

## **Governor Walz Modifies and Extends Commercial Activities Pause**

Governor Tim Walz extended and modified orders this week related to November's pause in dining, social gathering, and athletic activities. Walz's [new executive order 20-103](#), modifies EO 20-99 that was issued in November.

The new order, issued December 16, includes executive guidance on social gatherings, youth and adult sports, gyms and fitness activities, elementary school reopening, as well as the timing of entertainment and dining venues to open in early 2021. While laying out his plan Wednesday, the governor emphasized protecting hospital capacity, getting students back in school, and listening to the concerns of public health officials. The changes in the new executive guidance include:

Allowing school districts to resume in-person elementary education as soon as January 18 if they undertake mitigation strategies. Metro area school districts have since released reopening plans to families.

Social gathering guidance will now allow up to 15 people from 3 households to gather outdoors. Indoor multi-household gatherings are discouraged and limited to 10 people and two households. Outdoor public gatherings (such as ice skating) are allowed at 25 percent capacity with a cap of 100 people and physical distancing between households.

Practices for youth and adult sports are allowed to resume January 4.

Gyms and fitness centers will be allowed to open beginning December 19 at 25 percent capacity and up to 100 people in the facility. Gym classes may resume January 4. Masks are required in indoor spaces.

Bars, restaurants and breweries will be closed for indoor dining and gathering through January 10. Outdoor service is allowed at 50 percent capacity with a 100 person maximum.

Indoor entertainment venues including bowling alleys, movie theaters and arcades will remain closed through January 10.

## **Employer and Employee Assistance Package Signed Into Law**

The Legislature convened December 14 to review the extension of Governor Walz's peacetime emergency order and to take up bills to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the one day session, the Senate and House passed an [economic assistance package](#) for businesses, nonprofits and workers, and Governor Walz signed the bill into law this week.

The package includes an extension of unemployment benefits for laid off workers. The new law provides up to 13 weeks of special additional unemployment benefits from December 27, 2020, to April 10, 2021, to applicants who have exhausted all available state and federal unemployment benefits. Benefits paid to Minnesotans will not affect the experience rating impacting the tax rates of taxpaying employers and are not charged to reimbursing employers. This was paid for by a \$25 million appropriation from the state's general fund.

The employer (business and nonprofit) assistance packages included several components. One program establishes an \$88 million business relief payment program administered by the Department of Revenue. The relief payments target businesses subject to the recent executive order (20-99) closing places of public accommodation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Payments range in size from \$10,000 to \$45,000 depending on the average number of employees an employer had in covered employment over a specific time period.

A second component established a \$14 million grant program to provide economic relief to movie theaters and large convention centers impacted by EO 20-99. Qualifying movie theaters will receive a grant of \$15,000 per screen for the first two screens in the theater and an additional \$10,000 for each additional screen, with a maximum grant per theater of \$150,000. Specifies that grant funds must be used for the operating expenses of that theater. Qualifying convention centers will receive a grant of up to \$500,000 in an amount in proportion to the size of the venue and its workforce. Requires that grant funds must be used for the operations and upkeep of that convention center.

A third program provides a onetime \$114.8 million appropriation from the general fund to the commissioner of management and budget for payments to counties for relief grants to local businesses and nonprofits. DEED Commissioner Steve Grove explained counties have flexibility in establishing application criteria and awarding the funds, with a goal of getting money to applicants as quickly as possible. Counties in the metro will receive roughly \$19.25 per capita.

A fourth program in the new law requires the Metropolitan Council to refund the wastewater permit fee, paid in 2020, to breweries that produce less than 20,000 barrels per year. It also requires the council to apply a credit up to \$2,000 for strength charges incurred in 2020 to any brewery that falls within the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Microbrewery Program. Those regional wastewater refunds will be backfilled by a state general fund appropriation of \$142,000 in fiscal year 2021 to the Metropolitan Council to offset wastewater revenue lost from issuing the refunds and credits to breweries.

Contact Charlie Vander Aarde at [charlie@metrocitiesmn.org](mailto:charlie@metrocitiesmn.org) or 651-215-4001 with any questions.

## **Minnesota Housing Announces 2020 Housing Funding Awards**

The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency announced the state's 2020 housing funding awards December 17. The awards were funded by several sources, including the state's October appropriation of housing infrastructure bonds, other legislative appropriations including the Challenge Program, and partner funds including the Metropolitan Council, Ramsey County and Greater Minnesota Housing Fund.

\$195 million in total awards were announced, which will support over 2,300 affordable homes across the state and leverage an additional \$334 million in other private and local housing investments. A map of the awards as well as specifics on multifamily and single family awards [can be found here](#).

The awards include projects for 383 single family homes as well as \$15.8 million for down payment assistance and improvements. 27 multifamily developments will create and preserve more than 923 rental housing opportunities in suburban cities including Anoka, Eagan, Hopkins, Waconia and Woodbury, as well as greater Minnesota.

The awards also include 527 multifamily units for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Two permanent supportive housing developments included in today's announcement are Bethesda Cornerstone Village in Oakdale and Vista 44 in Hopkins.

As Metro Cities has reported, the October bonding bill included a new eligible use for single family homes, both development and rehabilitation. This week's announcement funded the Rondo Land Trust in Saint Paul and City of Lakes Community Land Trust in the metro.

While the awards will help many cities and their residents meet current and future housing needs, other metro applications for projects important to their cities remain unfunded. Metro Cities will continue to advocate for additional state funds that can help match local funds and local investments and meet local-identified needs.

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### **TAB Approves Regional Solicitation**

The Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) has selected the non-BRT projects to be funded as part of the 2020 Regional Solicitation process. The TAB selected a funding scenario, titled 1B in board documents, which uses historical funding as a baseline. Projects were funded in ten modal funding categories. These included traffic management, roadway reconstruction and modernization, bridges, transit expansion, transit modernization, multi-use trails and bicycle facilities, pedestrian facilities, and safe routes to school. A total of 56 projects will receive funding, which will total of \$222 million. These projects bring \$243 million in matching funds. This solicitation includes a set aside of \$4.9 million as part of a Unique Projects category. Criteria for this category will be determined in 2021. One ABRT project totaling \$25 million will be selected in April and will be recommended based on input from the Network Next process. The Regional Solicitation goes to the Met Council for concurrence and final approval. To view the business item, which includes project lists, click [here](#).

### **Metro Transit's Network Next Seeks Public Input**

Metro Transit is seeking public input on its development of Network Next. Network Next is a 20-year plan for expanding and improving the bus network. Transit improvements under consideration include improved local and express routes, shared mobility options, and arterial bus rapid transit (BRT) lines. Network Next seeks to develop a prioritization plan for these BRT projects and also seeks to identify ten lines in total that will be broken into near, medium, and long-term prioritization. The three lines identified as the near-term priority lines will become the Metro F, G, and H Lines. TAB will consider \$25 million in funding for the corridor that will be identified as Metro F Line in April. For more information, click [here](#). To take the Network Next survey, click [here](#). The deadline for taking the survey is January 20.

### **Mark Your Calendar! Legislative Session Preview**

Metro Cities will host a virtual 2021 session preview on Thursday, January 7, 2021, with its government affairs consultants and government relations team. Topics will include highlights of the recent elections, state budget process, anticipated key legislative issues for 2021, Metro Cities' legislative priorities for the coming year, and tips for effective communication and advocacy at the Capitol. Please RSVP to Jennifer Dorn at [Jennifer@metrocitiesmn.org](mailto:Jennifer@metrocitiesmn.org). We hope to see you there!

## **Metro Cities Board of Directors Openings**

The Metro Cities Board of Directors will have openings in January due to recent election outcomes. The 19-member Board is comprised of elected and appointed officials. The association's by-laws require the Board to be balanced by city size and population. The Board is responsible for overseeing Metro Cities' operational budget, strategic goals and legislative policies and priorities. The Board also has statutory authority for appointing municipal officials to the TAB and TAC. Interested candidates are asked to provide a (1) resume, (2) cover letter and to complete this (3) [application form](#). Candidates may also provide letters of reference. For more information, contact Patricia Nauman, Executive Director at [patricia@metrocitiesmn.org](mailto:patricia@metrocitiesmn.org). Applications should be sent to Jennifer Dorn at [Jennifer@metrocitiesmn.org](mailto:Jennifer@metrocitiesmn.org) by January 5th.

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