

New CRF Reporting Requirements for Local Governments

The state Department of Management and Budget (MMB) has announced changes to the reporting form for local governments receiving Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF). MMB is amending the form based on recent changes to federal guidance for CRF funds. The new form adds additional categories and sub-categories for expenses. The new form is linked here:

<https://mn.gov/mmb/covid-19-response-accountability-office/local-governments/>

Additional categories will include administrative expenses, budgeted personnel diverted to substantially different uses, COVID-19 testing and contact tracing, certain types of economic support, food, housing, facilitating distance learning, medical expenses, nursing homes, payroll for public health and safety (now in a separate category), personal protective equipment, public health, small business expenses, unemployment insurance, workers compensation, and an 'other' expenses category. Cities should provide a brief description of expenses and the month in which the expenses occurred.

Cities will need to use the new form for future expenses and will be required to re-categorize any expenses submitted in the July report, on the August report. The next report is due on **September 9, 2020**. If you do not have expenses for this period, please submit the report noting there are zero expenses.

SWIFT and DUNS numbers are required. If you do not know your SWIFT ID, it will be accessible via a link in the report. If you do not know your DUNS number, please contact MMB at CRAOffice.MMB@state.mn.us.

MMB has also indicated that it is working to provide guidance for audits and to add flexibility regarding the deadline for cities to expend funds (November 15th) by providing flexibility for certain payroll expenses and goods that are unable to be delivered by that date due to supply disruptions. Metro Cities is working with other local government organizations to request flexibility on the November 15th date.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Nauman at patricia@metrocitiesmn.org.

New COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program

MN Housing this week launched a new COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program and is accepting applications. This program was established by the Governor's administration with \$100 million out of the Federal CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund. The purpose of the program is to help prevent evictions and homelessness and maintain housing stability for renters and homeowners. Metro Cities policies support state funding assistance to support stability and encourages cities to share this information with the local community.

For complete details on who is eligible to apply and what costs are covered by the program, visit www.211unitedway.org. Interested applicants may also call 211 (Toll Free: 1.800.543.7709; Local: 651.291.0211) or text "MNRENT" to 898-211 to learn more. The 211 Helpline has multilingual staff available to answer questions about the program 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Monday - Friday.

To qualify, households must meet all of the following criteria:

- Income at or below 300% of federal poverty guidelines, with a preference for those at or below

200% of federal poverty guidelines.

- Have an eligible expense that was incurred after March 1, 2020 that is past due. Housing assistance funds can only be used for eligible expenses incurred between March 1, 2020 and December 30, 2020.
- Be unable to make one or more payments owed because of the public health emergency due to unemployment, illness, or another COVID-19 related issue.

Local administrators who applied and have been selected to help administer the program will review applications from individuals and families requesting assistance, verify eligibility, and process payments for eligible expenses on behalf of households.

The program covers past due expenses such as rent and mortgage payments, contract for deed payments, manufactured home park lot rents and payments, utility payments, and homeowner association fees.

Metropolitan Council Passes Preliminary Budget and Levy

The Metropolitan Council continues to plan its 2021 budget. In addition to the division level discussions taking place in its standing committees, the full Council voted August 26 to adopt its [preliminary 2021 budget](#). See prior Metro Cities News for updates on previous budget discussions.

Staff explained the preliminary budget reflects the impacts of COVID-19 on the region, the state and residents. The preliminary budget adopted on August 26, of \$1.149 billion in 2021 for operations, pass-through programs, and debt service, reflects a total increase of 0% to the budget overall from 2020. The Council expects the preliminary budget to change as updated revenue and expense data is received.

The proposed 2021 property tax 2021 levy is \$88.7 million, a zero percent increase over the amount payable in 2020. Under the proposed 2021 levy, a metro area home with an estimated value of \$250,000 will pay a Council-related property tax of approximately \$50 inside the transit-taxing communities and \$17 outside the transit taxing communities.

As Metro Cities has reported, the preliminary budget includes an adopted increase in the metropolitan wastewater charge of two percent. The sewer availability charge of \$2,485 per SAC unit will not increase for 2021 and has been flat since 2014.

A [2021 budget document](#) explains “The Metropolitan Council received \$226.5 million in federal CARES Act funds. Funds were distributed to regional transit providers based on an established federal formula. A total of \$12.1 million was passed through to regional providers, with the balance of \$214.4 million available to the Metropolitan Council for transit operations. The Council has programmed \$140 million in CARES Act funds in calendar year 2020 and \$74 million in calendar year 2021.”

The Council will approve a Unified Capital and Operating budget in October, then will invite public comment before final Council adoption on December 9. Contact Charlie Vander Aarde at charlie@metrocitiesmn.org or 651-366-7564 with any questions.

Additional \$300 Weekly Lost Wage Assistance for Unemployed Minnesotans

Minnesotans who currently receive Unemployment Insurance due to unemployment from COVID-19 may be able to access an additional \$300 per week, retroactive to earlier this summer. State officials announced today, August 28th, that Minnesota has applied to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) program. LWA will provide a temporary additional \$300 a week benefit to Minnesotans receiving unemployment benefits. To be eligible, an applicant must have a weekly unemployment benefit amount of at least \$100 and must be unemployed due to COVID-19.

Once FEMA approves the state's application, the Treasury Department will transfer funding to the state and the Unemployment Insurance program will begin to pay benefits when the funding is received. LWA benefits are retroactive to the week ending August 1, 2020.

Minnesotans currently receiving unemployment benefits do not need to reapply or do anything other than complete their weekly benefits request to receive the additional \$300 each week. DEED Unemployment Insurance will review all payment requests made for the week of July 26 going forward and automatically pay those applicants who are eligible for LWA. The state projects the program to last five to eight weeks, when the federal \$44 billion runs out.

Governor Establishes Committee to Study Metropolitan Council

Governor Walz on Friday afternoon issued an [Executive Order](#) establishing a Blue Ribbon Committee on the Metropolitan Council's structure and services. The purpose of the committee will be to evaluate the structure of the Metropolitan Council and the delivery of its statutory responsibilities, according to the Executive Order. The committee includes civic, business and academic leaders, with Mayors from three metropolitan cities: Jim Hovland, Mayor-Edina, Elizabeth Kautz, Mayor-Burnsville and Janet Williams, Mayor-Savage. The committee will submit a report to the Governor with its findings by December 31, 2020.

Metro Cities will closely monitor the work of the committee and provide input as appropriate and that is consistent with the organization's policies. Please contact Patricia Nauman at patricia@metrocitiesmn.org with any questions.

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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