

City Council Special Called Emergency Meeting Transcript –8/31/2017

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[10:21:49 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: Council, are we ready? So let's begin with -- before we get to the meeting, let's begin with our moment. Today is priestess Sharon Webb from tejas web here? Would you please come forward? Would everyone please stand?

>> This morning I would like to invite meat, the lady of truth and the lady of justice into this council. I ask that she bring the wisdom and the light of truth into the hearts and minds of all those gathered here. I ask that she open their hearts and their minds so that the decisions made here are based on compassion, truth, fairness and justice. Lady meat, lady justice, come fill this space with your light of truth, open the hearts. The heart is the seat of truth. The heart is the seat of compassion. So may all these decisions be based on these truths, compassion, truth, fairness and justice for all. Lady miat, fill this chamber with your light of truth now and in future meetings. Fill this space with compassion for those who need our aid. Fill this space with justice and fairness so that all the decisions aid everyone who is in aid of our need in this time of great trouble and sorrow for those who have lost much.

[10:23:56 AM]

Open the hearts and minds of this city so that we may open our doors to those who need our aid. Lady miat, you who hold the vessel of truth, you who are truth itself, compassion, come fill this space, fill their minds and hearts, dwell in this space now and in future meetings. Welcome, lady miat, lady of justice. Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: We're going to go ahead and convene the special called emergency meeting. Today is Thursday, August 31st, 2017. We're in the city council chambers here at 301 west second street. The time is 10:24. The meeting agenda has been posted more than two hours in advance of this meeting in

accordance with section 551.054 of the Texas government code and it is consistent with that provision that we are convening here this morning. And the news media received notice before the meeting according to 551.047 of the government code. We have the purpose of of this meeting was to talk about hurricane Harvey, to take some action, and then at the end of these items, we'll probably keep the meeting open for the rest of the day in case there's additional information that comes to us and we want to be able to talk about it.

[10:26:03 AM]

So we'll just -- please help me remember to close this meeting at the end of the day. Manager, do you want to talk initially?

>> I do. Thank you, mayor. This morning we have an update on our emergency response related to hurricane Harvey, just as we did on Tuesday, and we're also asking the council today to authorize staff to negotiate and execute a short-term lease for use as an emergency shelter. First I want to recognize and thank our partners in these emergency efforts that have been ongoing since last week. Austin independent school district, especially for the temporary shelters that they have opened at their schools. Travis county, the red cross, the voluntary organizations active in disaster called food, Austin disaster relief network, and the others, volunteers. I don't want to offend anyone if I forgot to list you. But thank you all for your help and cooperation with us in these efforts. Concurrent with these efforts to ready our convention center as a sheltering space, our real estate staff was asked to identify a lease site that would enable us to provide a better alternative for providing services to our guests impacted by hurricane Harvey. Our staff has identified, evaluated and recommends a site that is on your agenda today. This site provides the following benefits. It's stable in size, which will -- scalable in size which will provide us flexibility as the number and the timing of when we're accepting guests is in fluctuation. It allows for evaluation of the temporary shelters so we can get folks out of the school districts, facilities that are at teachable facilities, the schools that are in operation as well as those that are non-teaching facilities.

[10:28:08 AM]

The parking lot allows for a better staging area for when the FEMA trailers come in for services, so this is especially a benefit in this effort. This location also supports both ground and air transportation being in the southern part of the city. It is closer to the airport and so provides that flexibility as well. This lease has been authorized by the state, preauthorized for reimbursement and the initial term is 30 days with options to extend on a month-to-month basis, which allows us to make it available for a longer term period of time. Juan Ortiz, our director of homeland and security management, will provide the update

on our emergency response efforts, and Lorraine Rizer, director of our office of real estate services, will provide an overview of the proposed lease and she will be available to answer questions about that. Thank you both for being here. Juan, I'll turn the dais to you.

>> Thank you, mayor and councilmembers. As stated, last time we briefed you on a plan to start converting the convention center to open as a mega shelter at the request of the state of Texas. The state had originally requested that we receive as many -- be prepared to receive as many as 7,000 guests. And as our teams work real hard to make the preparations -- to be ready to receive those guests, we have met with the state, but received new information. Their request for assistance has now changed. They're now asking us to be prepared to receive approximately 1500 to 2,000 guests and that will start at some point in the next seven to 10 days. The state has authorized us, like the city manager has indicated, and our city manager has indicated, for us to go ahead and lease a facility. And like it was stated, this facility would be reimbursed 100%. Based on the new information, this emergency called meeting we are bringing to you a request for council action to negotiate and execute a lease.

[10:30:21 AM]

For the facility that has been stated as med center at 7,000 montopolis drive. Lorraine Rizer is here to answer any questions on that location. We're also going to transition the mega shelter from the convention center to the new facility. We will also stage resources to the new location in anticipation of a future ramp-up at some point in the next seven to 10 days. We're planning to consolidate the shelters as quickly as possible and we are working with closer communities for them to arrange -- to make arrangements to help them -- help the guests return back home as soon as they possibly can. People want to be sheltered closer to their home, so it is important that those closer communities open up shelters so they're able to check on their property and see the status of their homes. We're also planning to consolidate all the shelters at the schools and we're going to be demobilizing shelter operations as school facilities, starting first with the teaching facilities and then moving on to the non-teaching facilities. All of this will take place by this weekend.

>> Mayor and council, Lorraine Rizer, real estate services department. Council, I'm bringing forward to you two reimbursable leases, but I first want to say that my staff has looked at over 60 buildings and we have contacted over 75 different owners, brokers and different people to try to find a space. Austin has a very active real estate market and it's very hard to find the space that we needed to find, but we were able to secure a location. Although it's two leases, it's really one site. A portion of the building is leased by another property owner who is currently off the site, so they are going to sublease the site to us. And then the remaining of the building we're leasing directly from the original property owner.

[10:32:26 AM]

The sublease of 64,000 square foot is air conditioned finished space and it is leasing for \$53,120 per month. For a total if we lease it for all eight months, it would be a total of 424,960. The second lease is -- I mean, it's 96,000 square feet of unfinished space, and it's leasing for 61,440 a month. And we added \$100,000 for temporary lighting in the site and also to put the building back to the same condition we found it in when we're finished. We may not use it, but that was just a guesstimate. The city will pay all utilities. The site is 14 acres in size, which is really great because that will allow us to do all the staging we need and allow room for our partners join us on the site if they need to be there. There's a total of 660 parking spaces, which will accommodate large buses, and any other types of vehicles, showers and things that we need on the site. The site also has 18 loading docs that are truck height for us to be able to load and unload supplies, cots and other things that we need at the site. It has a very close proximity to 183 to the east, Burleson road and Ben white. And I'm here to answer any other questions you may have about the sites. Thank you very much.

>> Mayor Adler: Council, any questions? Or a motion to approve the leases? Ms. Garza makes a motion -
- no.

>> Garza: I'd like to say that as the councilmember that represents this area, I understand the emergency setting. I definitely would have liked a head's up on this. That being said, district 2 is welcoming with open arms what we can do to house those in need.

[10:34:32 AM]

We're very familiar with having to rise to the occasion in times of tragedy. I do have a couple of concerns. This area -- this area is very adjacent to a neighborhood that has -- I have had several meetings with this neighborhood because of a -- there's a plant near there. This is a very industrial area. It's surrounded by industrial complexes. This neighborhood it has a lot of concerns about being that close to some of that industrial stuff. Most recently it was a liquid waste kind of plant. And has there been an assessment done to make sure that this is a safe place that we will be sheltering these evacuees, is my first question?

>> Councilmember, this is a brand new building. Actually, we investigated the site. We were looking at purchasing this site for fire and ems. We just weren't able to negotiate the terms. So the building was actually being built and we were there at the site during that time. So we have done environmental site assessments during that time and it's only been -- the portion that's been used is only as office.

>> Garza: So it's not zoned for residential, it's industrial/commercial.

>> It is. It's in the med center. The va clinic is there and there's some -- some warehouses are being converted to office use more than warehouse use.

>> Garza: So I just want to make sure because I support whatever our city can do to shelter and do whatever we can for these evacuees and guests, but the city is 100% sure that this is a safe place to put these folks?

>> Yes, councilmember.

>> Garza: Okay. My next question is some of these people will have families and I know that aid has done a great job of saying that they're willing to do what is possible to school -- to have those children in those shelters go, but this is del valle school district.

[10:36:39 AM]

Have we spoken to del valle to see if -- where will these children -- is there a plan in place for the schooling of these children?

>> That's something that we're working with the school districts to make arrangements to make sure that those that are not able to return home are able to be enrolled in the school and make sure that the kids are getting education while they're here in Austin. So that's one of the things that the work continues to make sure that we have a plan to do that.

>> Garza: Okay. I would also ask that you reach out to del valle because that is the school that this -- that's the school district that this area is in. So whatever is most convenient for the families there. The other concern is -- the food bank is right down the street from here, so I could see the logistics of having this area close to that, but the food bank has also asked about concerns about the safety of an intersection there. So I would ask that we make sure that there are proper channels in place to make this area as safe as possible trafficwise. And my other concern is that this -- my district has food deserts, and this is in my opinion not the best place for a shelter. I feel like they're going to be out on an industrial island, but I appreciate that you said we have looked everywhere and we've looked for all kinds of options. So if in city staff's opinion this is the best and safest, then I can support that. Lastly, I want to say that I will ask the media and our city staff and pios to please respect the privacy of our individuals. When I see this video of people inside the shelters and press conferences happening in there, I just don't think that that's very respectful of the people that are leaving this really horrible situation. You're basically in their living rooms and I don't think that that's appropriate.

[10:38:40 AM]

[Applause]. So please respect the privacy of everyone coming into the shelter.

>> Houston: Mayor? Thank you, councilmember Garza. I too agree with that. It's not only disrespectful, it's inclusive to -- intrusive to be in the space and then try to capture people as they leave. I have some of the same questions about schooling of the kids because I went through the shelters in the district and some have already enrolled their kids in, say, Norman elementary. So that disruption, I'm concerned about how those kids who are already enrolled in Norman will get back to Norman. So as you talked with the Austin independent school district and del valle superintendent crook and the trustees, I would hope that you would see how we would be able to maintain those children that are already enrolled in lbj high school, how will they get back to their school of choice? So those are some of the concerns I have as well. The other thing is -- again, as councilmember Garza stated, there's not much out there. And there's a group of folks from the Austin striders that were taking people in their van over to Walmart to be able to get supplies because some people came on buses. A lot came on buses and don't have the transportation. So how would we lyingly be able to -- logistically be able to get people to where they need things, not what we are able to provide them. Just things to think about as you are making this change.

[Applause].

>> We're going to be working with capital metro and we're going to have a meeting after this council meeting to make arrangements, make sure that we can provide transportation. We're also working very closely with our volunteer organizations active in disaster and the American red cross and the Austin disaster relief network to make sure that we're looking at the whole quality of life in that mega shelter environment to make sure that we provide ways of -- make sure they have access to the different services in the community.

[10:40:48 AM]

Also transportation, education, medical services. It's like we said the other day, this is really creating a city within a city and we want them to have access into the city of Austin and other areas. So we want to make sure that we address that island perception and make sure that we reduce it as much as we possibly can for the -- and ensure that they have a good quality of life while they're here in the mega shelter.

>> Houston: And I don't want them sequestered in that place because in some of the other places we have opportunities for play and soccer is being played and kids are outside doing all kinds of activities. I don't know -- I know where the va clinic is. I'm not sure where this particular site is, but I don't know what the ground space is for converting to some playground so kids get an opportunity to go outside.

>> It is very important that we have the youth actively engaged in activities that -- to ensure that they're exercising and having access to library services and other types of things that we kind of group all into

human care or mass care, human services, to ensure that they have a really good quality of life while they're there at that location.

>> Houston: And thank you. I missed saying this the other day. Thank you for your service in the United States coast guard.

>> Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember Houston Ms. Troxclair?

>> Troxclair: So the -- I understand that the convention center has a much larger space than we might need. Is there another event happening there that prevents us from using it? Is there an ability for us to still use that space and just block off -- expand the space that we need using barriers or whatever to make it more appropriate to the new size of the guests that we're expecting?

[10:42:51 AM]

>> Yeah. The real reason is there's a lot of unknowns still as to the timeline of when those evacuating guests are going to arrive. The state has had difficulty in anticipating when they will get there them. And a lot of the folks who are impacted want to stay close to home. At some point the state feels that they're not going to be able to stay home and they're going to be evacuated out of those eas. At they -- but for that purpose they reduced the amount that they initially requested. And then also, because of that unknown, having a location that we -- that we can stage and build out what we need, this facility would be a lot easier to do that versus the convention center. Parking becomes a concern. All of a sudden we have a lot of people who are driving themselves over here and parking in the convention center and it would become a concern. This facility addresses all of that, scalability, parking, the uncertainty of the arrival of the evacuees and allows us to consolidate and ensure that all the resources we have available at our disposal can be concentrated into one central location and not have to be going into multiple locations because that creates a logistical problem if we have one location that we can resolve. Ms. Troxclair is there something happening at the convention center that makes -- owe.

>> Troxclair: Is there something at the convention center that makes the timing issue have an impact. I just am curious.

>> Councilmember, ray Arrellano, assistant city manager.

[10:44:52 AM]

And councilmembers, I think the ability for us is to scale in the uncertainty that we have. Certainly the convention is willing to and has in fact, as we set it up initially as the primary place, we have evaluated this location as one that positions us the best for some urban certain number at this -- uncertain number at this stage of evacuees and minimizes the impact for the community going forward. It's likely again that the evacuees that come here may be here for an extended period of time, so the issue is for us from a logistic perspective is to move the evacuees one time and one time only, if we can help it. And have it in a location that is better served and that we can concentrate the resources in.

>> Troxclair: I'm still not quite understanding the scalability argument because it seems like the convention center also allows us to scale and to a greater number if for some reason something else changes, and at some point there's some kind of event planned at the convention center and if the argument is that we are planning for the people to be here long-term and we don't want them to have to move, then I understand that. And I -- since this was short notice I haven't had a chance to read the backup, but it's about a million dollars and a 30-day sublease with seven 30-day extension options. So it's not a million dollars for 30 days, it's a million dollars for up to eight months. Okay. And are the property owners giving -- I mean, I understand that the city is going to be reimbursed by the state, but is this just fair market value for the properties? Are the property owners giving the city any kind of discount or benefit since we're trying to accommodate, you know, disaster victims?

>> The air conditioned space that -- since that tenant is paying rent, they wanted us to pay a market rent.

[10:47:02 AM]

We're not paying as much as they are paying, but it is within a market rate. The unair conditioned space is -- the unair conditioned space is a little below market and the owner is trying to do some things to help us get the facility ready. Some of the things that are real costs will be passed on to us, but there are other things that cease doing using his staff and personnel to work with us.

>> Troxclair: I think that we just need to trust that you guys have tried to present the best option possible and I appreciate your efforts.

>> Mayor Adler: Manager?

>> Thank you. I'd like to provide some clarification. We do have conventions scheduled in our convention center for the last two or three months. And so a lot of our effort in identifying another location was, one, not knowing how many of those who asked to be canceled or rescheduled. We didn't know the number of evacuees or guests was changing rapidly from 7,000 to maybe 1500 to maybe 2,000. The length of time when they would get here was changing. We were trying to be not only responsive to our business of running a convention center, but also to shelter people. Once we got the folks here we still had no idea how long we would need to do that. So we did have our next convention

that was scheduled. The folks who were planning that convention called us and offered to cancel it. So the uncertainty of how long we would have to shelter the folks and and at what point and also how many.

[10:49:07 AM]

So it's just really been within the last few days that we've had to deal with a significant change in the number of folks and when and how long. And we still -- when we get the guests we still don't know how long. And this site literally offers us a better way to serve those people when they do get here. And that was really what was driving us.

>> Mayor Adler: Mayor pro tem?

>> Tovo: I just had a quick question between the air conditioned space and the unair conditioned. Is the unair conditioned space going to be like a plan B if you need that space? I assume you intend to use the air conditioned space for the families to stay in.

>> We have crews out there right now along with the property owner trying to figure out how to get some air in to the space, temporary air. We're looking at temporary coolers and things like that. So we're working on it at the moment. I don't have the answer, but I will by the end of the day.

>> Tovo: So you may use both buildings for --

>> It's one building, it's just he had a tenant that only wanted to lease 64,000 square foot, so he just put a wall up. So it's one building, just one is warehouse and one is office.

>> Tovo: Okay. Thank you very much and thank you -- I can imagine this was a tremendous amount of work to secure a solution like this. So thank you so very much for working on behalf of all the families who are on their way.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember alter.

>> Alter: I think it might be helpful for the public if you could explain a bit about how the reimbursements work for this process so that we understand the fiscal consequences. Obviously we want to do everything we can, but this is reimbursable and I think this would be useful for us to -- for us and the community to have more information about how that process works if we're not familiar with that.

[10:51:08 AM]

>> Yes, definitely.

>> This includes people in the state of Texas and Travis county. There are different categories of work and emergency protective measures which is where this falls in as -- it's a category where you can meet the cork that has that category description and those expenses are submitted to FEMA for reimbursement. There is a 75/25%, that the 25% will come out of the state. And since we received a request from the state to do this and assist them in response to the state, where we'll be reimbursed 100%. The state of Texas will then submit their expenses overall and they will get reimbursed 75%. And so this insures that we are able -- basically acting as a contractor for the state is the best way that I can describe it and therefore we are eligible for 100%.

>> Alter: Thank you for that clarification. Appreciate it.

>> And councilmember, if I may. One of the things that occurs to me in the conversation about the conventions and so forth, the state would reimburse us for the expenses that we might have for these shelters, whether it's at the convention center center or this facility, but they won't reimburse for the fiscal impact of any business that might be disrupted. So among the factors we had to consider in choosing locations with the uncertainty of how many people we would get and for how long, that also weighed into our calculus.

>> Mayor Adler: Ms. Houston?

>> Houston: Could someone tell me how long the convention center was used during Katrina?

[10:53:10 AM]

What was the length of stay there?

>> I believe it would have been someone around four to six weeks. Less than that.

>> Five to six months.

>> Five to six months. Sorry, I was not here back then.

>> Mayor Adler: Council? Does anyone want to make a motion to approve the leases? Mr. Renteria makes a motion. Mr. Casar seconds. Any discussion? All those in favor please raise your hand? Those opposed? Unanimous on the dais. Thank you very much. I know you guys are spending tons of time out there.

>> Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: I also want to thank the community generally for the reaction that we've seen just out in the community to help and assist. It's been heartwarming. With that I am going to recess this meeting subject to call and I am going to call to order today's regular council meeting.

[12:37:40 AM]

It is 12:37. I'm going to convene the special called emergency meeting to address the hurricane Harvey matter.

[12:37:40 AM]

We started it this morning, kept the hearing open. So I am reconvening it for the purpose of closing it down. We have no further briefing. So without objection, I am adjourning the emergency meeting.