel in the metropolitan was presented. Overall travel is down roughly 70%. Transit ridership is also down 70% overall, with a drop of 90% on Northstar. Metro Transit is encouraging riders to wear a mask and use rear bus entrances. MN Management and Budget (MMB) and other state agencies asked for travel modeling, so that the state could model how quickly the virus might spread. Data comes from automated traffic recorders, traffic sensors, and automated passenger counters on transit. Council staff are

beginning to review other sources of data and are collaborating with U of M researchers, as well as examining long-term changes to travel due to COVID-19. A significant portion of travel is not currently being captured due to the fact that people are not travelling over sensors but are still traveling locally. To view the presentation, click [here](#).

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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