



## **Metro Cities Annual Meeting: Mark Your Calendar**

Metro Cities Annual Meeting is held each April to conduct elections to the Board of Directors. This year's meeting will be held as a virtual meeting next Thursday, April 30, 2020 at 4:00 pm. Please mark your calendars! The slate of recommended officers and Board members was emailed to city officials. A quorum of members is required for the meeting. Metro Cities' President Mark McNeill and President-elect Myron Bailey will provide brief remarks at the meeting. Call-in instructions will be provided next week. Please RSVP to Metro Cities' Office Manager Jennifer Dorn at [jennifer@metrocitiesmn.org](mailto:jennifer@metrocitiesmn.org). We hope you can attend!

## **Bill Establishing a COVID-19 Relief Account Heard in Senate Finance Committee**

[SF 4486](#) (Sen. Rosen), that would create a Coronavirus Relief Account for federal funds coming to the state, was heard and passed in the Senate Finance Committee Tuesday. The bill proposes to create a separate Coronavirus Relief Account in which federal COVID-19 monies to the state would be placed and appropriated by the Legislature. Currently, any federal funds are allocated to the Office of Minnesota Management and Budget for appropriation, with approval by a six-member bi-cameral Legislative Advisory Commission (LAC).

MMB Commissioner Frans and State Budget Director Reitan stated support for the current process for the distribution of federal funds, noting it allows for more nimble distribution. Senator Rosen and other members supporting the bill noted that the legislature is responsible for the appropriation of funding, and that the legislative process allows for input from the public and stakeholders and is more transparent and accountable. The bill passed on a voice vote. The passage of this bill would have implications for how federal money may flow through the state to local units of government. Metro Cities is closely monitoring the allocation of federal COVID-19 monies.

## **Senate Jobs Committee Discusses Business Reopening Process**

The Senate Jobs Committee debated processes to allow workplaces to reopen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic on April 20. [SF4480 – Mathews](#) would set a process allowing a workplace to reopen.

Under the bill, any business affected by an executive order during a peacetime emergency may submit a plan to the DEED commissioner that would ensure the safety of a business' workers and the general public during a peacetime emergency period. The plan for safe operation would be required to include the following:

- (1) a proposal to minimize, or eliminate if possible, physical interactions among staff and with and between customers;
- (2) a strategy to ensure appropriate health, hygiene, and safety measures are in place in work areas;
- (3) the rationale as to the level of business activity that may be conducted based on clauses (1) and (2); and

(4) any other information that the business determines may assist the commissioner in determining the operation of the business.

DEED would have three days to respond with an approval or denial. A denial or incomplete notice would be required to include information needed for the plan to be approved. DEED Commissioner Steve Grove said there is a process for how workplaces and businesses can plan to reopen and expressed concern about the state approving individual business plans, preferring a statewide policy. Other members echoed concerns on putting the state in charge of a specific business' ability to open. The bill was laid on the table for future consideration.

DEED's form to solicit best practices for social distancing in the workplace submissions can be found on the [DEED website](#). The state has released a draft template of a [COVID-19 Business Plan for](#) businesses to list specific operations and practices when undertaking to reopen. Send feedback about the form to [DLICovidPlan@state.mn.us](mailto:DLICovidPlan@state.mn.us). Links are also available on the Metro Cities COVID-19 page – [Resources for City Officials](#). Contact Charlie Vander Aarde at [charlie@metrocitiesmn.org](mailto:charlie@metrocitiesmn.org) or 651-366-7564 with any questions.

### **Housing Assistance Bills Heard in House and Senate**

Proposals for providing housing assistance for are being debated by House and Senate Housing committees on April 22.

The House Housing Division debated [HF4541](#) that would provide \$100 million in housing assistance funds from the state general fund. The bill, as amended, passed the committee today and was referred to the Ways and Means Committee where the funding level in this bill will continued to be considered.

HF4541 funds the Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program, an existing program administered by Minnesota Housing, that provides housing assistance dollars to applicants in the metropolitan area and across the state. The funds can be used for rent payments, mortgage payments, lot rent in manufactured home parks, property taxes, homeowner association dues, homeowner insurance payments, contract for deed payments, and utility payments with a due date of March 1, 2020, or later, that is past due or coming due within 15 days of the application for funding. The funds would be paid directly to the parties due the money, such as landlords, the entity owning the mortgage, the utility company and other identified entities to whom payment is owed.

The bill language addresses applicants who may receive housing assistance through other sources, including local city or county funds with a provision that states that “if an applicant applies for relief from sources other than the 2020 emergency housing assistance grants and receives aid for the purposes of paying for housing, the applicant must immediately notify the granting agency.”

The House bill also limits landlords from assessing late fees, terminating or failing to renew leases, and initiating evictions during and after a peacetime emergency related to COVID-19 until January 15, 2021. It also prevents foreclosures from being started during a peacetime emergency related to COVID-19 until January 15, 2021.

The Senate has a [housing assistance bill](#) being heard this afternoon that proposes a \$30 million general fund appropriation for housing assistance awards. More information will be shared on that bill in the April 24 Metro Cities News.

Metro Cities policies support state funding for housing assistance and staff provided a letter to the committees to this effect. Contact Charlie Vander Aarde at [charlie@metrocitiesmn.org](mailto:charlie@metrocitiesmn.org) or 651-366-7564 with any questions.

## **MPCA Suspends Rulemaking Schedule for Water Quality Fees**

The MPCA has suspended its current rulemaking schedule for water quality fees until after the Governor's peacetime emergency declaration has been terminated.

After the peacetime emergency declaration is terminated, the MPCA intends to release preliminary draft rule language for public comment and continue its rulemaking process. As required by state statute, the MPCA intends to seek legislative approval to spend the revenue generated from these increased fees during an upcoming session.

To stay up to date and for more information on the water quality fee rule making, click [here](#).

## **House Environment Finance Committee Passes Trust Fund Bill**

The House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee passed [HF 4498-Hansen](#), the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriations bill. The bill includes \$61.3 million total spending in FY 2021, and largely includes recommendations considered by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) that did not receive the super majority required for approval by the LCCMR. The bill includes:

\$2 million to maintain the Geologic Water Atlas to manage surface and ground water resources and \$1.1 million to maintain the groundwater atlas to monitor drinking water resources vulnerable to contamination.

\$4.3 million to the DNR to reduce emerald ash borer by providing assessments, assistance, and grants for communities, to plant a diversity of trees, and engage citizens in community forestry activities.

\$700,000 to U of M Board of Regents for studies to determine statewide long-term emerald ash borer impacts on water, vegetation and wildlife, to determine optimal replacement species and practices for forest diversification, and to develop criteria for prioritizing mitigation activities.

\$1,000,000 to the Metropolitan Council to acquire land within the approved park boundaries of the metropolitan regional park system.

An amendment to add \$1.5 million for grants to cities under 5,000 for wastewater treatment grants did not pass.

An amendment was adopted to include \$699,000 to the U of M to evaluate the ability of the virus that causes COVID-19 and other potentially infectious organisms that travel through wastewater systems, including septic systems, to drinking water sources.

The bill was passed by a vote of 11-7 to the Ways and Means Committee.

## **Governor's COVID-19 Briefings**

Below are highlights from this week's Monday and Tuesday briefings from Governor Walz. See the state's [COVID-19 web page](#) for the latest specific health data.

*Monday:*

Governor Walz discussed the shutdown of the JBS processing plant in Worthington, noting that the MN Department of Health is there to conduct testing and tracing. The Governor reported on conversations with specific industries to determine how certain sectors can safely return to work. The Governor also asked Ecolab CEO Doug Baker to speak about his work with other private sector partners to help the state's procurement effort and to discuss global supply chain, logistics, and warehouse management in the effort to get personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies to Minnesota.

The Governor discussed his conversation with President Trump over the weekend, the discussion of steps Minnesota is taking, and the state's support toward the national response effort. Governor Walz stated that President Trump expressed his desire to continue to work with Minnesota on its efforts and response.

*Tuesday:*

Updates were provided by the Minnesota Department of Health's Commissioner, Jan Malcolm alongside Kris Ehresmann, who is the Director of Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention, and Control at the department. In addition to updates on cases, deaths, and hospitalizations, the department discussed the developing situation among the state's congregate living facilities. Michelle Larson, Director of Health Regulation Division, described steps being taken to work with long-term care facilities, before, during, and after they see their first COVID-19 case. Deaths in congregate facilities represent 113 of 160 deaths as of April 21. Commissioner Malcolm said there are also many patients not from long-term care facilities that are hospitalized.

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**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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**Metro Cities (Association of Metropolitan Municipalities)**  
145 University Ave W, St. Paul, MN 55103-2044  
Phone 651-215-4000 · Fax 651-281-1299 · [www.MetroCitiesMN.org](http://www.MetroCitiesMN.org)