

City Council Work Session Transcript – 2/2/2021

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[9:04:45 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you, judge brown. Today is Tuesday, February 2, 2021. The time is 9:04. It is good to be with you again, judge and commissioners here virtually. We have a quorum present. We're ready to proceed. Judge judge judge.

>> Judge Brown: I'm going to call the meeting to order. 700 lavaca commissioner Travillion and myself and remotely commissioner Shea and commissioner Gomez. Nate, do we have any callers for public comment?

>> We have no callers at this time, judge.

>> Judge Brown: To help ensure the efficient use of time and manage the length

[9:05:47 AM]

of the brief, we're going to limit ourselves to one question in the order, so I'll call the order for commissioners court, then we'll go to the mayor for council to call the order and try to limit ourselves for that first round to one question each. And if time permits, we'll have a second round of questions. And so I will go ahead and start -- actually we're going to the briefing before questions. First, Dr. Escott, are you on the line and available?

>> Dr. Escott: Yes, sir. Let me share my screen and we'll get started. Okay. Good morning, judge, mayor, council and commissioners court. Thank you for the opportunity to update the city and county on our

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covid-19 response. Yesterday we reported 677 new cases in Travis county with a moving average of 577. We've had a slight uptick in the past couple of days of reporting cases, however, our peak was now 16 days ago. And based upon our

[inaudible], our hope is those numbers will drop again and continuous in a better direction in terms of our covid-19 situation here. We'll continue to follow this, the new cases again this week. This is a graph of our new admissions in the msa. Yesterday we reported 41 admissions with a moving average of 68. That puts our peak 24 days ago. So again, as you can see

[9:07:53 AM]

compared to object you're our -- our peak in June and July, it's put us slower, but I'm happy to say it is continuing to go down in the fact that we've seen several days well below the moving average indicates that this is likely to continue to push down in the short term. This graph is showing three things. The blue is the total hospital beds utilized for covid-19 patients. The Orange are the icu beds, the gray are the ventilators being utilized. Hospitalizations yesterday 510 with a moving average of 538. That included 44 individuals in the alternate care site at the Austin convention center. This puts the peak of hospitalizations 14 days ago. So again, still moving in a very good direction and dropping a bit more quickly now.

[9:08:54 AM]

Our icu utilization yesterday 151 with a moving average of 157. That puts the peak 17 days ago for icus. Our ventilator usage, 103 with a moving average of 97. Again, this has been a bit flatter, we've seen a slight uptick in the past couple of days, but still the peak 18 days ago. So again, all these metrics continue to move in a positive direction. When we look at what's happening in Travis county as well as the other metropolitan trauma service areas, we can see that there's decreases across the board. Again, as I reported last week, Austin was the last trauma service area to enter surge triggering ga31 and 32 and we were the first ones to come out of it. Yesterday having 12 point

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[inaudible] Of hospitalizations, or 12.19% of the available hospital beds utilized for covid-19 patients. You can see Houston is 17.09%. El Paso, 17.38%, Dallas 18.82% N San Antonio, 19.66%. So quite a bit of variability across the metropolitan jurisdictions, but all moving in that positive direction. Again this is

important because we know that covid travels easily and we've talked about the challenges that we all face when we see so many jurisdictions facing stress. It's nice to see that all of them now are moving in a better direction. I do want to point out, though, there's been a lot of social media activity

[9:10:56 AM]

talking about symmetry, comparing states that have much different policies and suggesting that covid just does its thing and what we do as jurisdictions doesn't matter that much. That's not really true. This is an excellent example of a lack of symmetry when it comes to what's been happening over time across our own state and across these metropolitan jurisdictions. What I'm showing you here is based on dshs data for active cases by county. Again, you can see that there's quite a bit of variation over time and by jurisdiction. Travis county is the dark blue line at the bottom. We've hugged the bottom of this graph for quite some time. You can see the peak that I mentioned displayed on the right side of the screen. And the gentle downward trend. We can see that's not been the case across all of these

[9:12:00 AM]

metropolitan areas and there's been quite a bit of variability, and obviously quite a bit of variability in policies associated with the covid-19 response. Similarly we see a lack of symmetry associated with deaths. What I'm showing you here is deaths per hundred thousand population. Again Travis county at the bottom of the list in the dark blue line with about 50 deaths per hundred thousand. You can see there's a cluster between 75 and 100 per hundred thousand which includes Harris county, tarrant, Dallas and Bexar county. And then you see this cluster at the top with Lubbock county and El Paso county at the top. So again, quite a bit of variability in terms of the impact of covid-19 on our population based on jurisdiction.

[9:13:00 AM]

This is an update on the projections from U.T. Again, these were updated last on Sunday, I believe, so we expect there's going to be an update today. I'll tell you that our admissions are tracking well below the median line, the blue line that you see here. Right now that line is suggesting that we are going to drop below 60 admissions on that moving average on February the 18th. I bring up 60 because the modeling indicates to us that once we drop below 60, we would be safe to transition back to stage 4 of our community based risk. So we'll be watching this closely. Again, we've seen some significant drops in the past few days. My hope is that we will see that drop below 60 sooner than mid February. Again, these models are based upon the activity that

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we're seeing, the admissions that we're seeing and the mobility data that feeds into that. So if we continue those protective actions, we continue to stay home when we can, we continue to limit our interactions with other folks, it will help to drop this quicker and put us in a better situation to drop down to stage 4. We see a similar trend here with hospitalizations. The median of dropping below 500 is February 16th to 17th. Again, yesterday we reported 510, so the hospitalization actual numbers are tracking well below this median point line. We expect this to be updated and it will show a quicker drop for the drop below the 500 mark. We see a similar pattern

[9:15:01 AM]

with the icu. The median project is below 140 in the icu on February 18th. Again, we are tracking below that line now already so we expect it to be even better by mid February if we continue those protective actions that resulted in this downward trend. This is a graph of the hospitalizations by race and ethnicity and by week. You can see that -- sorry, this is by age group. My apologies. You see an increase in the 60 to 69 age group. Some slight decreases in 70 to 79 age group and the 80-plus age group. I do also want to point out there's increase in the personal of the 20 to 29 age group that we reported last week. When we look at this graph which provides the numbers of individuals in each of those age groups, we can see that overall our

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hospitalizations drop by about 20% last week compared to the previous week, 504 to 400. We see that significant drop, 107 to 73 in the 80-plus age group. 108 to 83 in the 70 to 79 age group, and a, you know, relative -- relatively the same numbers in the 60 to 69 age group, 86 to 78.

-- 87. Again, down in the yellow bar, the 20 to 29 age group, we moved up from 28 admissions to 33 admissions last week. Again, when we see these numbers in these lower age group, it indicates to us significant disease transmission in those age groups. Because the risk of being hospitalized is so small, we need a large number of active cases going on those age groups to translate to these numbers. So again, we're really

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concerned about the impact of covid-19 on older adults, we do need to recognize that younger people are hospitalized. Some of them hospitalized in the icu. So everybody regardless of their age, regardless

of their perceived risk need to take those precautions so that we can further decrease the transmission and further improve our hospitalization situation. This is the breakdown of hospitalizations by race and ethnicity. Again, slight increase in our white non-hispanic hospitalizations. Last week 43.7% to 46.9%. Relatively flat for our latinx community in the green. 38.6 to 38.1. A slight decrease in our African-American community, 12.1 to 10.7. So again, relatively federal in the -- flat in our other

[9:18:10 AM]

ethics policy advertise advertise. Based to number of hospitalized, 177 to 142 for latinx community. Non-white 200 to 175 and significant drop in black non-hispanic 60 to 40 last week. So again, ongoing improvements across race and ethnicities in terms of hospitalizations last week. Our positivity continues to improve weekly. It's a slow improvement, so we moved from 13.3% two weeks ago to 11.7% positive last week. Again, we see rapid increases on the way up and slow increases -- or slow decreases on the way down. Again, still moving in a good direction, although well above that 5% mark and the 3% mark as our goals for

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getting down to stage 3 and below. We look at that breakdown of positivity by race and ethnicity. Our latinx community moved from positivity of 20.3% to 19.1% last week. American Indian, Alaska native, 18.3 to 19%. African-American 12.3% two weeks ago to 11.4% last week. Our native American population, 9.3% to 12.1%. So an increase in that group. And our white non-hispanic 11.0 to 9.7%. Again, all of our race and ethnicities are well above that 5% mark so we have more work to do. But again, those protective actions, the masking, the distancing, the staying home if you can are all helping to contribute to decreasing transmissions.

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Similarly we see decreases across our -- cross our age groups. Our 80-plus age group moved from 19% positive two weeks ago to 13.8% last week. Our 10 to 19 age group, 16.0% to 13.5%. Our 50 to 59 age group, which is the highest positivity age group this week, 15% down to 14.1% last week. So again, improvements across those age groups. We have to continue those efforts as they are all well above that 5% mark. A breakdown of those younger age groups by high school, middle school, elementary and preschool, we see the broke down here. High school and middle school above the community

[9:21:15 AM]

positivity 1.9% for high school, 13.1% for middle school, and our elementary and pre-school slightly below that community positivity 10.6 and 10.3%. This is a table of our reported cases from school districts. A total of 183 students reported positive cases into Austin public health last week, 105 staff and one visitors to campus. Relatively steady in terms of the impact on our schools at least in the reports to Austin public health, a total of 289 cases in the last week. A look at the quarantine, we see the substantial impact of these close contacts in the school setting. 1834 students, 343 staff, 2177 total.

[9:22:18 AM]

Begin, director Hayden may talk later, but we have been rye or advertising our 1b teachers so we can put our schools in a better situation to maintain continuity of education and we'll continue those efforts in the coming weeks as well. Some slight improvements in our nursing home cases. 273 the past 14 days, 620 in the previous 28 days. Again, as we've been talking about for many weeks now, as we see decreases in the positivity in the community, we will see decreases in cases associated where nursing homes and assisted living facilities. We want to continue to push those trends down and protect these most vulnerable members of the community. Briefly, our flare reports continue to look good, 1.2% positivity last week, 1.0% overall. Less than 100 total positive

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cases reported to Austin public health for flu this season with more than 6700 tests being performed. That puts us -- continues us at the bottom of the previous four years in terms of flu cases and influenza-like illnesses. Again, we still have some risk as we've seen in the past, we've seen some peaks that happened in February, but again our hope is that those protective actions, the masking, the distancing, the hand hygiene, staying home when you are sick are all contributing to the maybe record influenza year that we're seeing here. Again, we remain in stage 5 for our community based risk. While we've seen some relaxations from the state related to our decreasing surge in the hospitals, our recommendations are a bit

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stricter than that. So again, we continue to recommend no gathering outside of one's household. That dining and shopping be limited to essential trips. That non-essential travel be avoided. And that our businesses primarily operate through contactless options, curbside delivery, take-away. With that I will pass it over to director hayden-howard.

>> Hayden-howard: Thank you, Dr. Escott. Next slide. We wanted to provide this eligibility flow chart for you, and basically, you know, right now we're focusing on 1b. This just kind of shows you if a person enrolls in the platform, they are age 65, it does let you know that it is time for you to receive your vaccine. In addition to us focusing

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on people that are over age 50 with a medical condition and has been disproportionately impacted by covid. That group of people, it is also time for them to receive the vaccine. However, we know that we are definitely limited in the number of vaccines. And so it's going to be important for folks to know that we are definitely putting people on a wait list, and when more vaccine is available, we will be reaching out to them. Next slide. This just gives an update where we are with vaccines. We received 12,000 additional vaccines this week. Last week we operated three sites, two were closed-"I mean two were open sites,

[9:26:24 AM]

dellco and dove springs. One was a closed site. As Dr. Escott shared earlier, we are continue to go prioritize our educational folks and working with school staff, we're continuing to work with them. That not only includes teachers, it's teachers, cuss stoweddance, it is -- custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers that fall into that 1b. In addition to that, working "-staff sent out a survey to child care providers so we can get an idea of how many folks are in that area because we know that they cannot safely, you know, work with children because the children are young and they can't wear the masks. And so we're continuing to have that -- that priority

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as our focus. With the second doses, as most of you know, some folks have already -- we've already started contacting folks about coming in to take their second dose. One word of caution. If you have constituents that did not receive their vaccine with Austin public health, if first one, they cannot receive their second one from us. The way the state of Texas is allocating those vaccines is that they are sending them to us according to how many vaccines we provided the first go-round. And so -- so we have a very strict allocation with the second vaccine. So unfortunately, you know, folks that may have, you know, traveled to Houston or San Antonio or somewhere else to get that first vaccine, we're going to ask

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that they try to go back to those areas to receive that second vaccine. That allocation should go back to that area. And so we are asking them to reach back out to that service area and go back to that provider. And so we will continue to be proactive about scheduling folks to go ahead and come in to receive the second dose. In addition with our system, right now we have 532,339 individuals that have set up accounts on our sales force. And so, as you can see, if we're receiving 12,000 vaccines a week, when we look at the eligibility of what I showed you from the flow chart looking at people that are 50 years of age and older that fit that 1b

[9:29:28 AM]

criteria, that is 188,825 people that are eligible that need an appointment. And so as you can tell, at 12,000 vaccines a week, you know, we're going to be probably 16 weeks out from now before we're able to provide vaccines, and that's if we stay at this 12,000 vaccines a week. And so it's going to be so important for us just to, you know, just tell folks that, you know, we're working through our system, you know, we're updating the system, but there is quite a few users in the system. And so, you know, we're going to do everything we can to get to people, you know, in a timely manner. With our mobile vaccines, we've started our conversations and are looking at what that mobile

[9:30:31 AM]

vaccine team would be. So when we're still within the 12,000 vaccines per week, we have started to have conversations with -- with providers. We had conversation with the housing authority. And so what would happen is is that, you know, based upon the feedback that we receive from individuals that are seniors or people with a disability, that will prefer to have the vaccine provided at home, we are going to start that process later on this month. The other change with appointments is is on Tuesday and Thursday only, those are going to be the only two days that we are going to release appointments. I understand that folks are concerned and they are checking the website every day, so we are moving to a place where we're only going

[9:31:32 AM]

to release appointments on Tuesday and Thursday of each week. If things change and we get more vaccines, then, of course, we will release more appointments. Next slide. We are very grateful for the call center partnership on the agenda for today with Travis county commissioners court is a M. U agreement with the city of Austin and so Travis county staff were trained on yesterday. We're going to continue doing additional training, but they are going to help us with calls to assist folks with

registration, and then they are going to notify others and provide them an appointment. And so if this is approved today, this will be in effect until the end of

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March. And so this is going to significantly help us with individuals that may have had challenges with registration or have questions about I've registered and I don't have an appointment. And so they are going to be calling staff -- I mean they are going to call residents and have a conversation with them, make sure they have what they need, but then each week we're going to be able to provide some appointments to them as well. Next slide. When we -- when we kind of look at priorities that Austin public health has, these are our priorities and areas that we are definitely going to continue to focus in on. Our goal is is that every week we want to -- whatever allocation we have coming in from the state, example we've been receiving 12,000 vaccines, the goal is is to

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continue to get those vaccines out in a fast, efficient and effective way. We want to make sure that we are getting our data entry into the state system and any reports that we have that need to go back. In addition to that, we're -- we must make sure from a diversity perspective we are reaching people who have been disproportionately affected by covid. So working with groups and agencies, organizations to be able to identify folks that may not be able to get into our registration system in order for us to serve more folks that have been disproportionately affected by covid. Our registration system, making sure that incoming calls are answered. As you all know, we'll be working with the county if

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that's approved. But internally we've set up more folks to be able to answer calls, so Austin public health has reassigned some folks within our traditional workforce, and so that may mean some other things are going to have to be delayed because we need to make this our priority. And then we want to make sure to provide technical assistance for folks that are enrolling. With our testing sites, right now we have our testing sites that we do have available. We will continue to do home testing, but unfortunately as of now we had to close down give given, Monday top last and walnut creek. Our epidemiologist, as you all know, we continue to have a large number of cases coming in and we want to make sure that the data

[9:35:36 AM]

entry is happening in a timely manner, and so we need to address those issues. Our incident command teams will continue to work with, you know, our folks in schools whether it's child care, school -- high schools, et cetera, but also higher education. And it will continue to do our work with our long-term care facilities, and that's going to be the team that is going to be helping out with the mobile vaccines. We're going to continue our enforcement efforts because we know we're going to -- as we, you know, things start to change and we shift back to stage 4, we're going to need to continue those efforts. And then we just need to make sure all of our dashboards are working properly. We are in the process of working on our vaccine dashboard which will only

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have Austin public health data in it. And so we want to make sure that that dashboard is updated weekly. As stated earlier, you know, we'll continue to coordinate with the alternative care site and the infusion for the medical treatments. That concludes my presentation and I am available for questions. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you, director hayden-howard. We're going first to commissioner Gomez for a question.

>> Gomez: Is it possible for folks to also call 311 to register? When they had some difficulty getting through, they wonder why they just can't call 311 or 211, whatever the available.

>> Hayden-howard: They can call 311, but what 311 will do is take down their information. It's like any other kind of

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service request where they take down their information and then they send it over to Austin public health. And so Austin public health will call them back or with the other center stood up someone will call them back.

>> Gomez: This sounds like a nice shortcut to getting through. Thank you.

>> Judge Brown: Commissioner Shea.

>> Shea: I -- this is probably going to be for Dr. Escott, and I guess it would presume some awareness of what the state medical experts on covid are recommending to the governor, but I -- I share the dismay that's been raised by other state legislators. Do you have any insight consider the governor would not have made dealing with

[9:38:41 AM]

covid an emergency item? I mean the stuff he listed isn't -- can't even compare to almost 36,000 people in Texas being killed partly because there hasn't been a good mechanism for helping people. And would you know if the state's health director, I'm not even sure the right term, would have recommended something like this to the governor? I can't fathom this.

>> Dr. Escott: I think covid is obviously a top priority for our state whether or not it was said last night or not. You know, I think we've got to begin that discussion of how do we strengthen our infrastructure, how do we prepare for pandemics better in the future. How do we improve the functionality of the -- department of state health

[9:39:42 AM]

services in emergency situations like this. I think we have a lot of work to do in preparing for the next one. I hope it's not in any of our life types, but we have to -- lifetimes, but as the world's population grows, these kinds of things may become more frequent. I agree with you, there are so many covid-related issues that my hope is that it will be a priority for this session.

>> Shea: Thank you. Appreciate it.

>> Judge Brown: Thanks. Commssioner Travillion.

>> Travillion: First I want to thank you for all the hard work that you've done. I've called you guys early in the morning, I've called you guys late at night and you've always responded and tried to work with us, so I want to thank you for that. My question is how quickly or whether we can build a specific plan that will allow us to organize around

[9:40:44 AM]

community institutions in east Austin and the eastern crescent. I've had a number of churches, baptists, methodists, seventh day adventist, all have nurses that want to help us, that present their institutions. I've had the naacp call me. We've been working with title 1 schools. These are areas that are kind of off the beaten path and I want to develop a specific program to address availability in those areas. How can we put that together quickly.

>> Hayden-howard: I'm trying to understand your question. Is the question to put together a --

>> Travillion: I can ask it better. I've got churches that want to be places where community members can come, trusted community organizations, and they want to be helpful. I know that we've got

[9:41:44 AM]

centers and oftentimes centers have long lines. Many people are afraid to come into long lines. So they want to organize institutions so that rather than being at one place people can come there. Whether it's for information, signing up, even shots. I'm trying to get a better outreach infrastructure into the eastern crescent.

>> Hayden-howard: I think what probably would be helpful is you and I met outside of this platform just to kind of determine, and if there is other people you would like to bring present from the community, we would be willing to have that conversation with them.

>> Travillion: Okay. I will give you a call today.

>> Hayden-howard: Thank you.

>> Judge Brown: Commissioner Howard.

>> Howard: Thank you. Good morning, could you put the slide up one more time of the flow chart of whether

[9:42:46 AM]

you are eligible or not for the vaccination? I think that's pretty good and I wanted to snap a picture of it so we can share it widely. Is that possible to put that back up?

>> Dr. Escott: I can, commissioner. I believe you also received it in your packet.

>> Howard: Oh, perfect.

>> Dr. Escott: From chuck.

>> Howard: Thank you for making it visual like that.

>> Dr. Escott: You bet.

>> Judge Brown: All right. Director hayden-howard, I'm super excited about the call center that you and Dana and others have worked to make a reality. I just wanted to check, who are they going to be calling from this call center? Is it -- are we able to focus it on people who are Latino, black, in hardest hit zip codes, or is it a broader universe than that? Do you know the answer to that?

>> Hayden-howard: So right

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now we are going to ask them to target on folks that are 80 years of age and older and anyone that we may have not been able to call through our effort. So that could be, you know, kind of a broad group of

folks. These are people that have typically not been able to register for the process so they are going to help them to set up them an account in that system as well. So it's going to be a combination of folks. And so each week they will be able to make those calls, those outbound calls to assist with assisting with the registration process and then also scheduling appointments.

>> Judge Brown: Okay. If we could target that a little bit more to try to increase the equity piece, I think that was frankly my

[9:44:47 AM]

goal with that and so I'll continue to work with you to make sure we can do that. With that, mayor, I will pass it over to you.

>> Mayor Adler: Judge, thank you. As I posted, we're going to do this in reverse council district order. Councilmember alter.

>> Alter: Good morning, and thank you. I appreciate Dr. -- Director hayden-howard meeting with my staff and team to talk about how we can better assist some of our homebound seniors and I want to thank you for taking the time to work with us on that. I wanted to ask one quick clarification and then a slightly broader question. I missed what you said about how we were targeting staff in our schools, like for aid who have not yet been vaccinated.

[9:45:47 AM]

So if you could elaborate on that a little bit. And then, you know, as we still hear, you know, there's different components of the registration process which are proving frustrating, and there is a piece of it that is still that technology when you register and then we have people who keep fishing for more appointments, we still need to fix that so that folks know once you are in the system, it would be much better if it was once you were in the system you were in the queue and you were acted and there was no option to keep going back and keep trying to get in to get your appointment. Then there's another piece where folks when they are going back for their appointment, they have to keep reentering everything they've already given and that's proofing frustrating. I wanted to ask if you could speak about how we are working to improve those

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processes given that you just said we're going to be in 10 to 14 weeks just with 1b at this point, so people aren't spending that entire time trying to game the system and get in. Is there a better -- is there a way in motion that would fix things?

>> Hayden-howard: So the first question was about the education priority. Our goal is to -- the 1b population, in schools, period. So it is public school, private school and charter schools where we are addressing that area for 1b. Folks that meet that criteria. The second question that you asked, what we think is going to help is we are only going to release appointments on Tuesday and

[9:47:48 AM]

Thursday only. Any other days during the week, they do not need to go looking for appointments because we are only going to release them on Tuesday and Thursday. I think the other question that you have, that is a part of our screening process. We're asking them questions when they go back in to register for an appointment, it is questions that we receive from the Texas department of state health services is asking them have they had covid because they could have registered last week, and since then they may have had covid, so they are screening questions we must ask them. And then they are able to schedule an appointment. But in addition to that we still ask them when they get to the location because there may have been a day or so that have gone, but we still have to ask that question. So those questions, we will

[9:48:49 AM]

no take those away because they are a priority that we ask them that. And so I think that the change of Tuesday and Thursday only is definitely going to help the population. In addition to that, I feel like the call center aspect where we are increasing the ability for people to be able to call and leave a message and our folks able to have outbound calls, that will help with folks as well.

>> Alter: Thank you, and I appreciate THA clarity on the questions, that some of those questions are repeats that need to be updated as you get closer if there's any delay. I think that's helpful for those of us who are not able to get into the system and get that far to experiment to see what's going on. I appreciate that. I understand how just limiting to Tuesday and Thursday seems like it would be better than every day, I just still wish we could get to a system where, you know,

[9:49:50 AM]

there was some kind of automated wait list and you were contacted and those spots were open for that group rather than sending 500,000 people on Tuesdays and Thursdays to crash the system. I'm not technically literate to know what the solution is, but I'm concerned about how that plays out over time. So thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Councilmember tovo.

>> Tovo: Thank you. Thanks very much for this information. I have a couple questions, but they are extremely quick and really just -- basically verifying information we've heard. Director Hayden-Howard, the 188,000 are individuals he eligible, in other words, they are somewhere on the flow chart and that equates to 16 weeks. Is that correct?

>> Hayden-Howard: Yes, and that's as of 7:45 this

[9:50:50 AM]

morning.

>> Tovo: Thanks for that. I think that is very helpful data to provide to our constituents so that they understand why though they are eligible it is -- to get a sense of scale in terms of the wait. And I assume that the call center is also for individuals getting error messages or they haven't received a second email regarding vaccine, it's for all of those issues, but also tech support.

>> Hayden-Howard: Yes, it is.

>> Tovo: Thank you. And then my last question is the -- Dr. Escott, on the Travis county schools site, we are -- we've had this conversation before about what information each individual school is providing and the school district as we've discussed before, at least, never identifies whether it is student transmission or -- student cases or teacher, staff cases when we as parents get those letters. But I notice you are breaking it down here.

[9:51:52 AM]

In the past you've mentioned that most of the student transmission appears to be happening in extracurricular activities. Do you have any sense of how the staff in these schools -- what the transmission mechanism was for those staff, and can you help us understand why those letters are so very general? Even in terms of identifying students versus staff.

>> Dr. Escott: Sure. So for staff cases, generally what we're seeing is -- cases related to campus and often does involve faculty who are associated with extracurricular activities, coaches, for instance. We see transmission in social environments where teachers are exposed, as well as household

[9:52:53 AM]

transmission. They are getting it from someone else in the household. We haven't seen any -- again, any clear evidence of transmission in the classroom space from students to teachers. Again, you know, we are all concerned about the variants and the possibility that that may increase the likelihood of

classroom-based transmission. But the data we have so far is still indicating the masking and the distancing, the hand hygiene is still effective. Regarding the data that's transmitted by the schools, it generally tends to lack specific detail that would -- that may allow individuals to identify a particular person who was positive. For instance, if there was a teacher who was in the classroom yesterday and not the following day and you got a note saying a teacher

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was positive, you can track it down to that teacher who is missing or you may be able to. So there tends to be some lack of specificity on the day to day emails for the school districts to try to protect privacy.

>> Tovo: Thank you. I know, it's always very general. I've noticed other states are providing more specific information, but thank you for explaining, thank you for addressing the question of cases within the teacher population.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember Ellis.

>> Ellis: Thank you. Dr. Escott, can you tell me if the advertising we're currently doing is -- testing we're currently doing is able to pick up the different variants or is there a new process for having new testing? Or is it just covid is covid no matter what variant?

>> Dr. Escott: So far covid is covid in terms of

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testing. We don't have any indications right now the testing strategy needs to be changed based upon the variants. There is some genome surveillance testing going on in the area to determine how much of an impact variants may be playing into our transmission. Again, we may see some reports on that later this week. We suspect that it is playing a role, as we've learned throughout this pandemic, if we see it somewhere in Texas or the U.S., it means it's either here or going to be here in a short period of time. So again, this is why it's important for us to help -- continue to decrease transmission right now. Even though we're on the decline, so that we decrease the likelihood that these variants will become the dominant strain and may lead to further challenges in

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managing the spread of disease. We want to buy as much time as we can to get as many people vaccinated and ultimately save a lot of lives.

>> Ellis: Thank you for that. And is there any newer guidance on the types of masks that are most effective? I've seen some guidance that says things like bandannas or the more home-made versions, they need one that's better preventing the spread. Can you talk about that?

>> Dr. Escott: Sure. Again, the efficacy of the mask, the likelihood it's going to prevent spread of disease is really based upon the number of layers and the fit of the mask. So something like a gator or bandanna or shirt pulled over your face, it's going to provide a single layer, it doesn't fit very well so it's not going to be the

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most effective. The most effective are, you know, the N95s and kn95s that have high filtration and a tight fit. From there surgical masks are the next best because they are multiple layers and good fit. Ultimately it needs to have at least two or three layers and it needs to fit snugly on your face. Some people are advocating for wearing two masks. It's not critical that you wear two masks, but if you have only single layer masks, two is better than one. But again, it's about the layers and the fit. And ultimately finding one that is comfortable and that you are willing to wear. A mask is better than no mask, so things like comfort and fit make a difference in the ability to wear them for long periods of time.

[9:57:57 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you.

>> Thank you for that. Am I back?

>> Mayor Adler: Yes.

>> Okay. Just a very quick request. That slide with the flow chart is helpful, if we could make sure that's on our website, I think a lot of people would find that of interest.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember pool.

>> Pool: Thanks. No questions today. Just a huge debt of gratitude one more time to our staff who are here today. And in addition, especially to the ones whose faces we're not seeing here today. This isn't easy. We've been at it for almost a year. There's plenty of people in the community who would like to criticize or take pot shots or say things about motivations, or the work being done. And I just want to lay down a really strong foundation to say that the work that's being done

[9:58:59 AM]

by the city and the county here, and our employees, has been phenomenal. It has been diligent. And it's continued. And especially the good attitudes that you all project, the calm reassurance, I think more than anything -- well, actually, the calm reassurance plus those graphs with the trend bending downward are what our community wants to see. And that will lift our spirits and push us over the finish line. So that's it for me today. Just a heartfelt and genuine thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember Kelly.

>> Kelly: Thank you, Dr. Escott and director hayden-howard for all the work that you're doing.

[9:59:59 AM]

I echo councilmember pool's sentiments. My question changes gears a little bit. My understanding is that the Travis county sheriff's office reported its highest new covid-19 case count to date among inmates at the jail, 49 cases, 46 last week, thankfully nothing serious. I also understand that quarantine is single-capacity cells on one floor and all new inmates are held in single-occupancy cells from 10-44 days when they enter a facility. We know that isolation can be terrible for wellness, as well as we want to avoid the spread of covid. But can you speak to that choice choice of single-capacity cells in terms of an approach to inmate wellness, as well as the steps we're taking to ensure the health of that population?

>> Councilmember, the sheriff's department has a medical unit that has designed their policy.

[10:01:00 AM]

You know, we have consulted on it in the past, particularly the intake of new inmates and ensuring that we had appropriate -- or that they had appropriate quarantine precautions for that entry. I'm not aware of the specific details of how they're performing the remainder of their covid protections at this stage. I will say that I have been in discussions with the physician from the jail and we are working on a strategy for vaccinating so that we can avoid some of those challenges, particularly for the 1b inmates.

>> Kelly: Okay. Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember kitchen.

>> Kitchen: Yes, thank you. I do want to add my thanks to

[10:02:01 AM]

our staff. I want to thank director hayden-howard for the improvements that have been made to the registration system and the processes that she laid out today to help people over 80 in particular, and others to get an appointment. I have a question or two about that system. You know, we talked last week -- and this follows up on some questions from councilmember alter. You know, last week we talked about the increased functionality that ideally we would like to see from the system. And I'm hearing that some of those functionalities are being addressed. But I want to get straight at the issue of having to go online, as councilmember alter said, with, you know, 100,000 other people, or many, many hundreds of thousands of people to try to get an appointment on Tuesday and Thursday. It is certainly much better to specify Tuesday and Thursday.

[10:03:02 AM]

And I appreciate that. But it still is a very frustrating system for people. And so the last time we had asked about functionality to actually send people an email with an option. You know, with their appointment. And/or send them an email to sign up for an appointment, so there is a system about who get on to try to sign up. We had suggested reaching out to our technology leaders in the community who have offered to help with that functionality. So -- and the other reason for that is that there just has to be a better way than all those people having to go on on Tuesday and Thursday. And I have to tell you that maybe this is in the works, but it is not happening yet, based on conversations I've had with people in the last few days. They are not getting an email that tells them it's time to

[10:04:03 AM]

sign up. So maybe that's a new functionality that's going to be occurring next week or in the next few days, but I have to tell you, it is not happening now. So my question to you, director hayden-howard, is, are we working towards -- is the city working towards the functionality so that when people get registered they receive an email that says here is your appointment, and they do not have to go on and compete with hundreds of thousands of other people to try to get an appointment? Are we working on that functionality?

>> We are not working on that functionality. What we have put in place is the ability to make sure that we're able to schedule folks. They do receive an automatic email that says that your

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registration has been approved, and you're eligible to register. In addition to receiving that email, staff has sent out emails. But as I have seen in other settings, is that email is sent out. And when that email is sent out, it's ahead of, you know, everyone knowing that the portal is available. But what we have found

is, is that there are people that, of course, are not on their email like that. And so that is why we have implemented the call center, because we feel like that that's going to be a way to be able to proactively call folks that would like to be called, and would like to go ahead and schedule that appointment. And so they will be called.

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And our folks are able to have a timestamp of when they registered. And so that is how we're going to be addressing the folks and having the county to help us in that way. That is going to allow us to be able to one, we like the ability of giving a person a choice where someone proactively calls you, and have that conversation with you about scheduling an appointment. And that way you can pick the time that works best for you. We have reached out to -- and I want to thank mayor Adler. He did provide me information last week. And there is a meeting on Thursday with an external consultant to talk with them about the platform. And so we will -- our I.T. Folks will have that conversation. But we have to have a system that one, gives people a choice,

[10:07:09 AM]

because some seniors -- a lot of them may depend on someone else to drive them there. As well as making sure that that date is going to work for them. We have a very low no-show rate, and we want to keep it that way, because it's based upon choice. And so we feel more comfortable with people having choice of when their appointment is.

>> Okay. One quick followup. So, if I'm understanding correctly, there are two ways to get an appointment going forward. The thinking is two ways to get an appointment going forward. You can go online and register on Tuesday or Thursday, and get an appointment that way, you know, if you happen to get online earlier and ahead of everybody else. Second, you'll get a phone call. Some number of people will get a phone call with an appointment, but not everybody will.

[10:08:10 AM]

And those people that will get a phone call are the older ones. Did you say over 80, I think? So am I understanding correctly that going forward, the intent is these two ways. And there is no intent to make it easier for folks so that they don't have to go on on Tuesday and Thursday and compete for a spot with hundreds of thousands of other people? I do agree with what you're saying, director hayden-howard, about choices. But I'm wondering why we aren't just calling everybody and setting up appointments, and/or, you know, instead of having people still have to go through the frustration to schedule times on

Tuesday and Thursdays, to try, and then most of them won't be able to get it. So, did I understand that correctly, that there are two

[10:09:11 AM]

routes. Some number of people will get phone calls with choices of appointments, and those will be the older folks, and everyone else will have to try to -- on Tuesdays and Thursdays will have to try with everyone else to get an appointment. Did I understand that correctly?

>> Yes. That is correct. Because if we have 12,000 appointments a week, if we're not using technology to assist us, then I'm going to have to have a significant amount of people making those calls. And so we make adjustments, kind of, based upon the call volume and the questions that are occurring, and looking at how we need to increase the number of folks that are answering calls, that are returning calls, that are providing technical assistance. But we know that even though the

[10:10:13 AM]

system has had many challenges, the system has helped us to successfully provide 12,000 vaccines a week. And so we have to acknowledge that it has done some good. We continue to make updates. We will be meeting with the external consultant to see what they may be able to offer us. And we'll continue to work on it as we move along.

>> Kitchen: Okay. My last question -- thank you. I recognize that there's continued improvements. I just want us to be the best that we can, because of the city that we are in, and to help our residents with the frustration they're experiencing now. So, thank you very much, and I'm glad to hear that you will be meeting later this week. And I would ask you to talk to them about the possibility of a technology solution that would

[10:11:13 AM]

allow that functionality so that people don't have to go on, you know. And thank you for the just twice a week now. That helps. But so that people don't have to go on and compete with hundreds of thousands of other people and try to get their appointment. Thank you very much, and appreciate the improvements that have been made so far. The system has done some good, there's no question about that. The question is simply how do we be the best we possibly can with the functionality of this system. Thank you for what you're going to be doing later in the week, and thank y'all for the work that you've done so far.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you, councilmember kitchen. Councilmember Casar.

>> Casar: Mayor, my question was very similar to those raised by others, and so I think just reemphasizing that if there's anything the council or the commissioners court can do to keep leading into making the website as accessible as possible, the system as

[10:12:14 AM]

transparent as possible, and more workable, please do let us know, because I think you've laid out here what many of the challenges are. But we continue to hear frustration and challenges from folks trying to access that system. So, please do let us know what else can be done to make it as easy to use of a website as possible, given all of the constraints.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Thank you. Councilmember Renteria, any questions? Get the microphone closer. It's on, just try to get it clear.

>> Renteria: My line of question is like Ann's. I have friends that are taking care of their spouse at home, not trusting nursing homes. And they've been having some frustration on calling in.

[10:13:16 AM]

You've already addressed that question. But I just wanted to know, how would these people -- what's your recommendation on how they are going to be able to get a vaccine shot, especially if they have someone that's disabled or not able to move and be transported out of the house?

>> The mobile vaccination teams will be able to provide those services to folks at home. And so once we get ready to activate that, we will make sure to send that information out to both bodies, so you will have that information of how to get in the queue to get that service provided at home.

>> Renteria: Okay. That sounds really great. Do they call -- I mean, they've -- I have one friend who called and he couldn't get in last week. And I was just wondering, is

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there a special number that you're going to set aside for the people that have problems and need a mobile van coming to their site?

>> Yes. We will -- it will have its own number that we're going to use, yes.

>> Renteria: Okay. Thank you for that. I appreciate the office getting that word out as soon as you establish that.

>> Okay. Thank you.

>> Renteria: Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember Fuentes.

>> Fuentes: Thank you, and good morning. A couple of questions. And I did want to make a comment. I believe commissioner Gomez raised the 311 call line as a resource for our community. And I did want to flag that it was brought to my attention today that the covid information that is provided on 311 in the open queue is only available in English. It is not available in Spanish. And so I realize that that falls under -- it's my understanding, under Austin energy. My office is reaching out to

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Austin energy to request that the information also be translated in Spanish for those who do call 311. But to the extent possible, if aph can help us in thinking about the entry points amongst our department, that our community is relying on our going to for covid information, that we're being equitable in how we present the administration -- information on those different channels. I realize there are many. I hope the plan addresses that. The other comment really quick, I just want to make. You mentioned that the montopolis testing center is closed, in addition to gibbons and walnut creek library. For those who are watching this or watch this later, where would they go to get a covid test? What would be the next location for them?

>> The dove springs location remains open. The lark center off of airport and 12th is open.

[10:16:24 AM]

And the drive-through site at St. John's is open. And then the fultonville location is open as well. And so the at-home testing remains available. And so we just have a flyer. And folks can just schedule that. And so we can make sure that you all have that updated flyer with that information. Those are the locations for testing.

>> Fuentes: And so my main question is around the call center. You know, my understanding, we had about 15 operators on our end from the public health department helping answering the call. But with the call center that we entered into an agreement with the county, how many -- how much does that scale our call operations? And also, in other words, how many operators would that add, potentially? And then are we still directing people to that same nursing

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hotline? And then the other sub-question is, I just want to make a distinction from the line of questioning from councilmember kitchen. For this new call outbound center that we have with the county, should it go through, we're saying that the call center folks will be calling individuals who are 80 years old and over. But earlier I thought I heard they're calling based on voicemails that they get. Is there a distinction of -- will there be a list of all 80-year-olds and over in Travis county and they proactively call that list, or is it we need to be directing 80-year-old or senior residents to call that number and leave a voicemail so that they get the call back to make the appointment?

>> Our goal is to be proactive. There's going to be a few things happening. The individuals that are registered and are eligible --

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so that's the 188,000 people, which is about 11,000 of them that are 80 years of age and older. So basically, folks are going to look at who's registered in the system and be able to start calling them back. But we're also going to look at, you know, if they've already registered, when did they register so we can start calling them back. And that's going to happen through the county site. And that will most likely -- when they start to return calls to some folks, I imagine some of those are going to be people that are 80 years of age and older. And so they'll be able to do that as well. We'll still have our nurse line that will still be up and running. Our hope is is that as we work out all of the technology issues, that line will be used

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the way it is intended to be used, for folks that don't have access to the internet, and that are disproportionately impacted by covid. So that team will continue to do that work as well. And then we have some folks that are also making some other proactive calls. So there's 20 people from the county that will be added. And then we're looking at -- the conversations that we've had with 311, they felt like we really need to get to about 45 people on a daily basis. So the goal is to get to that 45 based on the recommendations from 311.

>> Fuentes: Okay. And so how can we help support you in getting to that 45 call

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operators?

>> Well, I have reassigned some folks in Austin public health as the last slide showed. You know, there are going to be some things that, you know, we're going to have to delay that we're doing as a

department, because this is the priority. And so we are reassigning folks and looking at areas in addition to that. We're looking at, as most of you may know, about 30% of the folks in the department are funded by a grant. We're going to be reaching out to determine how can we rotate them into the response and not have that penalty of using grant employees. So there is a couple of strategies that we're using in Austin public health. In addition to that, we've sent out a request through the city of Austin human resources department.

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Travis county health and human services, Sherri Fleming, has offered some staff. And so between all of that configuration of folks, we feel confident that we should be able to come up with the 45 people to have a daily presence from a call center perspective.

>> Fuentes: Okay. Thank you so much.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Mayor pro tem.

>> Thank you very much. I appreciate all this information, including all the fantastic questions from my colleagues, both at the county and here at the city. I honestly don't have very many more. Along the lines of the question that councilmember Fuentes asked, I'm just curious about the number, the age 80, how we arrived there. The distance between 65 and 80 is relatively large, so I'm curious how we arrived at the number 80 as a point of priority.

>> What we looked at is the

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people that have been dying in the system, going to the hospital, being on ventilators and icus. And so that was one of the reasons we're going with the age of 80, because the goal is to continue to drive down the volume of folks that appear in the hospital and that die. One of the things, as Dr. Escott shared earlier, we're looking at that data as it's trending. And we are starting to see younger people to show up in the hospitals and to die. And so 80 is the number as of today, but as we continue to watch that trend data and we start to look at how we're seeing other populations to be more severely impacted, it is

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subject to change. And so we're providing this today as a starting point just based upon the data that we've seen in the past. But as we continue to watch the data, and even looking at and thinking about

the variants that are probably already here in Travis county, these things are subject to change. But it is a starting point for us.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you. I appreciate that. And I'm really encouraged to hear some of the things y'all are addressing, much like most of the emails we're receiving is about that frustration, that lack of ability to really penetrate the system, frustration with the I.T. Component. I'm really happy to hear that it sounds like we're on our way to making progress there. And the calls -- I'd love to see that happening more. And, you know, some colleagues and I are, as you know, working towards some direct outreach

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initiatives. And so, really looking forward to being able to work with you more on that to see what that looks like. Thank you for all you do. We appreciate you very much.

>> Mayor Adler: Director hayden-howard, again, thank you for everything that you're doing. You have a mammoth task that you guys are dealing with, and again, at the end of the day, the mortality rate in Austin Travis county is one of the lowest in the country and if you're looking for a single point of measure that's really telling, the data that Dr. Escott just showed again -- while the trends follow similar lines, the area under the lines, which is the count of people that have died and gotten hurt is so much greater in other cities. So the bottom line -- everything is pointed to trying to make that number work. And we're doing really well here. So, thank you for your help with

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that. I do want to hit some of the, kind of, the tech questions, too. And I think that a majority of the council now has raised, kind of, I.T. As the primary concern that they have, because that's what we're hearing from people, as you might expect, as people are anxious to get the vaccine and there's not sufficient supply. Everybody's kind of dealing with those systems. Getting out the 12,000 is, bottom line, a really good number, assuming we're getting it to the right 12,000. If we're getting it out to absolutely the wrong 12,000, and getting out 12,000, then that isn't the right measure. I appreciate earlier in the week you said you thought by the end of this week we could get the demographic information. We have partial demographics for the first week, but we didn't have the addition of community care and people's and lone star. My understanding is that by the

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end of this week, we should have the demographics complete for the first week, as well as the demographics for the second and third tranches of 12,000. Is that still tracking to be able to have that for the community by the end of the week?

>> Yes. Definitely by Saturday, it should be available.

>> Mayor Adler: That's great, because I think when we see that information, that will either tell us we need to adjust what we're doing, or it'll tell us we are getting to the right people. I have some questions about that issue of getting it to the people that need it the most. So, the chart that you had that kind of had the triage thing, I think it's also a really good chart. That had three different areas where you had the green flag, okay, you're eligible. Do we prioritize those eligible for vaccines, or is everybody that has a green marker prioritized equally in our

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system?

>> The system is set up like we did for testing. And the way we did for testing is, is that we have points that are attributed. And so when folks go through and sign up, that's how we get to a place of who is potentially eligible. And so that is how they are prioritized. But it is very similar to what we did for testing.

>> Mayor Adler: When you open up the portal and say, okay, people can go sign up. And there's an email that goes out to people who are eligible. Does that email go out to everybody over 65, everybody that will have the comorbidities, everybody that -- one way or another gets to a

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green marker on that flowchart, do they all get the same email that says hey, there are appointments now available, go and sign up?

>> No. It does not go -- it would not go to 188,000 people. They would not receive -- the email typically goes to the folks that have the highest weight, that appear to be in a position where they are either disproportionately impacted, and we see them in the hospitalization data, as well as being positive for covid.

>> Mayor Adler: So in a week like this where we have 12,000 vaccines, do you know about how many people will get an email that says you can go online now, or go online and get an appointment?

>> No, I can't answer that question.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay.

>> I don't have that information.

>> Mayor Adler: That's okay. Just to know that universally, I think would be helpful for the community to understand.

[10:29:41 AM]

Because they're eligible but they're eligible but not getting an email, so being able to tell them we're sending it to the people who need it the most. Just having a feel for the universe of people that get those would be helpful. That's one way we do that. How long before the signup for the actual appointment does that email go out to people that says hey, you can go on and get it?

>> We send it out two hours before. And the goal is -- our hope is that they would be looking at their email, but, you know, we are concerned that they are probably not looking at their email. And so there has to be an additional step in the process where folks are reaching out to them to schedule.

>> Mayor Adler: And I appreciate that. And that appears to be the call system plus your staff reaching out. That's where we focus on the people over 80. Of the people that get the

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email, are we calling all of those people, or are we only calling some of those people that got the email that said hey, in two hours you should go online?

>> We are not calling all of them, because that would be quite a few people to call. The calls are more intentional to folks that have said to our folks that they have not been able to. It is based on information from folks that are partnering with us that are out there that are trying to assist them with enrollment and to be on the system.

>> Mayor Adler: So it appears as if two different groups of people are getting a call two hours ahead of time. One are the people that scored the highest, people over 80 that have the most points. They're getting a call that says hey, you just got an email, we're following up on that email

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and saying in two hours you need to go on in. And then the other group that are getting called are the people that are high-risk, vulnerable people, but have said we're having difficulty getting registered. They get a call that says we understand you're having difficulty, we're going to register you and help you get an appointment while we have you here on the phone, because you're not having the ability to be able to do that. So, having a feel for the kind of universe, the numbers that you're reaching in both those would be helpful information for us to be able to explain to the community what it is that's happening. When we open -- so I'd appreciate that information. That two hours later, do you know about how long that portal's open before the 12,000 appointments are taken?

>> So, we do not put all 12,000

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appointments out at a time. The reason why we selected a Tuesday and a Thursday is because, you know, we schedule so many appointments on a Tuesday and Wednesday, we have to take inventory of the vaccine that is left. And then from there, more appointments are put out. What we have been seeing is that those appointments are pretty much -- they're filled within a couple of hours.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. So they get two hours notice. They get a call. There's a two-hour block when they're able to be able to get in. That's also helpful. The last question I have goes to the access issue with respect to homebound people. And I think you addressed it. A couple people have raised

[10:33:45 AM]

that. I noticed that San Antonio announced that they got a special 1,000-vaccine allotment dedicated to homebound folks that they're administering with their mobile unit. And they're using meals on wheels to help identify who the homebound people are. I don't know if that thousand is coming out of their allotment otherwise, or if the state is experimenting now with a special allotment for homebound. That's how the mayor made it sound, but he didn't quite say that expressly. So, please check on that, because I know we're struggling to get as much supply as we can. That's really the answer. Do you know when you anticipate activating our homebound delivery? And then how do we identify the

[10:34:47 AM]

people that we'll be offering that homebound service to?

>> So, we are anticipating to be able to set that up no later than the end of the month, for it to be fully functioning. And so the goal is is that we're really trying to make sure ahead of time that we're having conversations, working with our commission for seniors. There are several nonprofit organizations that are going to be working with us, sending us lists. We did meet with the city of Austin housing authority. They have identified five properties that they have and the number of residents there. We do need to get that information from Travis county as well, so we'll have that universe of folks. In addition to that, we have

[10:35:51 AM]

partners as they are working with folks. They are keeping a list of folks that they typically provide services to. And they will be able to refer in to us. We will also be working with our park and recreation department as well, because they have a senior program. And then lastly, our hope is is that once we have a flyer available, we will put that out to the public so the information is out there and they are able to schedule, so we can start providing those services.

>> Mayor Adler: Great. Thank you. If there's anything that we can do to speed up that process sooner than the 28 days from now or 20 days from now to get that done, that's a prime group of people that are among our most vulnerable. So, anything we can do to help push that along, let us know.

[10:36:54 AM]

Judge brown, I will turn it back over to you.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you, mayor. We will go to commissioner Gomez.

>> Gomez: I'm very interested in seeing also that that service be provided, because we are getting calls from people who are disabled, and even children who are disabled who would probably be in that vulnerable group. So I'm very much interested in staying in touch on that. Thank you.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you, commissioner Gomez. Commissioner Shea.

>> Shea: Will the tuesday/thursday signup start today, or this coming Thursday? When does it start?

>> It starts today.

>> Shea: So --

>> Moving forward.

>> Shea: I do share several concerns that have been raised about the potential for essentially, this creating a

[10:37:54 AM]

bottleneck, because we're narrowing down to just two days when people can sign up. But if people have trouble getting through on the registration, should they call the 311 number so that they get on this list that will get called back, or what number is it that they should call if they're having trouble?

>> Right now we are saying 311, because what they will do is generate a service call. And then they will send that over to public health. They send that over to our staff every day.

>> Shea: Okay. Perfect. That's very helpful, because what I'm hearing and I think a number of people have also expressed is, people aren't even getting an acknowledgment that their registration has been received, and so they go for a long time not even knowing if they're on the list. So I'll certainly

communicate that once you've registered, if you think you've gone through all the steps properly but you're not getting any sign,

[10:38:54 AM]

recognition, or acknowledgment that your registration has been successfully entered into the system, you should call 311. And that seems to me like the only way they're going to be certain that they get in the system. I don't know why we can't send some kind of acknowledgment email back letting people know whether or not they successfully registered. That at least would answer a major question that you're getting.

>> They should be receiving an email back to them, because that closes the loop to let you know you have completed your registration, and you are eligible to schedule an appointment.

>> Shea: So if they don't get an email acknowledging that right away, they should call 311 because they're not successfully registered. Would that be a correct assumption?

>> That would be a correct assumption. If they are not receiving that email.

[10:39:55 AM]

>> Shea: Okay. Thank you.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. Commissioner Travillion.

>> Travillion: I'm just interested in watching the call center build-out. I want to know how people can be helped. You know, I've got 80-year-old relatives and they're not going to tinker on a computer, but they will make a call. And they need some help walking through. So I'm interested in the call center, how it's set up, and what our expectations are. So I think that we are moving in the right direction in that discussion. I just want to understand more clearly how do advise people to use it, where to tell them to go, and how they can be sure that they're engaged.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. And that will be also on -- once we shift back to the regular commissioners court, we'll talk about that more in a little more detail on that. Commissioner Howard.

>> Howard: Thank you. I just want to throw out the

[10:40:55 AM]

idea that once the call center has some experience under its belt, maybe we can merge the concepts of the phone bank with the leadership of the call center to utilize volunteers to really maximize the messaging. Thank you.

>> Judge Brown: Thanks. Two things. One, from our I.T. Department, it sounds like if you're outside of the city of Austin, I don't believe you can actually call 311. You can however call 512-974-2000 and that will get you, I believe, to the same place. Commissioner Shea, one addenda for people outside of the city limits. And for Austin public health, you know, I first want so thank you so much for the good work, and happy that we've been able to consistently get out 12,000 vaccines a week. I especially want to say thank you to Dr. Escott for your science-based, fearless approach

[10:41:55 AM]

to this entire covid pandemic. You have saved lives. I want to thank you for that. From listening to the group of local elected leaders today, it's pretty clear to me that we're getting very similar feedback across the city, across the county, hearing similar requests and frankly, some complaints about this process. I think that the process is so reflective of many problems that people have with accessing healthcare in our community. I would just ask again -- and I think it seems like the general consensus today is to ask again that you continue to look at ways to increase equity in the process, whether it's working to make the website function better, like councilmember kitchen laid out so effectively, making it send direct appointments to people so that they're not scrambling to sign up on the website, making the vaccine locations more accessible by maybe looking at increasing hours so that people who have to work during the day can get a vaccines in the

[10:42:56 AM]

evenings. Using the call center, which I'm very excited about. I want to thank Dana debeauvoir for helping set that up. And using that and other mechanisms of outreach to call people and reach out to people in each category who are the hardest hit. If we're calling people 80 and over, can we call people within that category who are Latino, black, who live in the hardest-hit zip codes and where healthcare is less accessible and make sure that they're getting extra outreach from all of our collective efforts. And with all of this, you know, again, just making sure that you are working on a plan to increase capacity in a very large way. I hoped that president Biden's goal of hitting 100 million doses in the first one Hyundais 100 days willcome true. To get there, we'll have to shift to a drive-through model so we can have though mass vaccinations, and maybe look at gearing up to giving out 12,000

[10:43:57 AM]

vaccines in one day, maybe. Maybe we do into the evening or a 24-hour model to make it more accessible. We have great options at the expo center and other locations, and I would love to continue working with you and everybody on making sure that we have a plan to ramp up the vaccines in a very large way, like they've done successfully in Denver at coors field, for example. But I want to end by saying thank you again. I know you all are working extremely hard at this and really appreciate director hayden-howard and Dr. Escott, and your entire team. Thank you so much. And I will pass it back to you, mayor.

>> Mayor

>> Mayor Adler: Judge. Thank you. I'll go through our list again. Councilmember alter.

>> Alter: Thank you. I had two quick questions. We've been talking about

[10:44:58 AM]

Austin public health has on hub in our 12,000, but my sense is there were other providers that received vaccines above and beyond that hub. What can you tell us about the broader availability in the community. Are there second doses or also just first doses?

>> Dr. Escott: There were a couple of other entities that received vaccine this week. One was the U.T. Health, Dell medical school, received 1950 doses. Community care was the other partners to receive doses. Beyond that, there really wasn't other providers that received that. Councilmember, I'll point out there is a new website that is co-hosted by the Texas division of emergency management and the Texas department of health

[10:46:00 AM]

services that's an interactive map much improved from the initial version. It has Rodriguez dots where there is not vaccine but providers, blue dots fires doses available and white dots are hubs. Each one of the dots has the name of the location, the address and the website link to sign up for vaccine. So that's the best and most up to date dashboard for determining other places that may have vaccine availability.

>> Alter: Thank you. And then my other question goes back to we have among our most vulnerable populations, we don't have the digital access or digital literacy for the system that we've set up. It's my understanding that even with the call center, the first group that's going to be called are the 3400 folks who are 80-plus who have registered. And that's a doable number

[10:47:01 AM]

given the numbers we're having to get through and to help those people. But then we have the whole host of group of people who are homebound who are 80 plus who don't have somebody able to navigate the system to get them registered who are not able to follow up on email and go through the system. And I know that my conversations we've talked about several ways that we could identify some of those people using some of the partners that are out there, recognizing also that not everyone who is in that situation is working with meals on wheels or drive a senior or elder care. But how are we -- is the call center going to work with people who are not yet registered? Can we just clarify that?

>> Hayden-howard: The goal

[10:48:01 AM]

with the call center will be separate from the group that is working to reach out to folks that don't have access to internet. The 972-5650 number is the dedicated line that is for people that don't have access to the internet. And so our goal is is that, you know, we're shifting people from calling that number and being able to use it as it's intended to be used. So in the meantime, we have partners that are sending us information of folks that don't have access to the internet that our folks are calling. So all of this is kind of happening all together. So that's where we get to the place of the 45. Because we have people at the county working on the list from a registration

[10:49:03 AM]

perspective, we have to have our folks that are able to answer the 972-5650 for folks that don't have access to the internet.

>> Alter: And that's all happening through the same call center?

>> Hayden-howard: Yes. Yes, it's --

>> Alter: So all of those things are happening from the same group of people to different streams. You'll have some people who are working on calling folks in your high priority group for whatever week you are in because hopefully we'll get through this first batch, and they are calling people who have registered and helping them to get to their appointments who have been identified in the highest priority group, and then there are the folks who are getting people who are having trouble registering via the internet to do so via phone either because they've reached out and said they are having trouble or because groups have identified we have these seniors that need help. Is that correct?

>> Hayden-howard: And they are not just -- they are not

[10:50:05 AM]

just seniors. They are people who don't have access to the internet. So they don't have to be over 80 years of age. They are just individuals that don't have this kind of access.

>> Alter: Thank you for the clarification.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember tovo.

>> Tovo: Thanks to our staff and thank you to colleagues at the commissioners court as well as on the dais. I think the questions today have really been very helpful. Manager, last week I asked -- I think it was last week we asked that we get in our offices specific contacts for different kinds of issues, and I'm going to reiterate that request. It would have been helpful in today's email to council we had a specific contact for website challenges that our constituents are facing, a specific contact for to whom we should send names of constituents who are without

[10:51:05 AM]

be among that group that staff are calling. A particular contact for feedback on 311. I know councilmember Fuentes said she is in touch with ae about 311. We have sent our 311 feedback from constituents to other city staff. You know, it is not at all efficient for me to be forwarding some of these really particular technical issues that constituents are experience to go director haden-howard. That's not a good use of her time. If we could get that information within a day, even if it's three or four very specific issue areas, that would be helpful. I know all of the various particular information from our constituents about when I plug in X, I get into this loop and then the appointments are available, or I'm getting this particular -- I think that if we could forward on as the improvements are made to the website and to our call

[10:52:08 AM]

response system, I think this particular really specific information would be of help. And along those lines, as several of my colleagues have mentioned we do have offers from our tech sector to be of assistance in this, and if I could note to forward those too, that would be really helpful. I want to thank the constituents. Not all of us can access the registration system as one of my colleagues said earlier, so those constituents to write out their path and explain what the happening when they hit certain buttons, it is really valuable and I want to make sure that fact and the suggestions we're receiving and the offers of tech help are making its way to the right system. This is an enormous challenge to our city. I appreciate the frustration many of our community are experiencing but would echo this has been an enormous challenge and I appreciate

[10:53:08 AM]

the work of Austin public health, I hope they are being supported by our ctrm staff and the other talented folks at the city and county.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. I think it's councilmember Ellis. Do you have a question?

>> Ellis: Thank you, mayor. I wanted at more information about how people working in restaurants or retail might end up in the flow chart. We know the first responders obviously need to be high on the list, but there's a lot of people that need to interact with the public that may not be able to stay home and I wonder how they factor into the time line.

>> Dr. Escott: Councilmember, the state has not designated a 1c list like the CDC has. We expect for that to come out in the next several weeks. Once they do that and specify groups that fall

[10:54:08 AM]

into that category, then we will transition plans or adopt those new plans and focus on some of those essential workers. Right now, essential workers who are a part of the 1b can sign up, and we are hopeful that we are getting through some of those. I think in future weeks we are going to be working on plans with some of the various industries to begin to sort out how best to meet the needs of those particular groups, particularly ones that may have large numbers of 1b individuals now who are eligible. So that will be a work in progress and we're hopeful that the various industries will work together with us to ensure that we have plans to reach out to each of those groups.

>> Ellis: Thank you. I know there's a lot of folks that aren't necessarily medical workers but are helping to keep our

[10:55:09 AM]

city going, helping to ensure we have what we need to stay home. Thanks.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember pool.

>> Pool: Thanks. Just my appreciation again to all the folks who are continuing to work really diligently. I noticed I question I had raised last week about how are we getting to stay on the home seniors, people with disabilities who may not otherwise be able to get out to one of our vaccination sites, how are we getting to them and sounds like we have a plan for that and I think that's a pretty good pattern. We raise questions in these sessions and shortly after they are raised they are either answered or we know staff are working diligently nod to solve the additional challenges we are confronted with. Just again a very strong appreciation for everybody including all the communities within our community for your diligence

[10:56:10 AM]

in following what the recommendations are and also for the patience and the determination that you also are exhibiting in order to keep yourself and your family and friends healthy and safe.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember Kelly.

>> Kelly: I don't have any further questions. Thank you very much for all the hard work that you are doing. I'm very thankful to be included in the conversation and I know that the community is also thankful for being able to hear more insight on how aph is working on this critical time. Thanks.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember kitchen.

>> Kitchen: Thank you. I have one follow-up question that I wanted to ask, and this relates to the -- our health care workers who are caregivers

[10:57:11 AM]

in the community with elderly and people who need additional assistance living in their homes. And could you just speak to where they are in the priority list and the extent to which they may be included at some point in -- and the efforts to call and reach out to people.

>> Dr. Escott: Go ahead, Stephanie.

>> Hayden-howard: We want to just share with you, councilmember kitchen, that the folks that are at home, that are providing services to a senior are considered 1a. And so it's important for them to reach out to us because we want to get them scheduled. One of the things that we did talk with one of the agencies about is is once we start the mobile process,

[10:58:12 AM]

they are going to count the number of -- this was a conversation I had with haca, they are going to count the number of caregivers that they have that are working with the seniors that are disabled and/or seniors living in their properties, and they are going to give us a count of those people. And so that way when we come out to provide the vaccine, if the caregiver is there, we'll go ahead and provide the vaccine to them and the caregiver. But they are considered to be 1a.

>> Kitchen: Thank you. One quick follow-up. So that's how the -- what if the caregiver is not there at that location at that time? You know, a lot of seniors may have more than one caregiver, particularly if they

are a senior living in home that need care fairly honor in some cases even 24 hours. Is there a process for

[10:59:14 AM]

connecting with the caregivers, all the caregivers that a senior may have, or perhaps a process for connecting with the services that, you know, that caregivers work for and then are connected to seniors? What's the thinking in that instance?

>> Hayden-howard: What I would suggest is is that caregiver, if they are either hired by that senior or they work with an agency, that they will just either they can definitely set up an account with us. That would be fine for them to do. If they don't have the access to the internet, we would just ask them to call 311 and someone will call them back. Because it's going to be a little difficult for us to, you know, besides the agencies that have folks that they are providing

[11:00:15 AM]

services to at home, receiving that information is going to be, you know, proactive part of what we're working on, but it's going to be important for the individuals that fit into that criteria that they also reach out to seek the service of the vaccine.

>> Kitchen: Okay, so it sounds like for a caregiver in that situation, the most ex per -- expeditious way is reach out to the person they are giving care to, but 311 should they call? Who should they call?

>> Hayden-howard: They can register on the system and go through that process or they can call 311 and ask for a call-back and say I am a caregiver, I fall into the 1a category. And then that information will come to us and our staff can call them back. So those are the two proactive ways that I would

[11:01:16 AM]

suggest that -- because otherwise we are going to be getting that information from the partners, but this would allow to make sure there is not a gap in the process.

>> Kitchen: Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember Casar.

>> Casar: I have some follow-up questions from your conversation with the mayor earlier, director.

>> Hayden-howard: It sounds like there's 10,000 to 11,000 people over 80 and registered and you are calling those people. Can you clarify are you calling and registering them for appointment or just letting them know appointments are going to open up soon?

>> Hayden-howard: So that process has not began. That process is going to begin once the county approves for those folks to be able to do that. One, they are going to -- they are going to be using

[11:02:17 AM]

folks that are already in the system so they are already registered. And then we're going to offer them appointments. So they are going to offer them an appointment.

>> Casar: So you are going to get them signed up with a time. You call them with an answer and get them signed up with a time.

>> Hayden-howard: Yes.

>> Casar: And then the people who you are calling who are high risk who don't have internet access, you are calling and not scheduling them for appointment, but calling and getting them registered into the system.

>> Hayden-howard: So we're doing both. We're calling them and we're registering them. And at the time when we call them if there are appointments available, we will go ahead and schedule them. So it's a combination of both.

>> Casar: Great. Thank you. That makes good sense to me. Thank you. And then the group of people who isn't all 180,000 but a smaller group of people that have the highest points, you

[11:03:17 AM]

send them an email on Tuesdays and Thursdays right before the appointments open up. And those people, if they get on in time after seeing the email, can register for a -- or schedule an appointment and then other people who are part of that 188,000 can also log in on Tuesdays and Thursdays and amongst all those folks they try to get those appointments. Is that how --

>> Hayden-howard: Yes.

>> Casar: So the point system, who gets the email, but all 188,000 can log in on Tuesdays and Thursdays and try to get an appointment or is it some of those 188,000 cannot log in and get an appointment because they -- although they qualify, they don't have as many points? Tell me if I need to make that question more clear. It made sense in my head, but --

>> Hayden-howard: So it's a combination of things. I think the caution I have

[11:04:20 AM]

to just say blanketly is that we cannot restrict access. Once we start to restrict access, then the state of Texas has the potential to step in and we cannot receive the vaccines. So we have to create a process where -- where we have people that are eligible that they have a platform where they can sign on. What we have typically worked on is making sure that when we'll don't have access to the internet, that may even be working because they just don't have that kind of access and don't have that kind of time, being proactive in working with grass roots organizations to call them. And so what we're working on is just creating a balance of where emails are sent out earlier, calls are made proactively, so it's a combination of things. And that is the reason why

[11:05:21 AM]

we have to make sure that we have more folks to be able to make those outgoing calls.

>> Casar: Thank you, director. I think that's a really hard balance to strike but makes good sense once you lay it out why you are trying to do it. So on Tuesday and Thursday if you are phase 1a or 1b, you can try to sign up for a limited set of appointments, and then we are proactively reaching out to the highest risk people to both get them registered and to get them appointments the best that we can without restricting access on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

>> Hayden-howard: Absolutely.

>> Casar: Thank you.

>> Dr. Escott: Councilmember, I wanted to respond and say that there's a question earlier about I think it was from commissioner Travillion about churches and other groups getting involved. They don't have to wait to

[11:06:21 AM]

get involved. Now is the time to get involved. They all have lists of parishioners who are, you know, 65 and plus. Go down the list, call them, offer support, ask if they are registered, if not, help facilitate the registration process. There are so many groups that have worked together throughout this pandemic that's led to success and we can certainly do the same thing with the vaccination effort. So I would encourage, you know, you all, those community groups to start reaching out to those seniors in particular who may struggle with access and offer to help get them signed up.

>> Mayor Adler: Sorry. Councilmember Renteria. Do you have another

[11:07:22 AM]

question?

>> Renteria: Yes. That's interesting. I just -- director Escott, about these groups that are actually helping out. I know I've been getting emails and phone calls from the democratic party because they have the van list and they can see everyone's age. So how do they work? Do they just get the information or are they transmitting the -- telling the seniors on the ones that are qualified to call in or are they helping out with the registration?

>> Hayden-howard: So councilmember Renteria, I can actually answer that question. Basically when the party reached out and requested that they would call all registered voters that are ages of 65 years of age and older, starting with targeted zip codes to increase the awareness so

[11:08:24 AM]

they would know about how to sign up with Austin public health. So they made those calls and what they've done is if there was anyone -- let me take a step back. We provided a script for them as well as a thank you, and then from there if there were individuals that had more questions and wanted to touch base with Austin public health, they sent us a list of who those individuals are. And then from there our folks are going to start to call them and to determine exactly what they need.

>> Renteria: Thank you for letting me know that, and I really also wanted to give my thanks out to you and all your staff and Dr. Escott for all the work that you have been doing. So thank you.

>> Hayden-howard: I also wanted just to share that we did reach out to the

[11:09:27 AM]

Republican party as well. It had conversations with them. And so we're going to make sure that if there were folks that were not reached or may have not decided to answer the phone because they were being called by a Democrat, that they will be able to do the same kind of process and provide that information back to us as well.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember Fuentes.

>> Fuentes: Thank you. I think it might be helpful, director haden-howard to touch on the recent news our federal government would be dedicating to come help Texas in administering the vaccine. To the extent of knowledge that we're aware of, how that factors into our county, what can be our expectations around that as of today?

>> Hayden-howard: At our last meeting with the Texas department of state health

[11:10:28 AM]

services, what they shared with us at the time is that they are going to target areas that don't have as many either hub providers that are signed up or sites that are willing to provide the vaccine. And so that may be subject to change, as all of you may recall, currently the pflugerville site, even though Austin public health is coordinating that, that is done by the Texas department of emergency management at that site. And so we tend to have those types of partnerships even when we do have available services, and so we'll continue to work with the department of state health services and Texas department of emergency management on those efforts.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Mayor pro tem?

>> Harper-madison: Thank you, mayor.

[11:11:29 AM]

One of my concerns I actually brought up during a meeting with the folks from the community resilience trust, and in addition to that concern that I brought up which was around hearing impaired individuals, us having available materials and outreach training for folks who both either have hearing impairment and need somebody fluent in American sign language, but we extended that conversation to discuss folks who speak Spanish but also have a hearing impairment. I would like to ask questions about what accommodations we're making there but also recognize we have a substantially visually impaired population of folks and wondering what accommodations we have available for those folks as well.

>> Hayden-howard: So

>> So, we have started the process -- from an I.T. Perspective, we have been

[11:12:30 AM]

alerted and we know that there is a need from an Ada capacity for folks to be able to use the computer to make sure, you know, if they are visually impaired that the computer does make some type of notification to them. So, those are things that we are working with our Ada folks on in order to improve not only at the site, but also for the registration. So those things have been moved forward and our team is definitely working on that. What we are asking folks right now is we are still asking folks to call 311 to enter that information, and then from there when our folks call to schedule that person to go out, we will make note that either they have some type of disability and that

[11:13:31 AM]

they would need some additional assistance once they arrive to the site to provide that vaccine to them.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you. I appreciate that. I wonder if it would be prudent for us to create some working relationships with our colleagues at the schools for the blind and visually impaired and schools for the deaf, to have them help us make certain that we're reaching the populations of folks who may otherwise be left behind.

>> We have actually been working with them. We have actually provided them some vaccine, because as you know, they have a 1b population there. And so they have been within our priority population that we have addressed. And so we'll continue to work with them in the space of us providing services. So we can talk to them about that. But we have provided vaccines to them.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you. I appreciate that.

[11:14:35 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: It needs to be real quick, director hayden-howard. When somebody goes and registers, if they are under 65, do they get an email confirmation if they're registering but not eligible? I was unclear who got the automatic email after registration. Was it just people who registered and were eligible, say, over 65? Or was it everybody who registered, including someone in their 30s, say?

>> Because we are targeting -- according to the visual, the eligibility flowchart, the goal is to target people that are 50 years of age and older. And so that is who would receive the vaccine as being eligible.

>> Mayor Adler: That part I understand. I was trying -- I'm trying to level set the expectations of people in the community. Someone who is 30 years old can

[11:15:35 AM]

go to our system and register. They're not eligible. They're not going to be told to sign up. But they're in the system. And someday we will get to people who are 30 years old. Somebody who is over 65 also can go and register, but they're not only registered, but they're registered and eligible. You had said that when someone goes into our system, if they're properly registering and eligible, they receive an email confirmation that they're basically in the system, and they're eligible. That would be somebody, say, over 65. If someone was 30 or 40 without comorbidities, they can also register in our system. Isn't that correct?

>> They can register, but they will not receive an email that says that you are eligible to schedule an appointment.

>> Mayor Adler: Got it. So there's no confirming email for somebody who registers but is not eligible. So they shouldn't be waiting for

[11:16:37 AM]

one and if they don't get one, that does not mean they didn't successfully register, it just means they are not in the -- you know, verse of registered and eligible for a vaccine. I want to go back to judge brown's request and I'll join in that, just to have a decision made on the mass vaccination issue. I understand we're not presented with that yet, and hopefully we get to the place where we have 40,000 vaccines to give out. But the judge and I are continuing to get questions from people that just say what is the mass vaccination plan. I know that you have planned it generally, already in the work that's been done over the proceeding months as we got here. But I think the additional request from judge brown and me would be that you take a look at the available options to make the decision as to --Ed a this

[11:17:37 AM]

point, would it be at the exposition center, and would it be drive-through, and who would be logistically setting it up. In other words, I don't think it's going to create a lot more additional work, but just to be able to respond to the people to say if we got 40,000, this is our plan for execution. I think that plan and having that written down somewhere and having made those decisions would be helpful. Is that something that you think you could get?

>> As you know, we have the plans to be able to move that forward. We are working with a consultant that once we receive that information back from him and we combine those, and then we make the decision about where those locations are going to be. And so based upon the information back from the consultant, then we can provide that back to this -- these

[11:18:38 AM]

bodies.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you very much. Judge, I turn it back to you

>> Judge Brown: Thank you so much. So, that is all we've got. I think we're going to wrap things up here. And I have got -- in my script it says I turn it back to you. I may do that and let you end your meeting. Then I will come back here and end our meeting. I want to say thank you, mayor, and members of the

city council, and Dr. Escott and director hayden-howard. Thank you so much for everybody working together and all of your hard work. I know these extraordinary times in this pandemic, I just want to thank everybody for continuing to work together as a team. I really like this approach. Thank you for working hard.

>> Mayor Adler: Judge brown, I want to thank you and I want to thank the commissioners court on behalf of my colleagues on the council. It's actually good to hear the questions that the commissioners are also asking and you're asking. That helps not having to put Dr.

[11:19:41 AM]

Escott and director hayden-howard through this two days in a row repeating the same questions. It has now given them back an entire morning to actually spend on the virus itself. And that's where we want them to be. And frankly, this is one of those projects -- and there are many -- that the city and the county do together. So, coming together on those things that we do together is important, I think, just so the community can see how well we work together. I continue to read in the media other cities and counties, even around our state, that probably could not do what we're doing here right now. So, with that, thank you, judge. And I will adjourn the city council special called meeting today on February 2nd, 2021, here at 11:20. Our special called meeting for the purpose of getting a covid

[11:20:43 AM]

report. And with that, colleagues on the council, I'll see you in our work session later as we meet so that we can do that. All right, guys. Bye-bye.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. And -- >>> >> >>> >> >>>

[11:22:04 AM]

>>> E. >>> >> >>> >> >>> >> Tuesday, February 2, 2021, meeting of Austin city council work session.

[11:24:23 AM]

[Music].

[Music].

[11:32:18 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: We just finished our special called joint meeting work session with Travis county for the update on the virus pandemic. Now we'll move through our agenda. Colleagues, I think we're going to start with the briefing on the potential charter amendments with staff. That will probably get us close to lunch. If we're able to, we might try to pick up item 8 on chamber funding and 32 and 49 if we can or not. But then we'll break for lunch at about noon. We will come back after lunch probably into executive session to discuss legal matters and the may 2021 election in executive session and then any pulled items. Ann, I think you were

leaving at about 3:00? >> Kitchen: Yeah.

[11:33:23 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: Did you have anything on one of those?

>> Kitchen: It sounds like we might get to it in time. I wanted an opportunity to speak to item 49 before 3:00.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. We'll make sure we try that. Manager, why don't you introduce the briefing.

>> Good morning. We have one briefing this morning. That is on the petitions for the potential charter amendments and our legal department has prepared the presentation and so I'm going to first turn it over to our city attorney to introduce her team. Ann?

>> Thank you. Ashley Goshier is going to present the presentation and it will be the high level factual information about the various petitions. She's joined by Caroline Webster who is also an election expert. And then Lee Crawford and Chris Coppola who are both

[11:34:24 AM]

in our public safety general counsel group are here to answer questions about the firefighter union's petition regarding bargaining and the petition about the sitting and lying in certain areas, camping and solicitation. So if Ashley is there she can take it away.

>> Good morning. Thank you, Ann, for that introduction. I will go ahead and get started. As Ann noted, we're going to do an overview of the petitions that we received. Next slide. So the city attorney's office has received three citizen initiated petitions. I'm going to present these in the order that we received them, which is here on the slide. The first two are both proposed charter amendments. The first one is from Austin

[indiscernible] For Progressive reform and the other from the Austin firefighter's association. And the third one is from save Austin now, but it is a petition under our city charter for referendum and

[11:35:26 AM]

it initiates an ordinance. The first two the clerk has completed the review of and both of the petitions are valid. The third one from save Austin now is still pending. Jumping into the first petition that is from austinites for Progressive reform, the purpose is amend the charter in several days. This is an eye level overview for the changes that it would make. The first one would be to change the election date for electing the mayor. The next would be to require rate choice moving in city elections if that's allowed by state law. It would change the form of city government from council and manager to mayor and council, and it would change the current paid finance program with democracy dollars which is a different type of finance program. Next slide. So the first item is changing the mayoral

[11:36:27 AM]

elections schedule. The charter petition would provide that the mayoral election would coincide with the general election in November years for presidential. This would be a change from the current mayoral schedule which elects the mayor during the mayor gubernatorial elections and provides a transition period so that the mayor elected in 22 must serve a two-year term and the mayor-elect in 2024 and the mayors after that would serve a four-year term. Next slide. So moving to the next piece of this petition, which is the ranked choice voting. It would allow voters to rank up to five candidates per office in an election. The first place votes would be candidate and if the candidate in that first round receives a majority of the first place vote that candidate is the winner. If there's not a candidate that wins after the first round, a tabulation will continue until there is a winner.

[11:37:27 AM]

Rank choice voting for eliminate the need for a subsequent runoff election. Next slide. So a brief explanation of the tabulation rounds. If there wasn't a majority winner after the first place votes were counted, the candidate with the lowest number of votes would be eliminated. And then those ballots that rank the eliminated candidate first would be retabulated and those voters' second place choice would be added to the vote totals. And that would continue until there was a winner. So after the second round votes were tabulated if there was a majority winner, the tabulation would stop. If there wasn't it would continue. Next slide. So moving to the next part of this petition, which would change the form of government to mayor and council, as a high level overview this change would lead to city council continuing to be an 11-member body, but it would require the creation of a new 11th council district.

[11:38:28 AM]

The mayor would be elected from the city at large and would become the chief executive and administrative officer. The mayor would no longer be a member of council, but would have veto authority over council legislative actions. And then with regards to the position of city manager it would eliminate that position. And the petition language envisions this to be effective after the 2022 election. Next slide. So city council as I noted, the independent citizens redistricting commission would redraw the council districts and draw an 11th council district. It would create a president of council position, a president of council would be the person that would preside over council meetings. And then of course council would pass all legislation, but it would be up to the mayor to veto. Next slide.

[11:39:28 AM]

And then the mayor would become the head of city government for official and ceremonial officials and it's similar to what's in our charter now for the city manager. The mayor would be responsible for administering the city government, he or she would hire and direct the city workforce, subject to civil service rules. They would prepare the budget and submit that to council. And also prepare financial reports and advise the council on such finances. Next slide. So for ordinances in a mayor and council form of government, council would continue to pass all ordinances, however, the mayor could approve or veto the ordinance within 10 days. If there's no action, then the ordinance is defective, meaning if the mayor neither signs it or actually takes affirmative action, the ordinance doesn't become effective. Council may override the veto within 45 days after receiving the veto at the first meeting after the veto

[11:40:30 AM]

veto. The veto would require a two-thirds vote of council, which is eight members, or require a three-fourths of council, which is nine members, if the ordinance required a two-thirds vote. Next slide. So this is just a chart overview of what the change in terms of appointments. The city clerk and city auditor would not change. The city council currently appoints those positions and will continue to do that. The city attorney would change. Currently the city attorney is appointed by the city manager. It would change to the mayor appointing the city attorney with confirmation by council and the city attorney could be removed by the mayor or by two-thirds vote of council. In regards to the director of finance, human resources, planning, growth management and land development, all which are specifically set out in our charter, the appointment authority would shift from the city manager to the mayor as well as

[11:41:31 AM]

other department mayors, that would shift from the city manager to the mayor. Next slide. And then on this slide it's a continuation of appointments for municipal court judges and the clerk. The current appointing authority is city council. That would change to the mayor with a confirmation from council and then they could be removed by the mayor and also with confirmation of council. The planning commission has 13 members appointed by council now. That would change to 11 being appointed by council and two by the mayor. And then the municipal civil service commission -- municipal civil service commission could not change. The city council would continue to appoint members of that body. Next slide. So the last component of this commission is democracy dollars. So the petition would repeal the current fair campaign finance program that the city has and would replace it again with this kind of

[11:42:31 AM]

campaign finance program, which would require the city clerk to mail 25-dollar vouchers to all registered voters within the city before every city general election. The clerk would mail up to two vouchers per election per voter, one for city council and then one for mayor if those offices are on the ballot. And then the voters could then contribute those vouchers to a city council or mayoral candidate of their choice if that candidate has chosen to participate in the program. Next slide. So candidates may receive democracy dollar contributions only if they agree to participate in the program, which means they have to qualify by receiving at least two times the number of signatures required to be placed on the ballot and by receiving at least 150 contributions. And they must also agree to accept certain conditions on their campaign, which are that they will not solicit funds on behalf of a pac, political party or an

[11:43:32 AM]

independent -- an expenditure entity. They must also agree to participate in three debates and limit contributions. The aggregate limits would be 300,000 for mayoral race or runoff and 200,000 for council race or runoff. It does not prohibit sources from other advisors. Next slide. So now moving to the second petition that was filed at the city clerk's office is the petition from the Austin firefighters association. The purpose of this petition would be to add a new provision to the city charter which would create a binding arbitration process for labor contract negotiations between the city and afa. If negotiations were to reach an impasse it permits either the city or afa to

[11:44:33 AM]

demand [indiscernible] If contract negotiations are not completed within the 60 days. It would provide that the arbitration would occur before a three-member panel. The arbitration panel would make the final binding decision on all issues. And then finally, the petition establishes a timetable of

[indiscernible]. Next slide. And now moving into the last petition that's been filed with the clerk's office, which is from save Austin now. The purpose of this petition would be to replace the current city code provisions on counting. Obstruction of the downtown area with city code provisions that were in place before passage of the June 2019 ordinance on camping, solicitation and sitting or lying on public sidewalks. One exception it expands the area where sitting, lying is prohibited. And the next slide shows a

[11:45:34 AM]

map of that area. Next slide, please. So in regards to camping, the proposed ordinance and the petition would prohibit camping in public areas not designated as a camping area by the Austin parks and recreation department. Next slide. And the petition would also prohibit aggressive solicitation or solicitation in certain areas or during certain times, which may be on buses or bus stations or similar transportation facilities within 25 feet of an atm or financial institution, at a crosswalk, near school entrances or exits, at sidewalk cafes or patio areas at bars and restaurants. And finally, it prohibits solicitation in the city of Austin from seven A.M. until seven P.M. And then it would prohibit sitting or lying down in a right-of-way on or sleeping outdoors in areas of downtown and around the

[11:46:35 AM]

university of Texas campus. Next slide. And then here is a map that showcases the ordinance that the city of Austin had prior to June of 2019, the light gray area, which is the current restrictive arithmetic the petition would expand that area to include the dark gray area which goes up around the university of Texas campus, up to 38th street. And then a little bit further east, it looks like around [indiscernible] And that area around manor. So that is the last slide that we have on the petition petition. Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions that council may have.

>> Mayor Adler: Colleagues, any questions from this presentation? Councilmember Ellis.

>> Ellis: Thank you, mayor. I might have more after a few more people have a chance to ask questions, but

[11:47:36 AM]

as far as the rank choice voting there is a cause about state laws and universities that would apply, is that correct?

>> There is a provision in the petition that says it would come into effect if it is allowed by state law. State law does not currently allow rank choice voting so there would need to be a change so the step could I am -- the city of Austin could implement that part of the provision if it were approved by voters.

>> Ellis: Thank you T.

>> Mayor Adler: Colleagues, any other questions? Councilmember pool?

>> Are we still allowed to put that on the ballot or is there not that ability because it violates state law?

>> It's an administrative ability to put it on the voters and the petition center that language in there that says if allowed by state law and by the

[11:48:36 AM]

language itself it seems -- petitioner seems to have envisioned it would only come into effect once it was allowed by state law so I think it would be idle until if and when it was allowed by state law if it's approved.

>> Pool: Gotcha. And on the mayoral veto within 45 days of an ordinance passing or resolution passing, are we still bound -- it would take eight or nine councilmembers to overcome a mayor's veto within the 45 days. But those eight or nine people wouldn't be able to confer or discuss their objections, right? Because we would still be limited to quorum rules so that only five people at the most could ever talk about a particular action.

>> Correct, the Texas open meetings act would still apply to discussions among

[11:49:38 AM]

councilmembers.

>> Mayor Adler: Colleagues, anything else? Councilmember tovo APD then councilmember kitchen.

>> Tovo: Thank you. I actually have quite a few questions about the petitions and I'm not sure whether we have the time allocated today to have them them, have a full conversation about it. So I hope we will have another opportunity as well. A couple of quick questions, though, about the -- what would be just a huge transformation of our governmental structure to a strong mayor system. This is a conversation that I really would not want to undertake without really extensive community conversations and clearly that has not transpired in the way it would ordinarily have happened because of the pandemic. And typically these are conversations that the city has a role in and we usually have a charter review commission comprised of

[11:50:38 AM]

different volunteers who really have an opportunity to talk and to hear public testimony and ask questions of staff and get information. So that's one of the reasons that I'm really asking for an additional opportunity to talk about this before the council makes a determination of when to put it on the ballot and has that careful vote about what the ballot language is. So as I understand your presentation and the really quick quick review I've been able to do of the changes, I mean, in a way this creates creates -- this creates a -- one way to think about this role is that the city manager -- the mayor is like the city manager but has a veto power over the council's actions because

[11:51:40 AM]

the mayor would be would be standing in a place where the city manager is currently in terms of making departmental departments but also implementing and managing the whole operation of the city. Are there additional -- that's quite a changed role for the mayor, and for an elected position it calls on a lot of qualifications that would be critical to doing that job well. Does this charter amendment contain any qualifications for people running for mayor and can you help us understand what those are, if so?

>> The petition language does not change the eligibility requirements for mayor. It will continue to be having resided in the city within the last six months and in the state for the the

[11:52:41 AM]

last 12 months. I can check that, but it would maintain those eligibility requirements.

>> Tovo: Are there other eligibility requirements for those who serve as mayor? It's important for me to have those conversations without thinking about our current mayor who has an enormous array of skills, so do I just want to make that point -- so I just want to make that point. And it's important to have the conversation with thinking about the city manager, Spencer cronk, who has an enormous array of skills. As we discuss this in the community, I will encourage those who talk to me about it to really think about it not with specific individuals in mind, but -- and whether or not you're pleased with the job they're doing, but really with an eye how towards how this would completely transform our system. So currently -- so you're saying that there are no new qualifications being added in for this strong mayor system. What are the current

[11:53:42 AM]

qualifications? Are there others other than the one you mentioned about residency? Are there particular expertise or professional training or background that would be required for somebody who seeks to run for that position.

>> There are not in the other additional requirements. I think we would have to evaluate this is the petitions and this would have to go on the ballot if it were happening in the future. It would require the state law and other city charters to explain if other qualifications could be added because some cities have flexibility in terms of qualifications for candidates but there is also some state law requirements there.

>> Tovo: Thank you. I think I will submit through the q&a or maybe I can say it here on the dais, I would be interested to know -- to just have attached to this presentation a list of the

[11:54:43 AM]

current qualifications for mayor and some sense of the professional organizations of what kind of qualifications are -- what kind of qualifications are typically required for city manager of a city this size. And perhaps one way to get at that would be to look at some of the job requirements that we require in our job search for our current city manager since we did that one fairly recently,. I think that would get a help of what requirements are typically asked for. So the mayoral veto would be significantly different from this city in how we typically bring forward acts of legislation. So currently the council can bring forward an ordinance or resolution. As I understand it if this passes the mayor would have a veto right over ordinance

[11:55:44 AM]

ordinances. Would the same be true of resolutions?

>> There is not a veto authority provided in this over resolutions, just ordinances.

>> Tovo: Is it any ordinance brought forward by staff or councilmembers?

>> I'm not sure if I understand your question. It would be any ordinance enacted by city council. It does include in a number of locations that council has to act by ordinance. I'm not -- it seems to take away some ability for resolution. It seems that council would become a legislative body that would enact by ordinance and direct the mayor to implement the requirement of the ordinances passed by council and the mayor has veto authority of those ordinances.

>> Tovo: I'm sorry, I'm not completely understanding that. So your suggestion -- it may

[11:56:45 AM]

be a point that that I need to explore with you offline. But the fact of the matter is that even if something starts with a resolution it comes back to the council as an ordinance. So it would be at that point that the mayor would have veto ability. So for an example, one of the things I'm doing in evaluating this proposal is to think not just about this current council, but how on previous -- in previous councils the mayor has, for example, not supported changes to the chapter 380 agreements that required -- to require a living wage. So in that case I believe the council was making those changes to the chapter 380 agreement and the living wage -- and adding a living wage requirement and that would happen in ordinance. So if the council voted

[11:57:46 AM]

affirmatively for that, the mayor would then have an opportunity to veto it. Is that correct? If this passes?

>> Correct.

>> Tovo: And does the mayor -- I didn't see this, but I may have missed it. Does the mayor have to -- are there any parameters under which that veto can happen? For example, does it need to be something that's unconstitutional or illegal or too expensive? Are there any guidelines for when that mayor would have the ability to issue a veto?

>> The petition does not contain any limitations, it just provides a right for the mayor to veto an ordinance passed by council.

>> Tovo: Okay.

>> He does here she does have to provide a Visa for the veto but there is not a requirement, there be certain parameters in exercising the veto. Okay. So and I think you said it with those words. There are no limitations for that veto. The mayor can in essence veto any acts of council.

[11:58:47 AM]

>>

>> Thank you.

>> You're welcome.

>> Mayor Adler: Ann.

>> Mayor Adler: And then Vanessa.

>> Kitchen: Thank you, my questions relate to the policy budget, is done under the strong mayor proposal, my understanding is, if I understand correctly the mayor prepares the budget and how does it work from there?

>> In looking at the petition it looks very similar to how it would work to the -- currently with the city manager, the petition would amend the powers and duties of the city manager and change that. So it would appear that, you know, generally it is kind of substituted, city manager is substituted for mayor. I don't know if you have a specific question about that but it just provides the mayor would prepare budget annually,? It it to the council and be responsible for its administrator after adoption.

>> How does it work with regard

[11:59:47 AM]

to the vetoes and how does it work with regard to the direction --, you know, when do we the budget a lot of times we also include where the budget, we adopt the budget and also include directions sometimes to staff, to city staff on how he want them to implement a particular program or other things like that. So can you -- it may be a question for the city manager or to you, from legal I am not sure who the appropriate person is who can answer that.

>> You know, we can think about that and get back with you with an answer, you know. I believe since the mayor is the chief administrator and executive in this petition, you know, I think there would be an evaluation over council's ability to instruct the mayor and how that

[12:00:48 PM]

would work in different times. So think I it is probably a topic by topic question that city law and all of us would look at if the voters were to approve this. I will leave it at that if anybody has anything to add.

>> Teich: That's something I would --

>> Kitchen: That's something I would like to to check into further. Thank you. I was going to add councilmember what Ashley said is correct, essentially the manager is replaced by the mayor so everything about the budget process would be similar to how it is now except it 2015 mayor doing it the rather that the city manager.

>> Kitchen: So that brings up the question if the mayor has veto power over certain items and there is a direction related to something the mayor had vetoed O may want to Veno the future I would like to understand how that works in the budget. I will ask more specific questions, but I have some

[12:01:48 PM]

concerns about that related to the budget. I have one other question, if it is okay to continue, mayor.

>> Mayor Adler: Well, let's get back and get some other people here.

>> Kitchen: Okay.

>> Mayor Adler: Vanessa.

>> Thank you, mayor. Councilmember kitchen I think you and I are on the same wavelength. My questions are on the budget. This is the budget process, the timeline determined by our city charter or does the city manager currently, in effect, if it moved to a strong mayor system would the mayor have the authority to change the timing of when we adopt the budget?

>> There are some state law requirements about the budget process, so those would still be in place after that, and then it would be within your court.

>> So proposed changes to the fiscal year, so the budget would work on the same schedule as it is now?

>> But would the mayor then have the authority to move it damage

[12:02:49 PM]

I am just trying to think of the consequences and, you know, what we see in the state legislature is that the governor issues his veto after the legislature gavel out so in effect you don't have a quorum to be able to over-ride governor's veto, and is my understanding that council takes a break in July to tone down other duties and so, in effect, the mayor could then strategically veto items at a time when council is not meeting, so I am curious if the budget -- so I am thinking if they could move the budget process to a different time.

>> I think we will get back to you in a more detailed way. I will just echo what Angela said a lot of the budget is dictated by deadline and state law which the mayor could not change, if they were -- implemented so I think generally you would operate on the same

[12:03:50 PM]

kind of schedule we have now, plus specific to council's calendar, how that would work, and have to think about it and get back to you.

>> Fuentes: And just so I am super clear, the state when municipalities adopt the budget that is governed by state law; is that correct?

>> There are time trails that we have to meet to operate within state law, so particularly if we are going to change our tax rate we have to provide that information to the comptroller, so I will, you know -- I

don't think there is a specific day we have to adopt the budget but uh we have to run on a certain cycle to meet all of those deadlines by state law by informing the things -- we had a tight election in November and we of course had to have the budget done so we could call

[indiscernible] Meet certain requirements [indiscernible]

>> Fuentes: Gotcha. Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay.

[12:04:50 PM]

Alison.

>> Alter: Thank you. I have several questions, but first I just wanted to clarify, I wasn't sure if you closed the loop. Can the mayor veto budget?

>> There is a limit in the petition on the mayor being able to veto the budget so I believe

--

>> Alter: The budget is considered an ordinance under that so if the council hoped to go to the voters with a tax rate election, which is time sensitive and the mayor vetoed it, would then veto also the action to go to the tax rate election sorry that not an ordinance?

>> Repeat last part of your question. I am sorry.

>> Alter: I am trying to understand given the questions that councilperson Fuentes asked, given the way we have to call an election for a tax rate election if the mayor were to veto the budget and the budget called for a tax rate election, I am not advocating I am just trying to work through the different pieces, would the mayor, would he be able to veto

[12:05:54 PM]

the tax rate election and the budget? Effectively? Because we have to do it within

-- normally we would be doing that budget decision within a couple of days from when we would have to call a --

>> I think this is also a question we would have to think about and get back to you and it requires some legal analysis. Let you know budget calendar is set by state law so I think that echoes what I just said there are certain end points we have to meet to be able to comply with state law, in terms of ordering the election, you know, we also have to economy with state law in terms of the deadline to order an election, so I think, you know, that would probably --

>> Alter: What I am saying is, given we have that deadline and we don't pass the budget until say a week before that deadline, then the mayor, if she were to veto that, then you would have the opportunity for the mayor to prevent us from choosing to provide that opportunity to the voters?

[12:06:54 PM]

Because you couldn't do it -- you might not be able to call an election -- you may be, you may not even be able to call a meeting within the time remain for a veto.

>> I understand your question, right because you have to provide notice under the open meetings act so the answer to those questions, councilmember alter is you are correct, that veto could prevent the election, I think we would have to build in time frames to plan for any kind of consequence that could happen.

>> Alter: Thank you. And then under current law, state law, constrains the ability of the city manager with respect to certain appointments, particularly the chief of police. Can you detail what those constraints are from state law with respect to the chief of police and would any of that change by moving to a strong mayor system?

[12:07:56 PM]

>> -- Go ahead.

>> Good morning, mayor and council, Lee Crawford here, in answer to your question, councilmember alter, the law provides the chief of police actually serves in the role of police chief at the pleasure of the chief executive, who is currently the city manager and who would be the mayor if this charter amendment were adopted, if the chief of police is removed by the chief executive and the chief of police under the state law has the right to return to the same classification, typically assistant chief but maybe not, that the chief police held in the police department before he or she was appointed police chief, or alternatively, if the chief executive wished to sort of completely terminate employment of the police chief as a member of the city workforce, in other words, not return to the position that you came from, but examine it the police department, this ten can chief of police has the right under state law to go through a

[12:08:57 PM]

civil service hearing, just as a regular police officer would have the right to appeal a disciplinary action through civil service system. So that's the current law and nothing in this petition would affect that,

because that's a matter of state law that is not controlled by her charter. The only thing that petition would do is be to change the role of the chief executive from city manager to the mayor.

>> Alter: Okay. If you could provide me and follow-up, as follow-up the legalese around that.

>> The statute?

>> Alter: The statute that would be great.

>> Absolutely.

>> Alter: So there is another part of this I don't know if we are just doing one section of the initiatives or if we are talking about others but one to me that seems intimately linked write is switch, which is the switch to the presidential years for the mayoral election, as I read it there is nothing in here that determines whether or not

[12:09:58 PM]

the mayor, should she choose to, could pursue three terms or not, so I mean, switch to 10-1, we may it so that the folks who got the two-year short straw were able to do ten years. Is that in operation for the mayoral proposal here?

>> The petition doesn't contain language similar to the transition of the -- that had the, you know -- that drew the two career term to pursue another term. That's not in this petition.

>> Alter: So would there still be a two term term limit. I think that also would be something we have to think about. They do carry over the term limit language that provides they cannot serve more than two terms without having the petition. I the I that that would have to be something we would look at to determine whether that language would apply to the two-year term plus a four-year term or if it would be two-year term plus --

[12:10:59 PM]

>> Alter: I am struggling a little bit given the context of term limit what used your actual accountability is with the mayor in his or her second term when, you know, it is pretty challenging to get those petitions. It just doesn't seem like there is any accountability, given the amount that we would be delegating. And then can you tell us under 10-1, when 10 -- venue cousins suited a choice was made to put mayoral in nonpresident year so there was higher turnout for the council elections in the nonpresidential years and I am concerned request the way this shakes out then you have council elections for five offices that will always be where there is less turnout where the other ones will have a whole lot more turnout and it kind of -- it is not a very level playing field across the ten or 11, so can you tell us a little bit about under

[12:12:01 PM]

10-1 why the choice was made and that may be more a question on the -- that committee, I don't know they have sat question for legal or councilmember kitchen.

>> I will defer to other councilmember kitchen, something to add I was not here during the 10-1 transition process so I will tell you what was in the ordinance but I don't know if I have all of the background information.

>> Well, that is good question, councilmember alter, all I can really say at the moment is that the intent of the commission and the intent of 10-1, and in fact both of the provisions that were put on the by the council was to allow for greater presentation and try to do what was possible to allow for greater representation across the whole city and I the basic point of 10-1. >>

>> Mayor Adler: Okay.

[12:13:01 PM]

Colleagues? Pia.

>> You hear me, mayor?

>> Mayor Adler: Yes. Go ahead.

>> Renteria: I want to know, if we have the election here in may and it passes will the first election for the new mayor the, would it be under the strong mayor the first two years or do you need to go through a process of trying determine when would bit implemented?

>> The way the petition is laid out is that if the selection was held in may it envisions that redistricting commission would then start work on regrowing the

-- to include 11 councilmember districts and then strong mayor would be implemented after November 22 election that following January, when the mayor was sworn in. So strong mayor would start in

[12:14:01 PM]

January of 2023.

>> Renteria: Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Colleagues, anything else on this topic before we break? Kathie and then Ann.

>> I have another comment on the budget questions about the budget. So I just want to be sure I am understanding what you saying, because we adopt the budget the council adopts the budget as an

ordinance, any changes to that budget would also be subject to the mayoral veto and again as I am trying to think through, you know, when a mayor has been in a different position from the council, I am reflecting back on the year that -- the year that the affordable housing bonds failed and some of those projects weren't going forward and there was a midyear budget amendment because there was some surplus funding and \$10 million was allocated to affordable

[12:15:03 PM]

housing so those projects that had thought they were going to get bond funds were able to continue and those were supported by the council, but not -- so that because that is happening that kind of a budget amendment either during the budget process or during a midyear budget process, it is happening via an ordinance, I would assume those kinds of -- those kinds of changes are also subject to mayoral veto; is that correct?

>> I don't see any language in the petition that would exclude any type of ordinance to be excluded from the veto authority. As I said before, you know, I think if the voters were to approve this measure and implement strong mayor I think there would be a process in this department and other city employees would have to look and try to figure out exactly how that would work. I don't know that I can answer every question but there is nothing in petition that limits the authority to a specific kind of ordinance.

>> Tovo: Because you were

[12:16:03 PM]

saying in exchange with can councilmember kitchen the mayor presents the budget but it is very likely and common and always happens that council makes amendments to that budget, maybe shifting some funds around or adds money or in the example I described if there is a middier budget process we will make allocations out of that and so those would -- those would be opportunities for the council to respond to constituents and make changes to that, that those two would be subject to the mayoral

--

>> Including a budget ordinance

-- I have a couple of questions about the democracy dollars, but if there are other questions on the strong mayor, I will defer those for the moment.

>> Mayor Adler: Ann?

>> Kitchen: I want to talk for a minute about the relationship between councilmembers and staff, particularly, you know, directors and a assistant city manager, right now, we -- the council as a whole holds our city manager accountable.

[12:17:04 PM]

My understanding is that under strong mayor that is the role of the mayor, in terms of holding staff accountable and is not the role of the council; is that correct?

>> The petition does provide that mayor would become the chief executive and administrator similar to the role of the city manager now and

--

>> Kitchen: I am sorry, go ahead.

>> And would oversee the city --

>> So the city council doesn't have a mechanism for holding the mayor accountable for the actions of staff or administrative actions? Is that right. >>

>> I don't -- I think -- think similar to now, there are limitations on -- I will defer on that question and go back. I want to make sure and look through this one more time so let me think about that and get

[12:18:04 PM]

back to you.

>> Kitchen: Okay. That's one of my concerns, because as the system is right now, as the system of government works now, councilpersons have the opportunity to work directly with our administrative functions, directly with our city manager and we have enjoyed a relationships that are collaborative with our assistant city managers, with our directors and with others on our staff, which allows us to really represent our constituents, most directly with constituents who are having difficulties with particular issues. So I am concerned about a system that is set up such that councilpersons would have to go through the mayor's office and not have that direct access. So after you get a chance to review I would like to understand exactly how that works. That appears to be the situation to me and I am not seeing how the council as a whole could hold an elected official

[12:19:06 PM]

accountable and not be blocked from working directly with staff. Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember alter.

>> Alter: I wanted to build on a comment that councilmember tovo made earlier about the normalcy charter process, so if legal could speak to how we ordinarily handle charter amendments in terms of developing those and the process and then also, you know, if any of these ordinance changes passes what that means for our future ability to go through that kind of broader process.

>> Sure. Historically, let me back up and say the Texas local government code provides that a charter can be amended in one of two ways. Either city council can place an item on the ballot or there can be a petition process wherein citizen accounts collect signature as a petition to police a Charter amendment on the

[12:20:07 PM]

ballot. When city council placed an amendment on the ballot, council has created a charter review commission. I am not sure how many we have had but I know we recently had one in 2018 and I know there was one that was -- during the 2012 transition and the charter is usually created by city council with some direction on what they would like the charter review commission to review and look at and address and come up with proposals for charter amendments. So that is essentially the approach of the city. And then I think what you are also asking about origin of the Texas constitution which provides city charter which cannot be amended more often than two years, so that means that if there is an election this may of 2021, the city's charter couldn't be amended again until may of 2023, at that judge consider, so it precludes, you know, multiple charter amendments during those temporary -- those two-year

[12:21:10 PM]

intervals.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Councilmember pool. Approximately pool thanks.

>> Pool: Thanks. .. It sounds like in the strong mayor proposal the mayor is a legislator; is that right? And the action of vetoing ordinances?

>> Subscribed to the mayor as chief administrator and executive, however the petition doesn't also provide the mayor with veto authority.

>> Okay. So -- and the sea toe -- veto authority would rest generally with the legislative branch, is that right?

>> You know, I don't know if there is an answer to that, there are certainly -- with the executive branch that are out there. So I think that would be something we would have to think about in terms of how the branches of government work.

>> Pool: If I am remembering right one of the changes in the charter that were attached to the petition said that the mayor

[12:22:11 PM]

also would rule on appeals from employees?

>> I did not see that but that will be somethingly add to look. I know that there is a civil service process would remain --

>> Pool: Yes. It strikes out city manager and inserts mayor as the arbiter on appeals from employees at the end.

>> It is near the end. Okay. So that's the judicial branch so we have covered the legislative branch potentially, judicial branch, and then as the administrator he is the chief executive which is what you were talking about previously, which I think is pretty much understood. It sounds to me like we have effectively collapsed or conflated the three separate branches of government which are pretty much a basic tenet and hallmark of our particular form

[12:23:12 PM]

of democracy in the united States. And I am not asking you to answer that, obviously that is the interpretation that I am putting on this, which is what is waving some pretty significant red flags to me about this proposal. Along with the fact that I can't find -- many if any people in my district who were consulted about this proposition, the petition to know exactly what was going on with it so I don't think that at least to the extent that my more central district of the city was engaged in participating, I don't think there was very god engagement certainly my district which votes pretty robustly as we saw the numbers we had about 45,000 people voting out of district

[12:24:13 PM]

7 just in the district 7 race in November, which, except for I think district ten probably eclipsed all of the other council districts that were on the ballot in November, of course that is a portion of the entire engagement because a lot of people were voting for president, and when we talk about the subset on the district. So I am really concern about the fact that there is coming from a small group of individuals that we didn't really reach out as broadly, certainly not in my part of the district where we would have seen that engagement, including they, right, as an elected official in those community conversations I have some other really no distinct concerns and skepticism about this proposal but I think I will just leave that there, the lack

[12:25:15 PM]

of broad-based community engagement and it looks like a collapsing of the three branches of the three separate branches of government into one really, really, really strong individual, and the wild swings in policy that could frankly happen if you remove and replace the mayor every four years you could have wild swings in policy with no true, with no through thread from one term to the next, and as we all know, it is the reliability and predictability of government and the lack of drama that moves our community forward. I continue to study proposal and I look forward to our conversations and our special called meeting but I have grave reservations about the proposal under the strong mayor.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay.

[12:26:16 PM]

Colleagues anything else before we break for lunch? Kathie?

>> Tovo: Thanks, sorry do circle back around to something else but the democracy dollars, I want to understand some of can you please help me understand what provisions of the fair finance campaign fund are repealed, I am looking over some of the correspondence we received over it and they have one rider points out that current fair campaign finance fund has a limitation on spend pictures a candidate can make from his or her own funds as well as an overall cap on the amount of expenditures they can make. Is that accurate based on your reading?

>> Yes. So this petition would repeal city code section 2211 through 2217 and the 2261 through 2265,

[12:27:16 PM]

so it would repeal all of the current -- finance provisions which would also include repealing those that you just mentioned about the limitations on expenditures and use of personal funds by the candidate.

>> Tovo: And it does not put any new ones in its place so there would be no limitation on the amount of funds of one's own funds?

>> Correct. >>

>> Tovo: Sphwiewt a campaign if they are receiving democracy dollars and there are no -- there are no caps on overall fund-raising? So you could get the democracy dollars and do as much fund-raising as you could for one to two? Right --

>> I don't see anything in this petition which would serve as an overall cap. There are -- limits in what a candidate can receive through the -- and I notice in the presentation it does provide that, you know, other contribution limits would have

[12:28:17 PM]

to be complied with, for example, currently I think with the adjusted cpi, mechanic can receive four, candidate can receive \$400 from an individual so that is still, that's in our city charter and different section of that, that would still be in existence but I don't see anything in the petition that would provide a cap on -- I think we are asking for total amount of dollars a candidate could raise, provided they complied with the other limits elsewhere in the charter code and within state law. So.

>> Tovo: Okay. Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Colleagues, anything else? Yes. Councilmember alter.

>> Alter: So the petition shows, chooses to move forward with this as a charter amendment rather than an ordinance change, but legally as we discussed this before, I think we just never got around to it with covid and everything else, we could move forward with a democracy dollars program via ordinance which then

[12:29:17 PM]

would make it much easier for us to amend it as needed and adjust it as we and as Seattle, et cetera learned about how this works, but the charter approach means that there is very little flexibility; is that correct?

>> In order to amend the charter it does require an election, council cannot amend the charter by action of council, so, yes, if this -- this is now -- to the people if this is adopted and the only way to amend this is through subsequent amendment election which can't happen for another two years plus.

>> Alter: And then how is this funded and how is it that they can put a charter amendment in that has financial implications or is it they are not allowed to put an ordinance forward that has financial implications but it is okay if it is in the charter?

>> Our city charter provides that the people cannot -- or initiate an ordinance that would require appropriation of city funds. This is a charter amendment so

[12:30:18 PM]

this is different so there is not a prohibition state law about, you know, putting forward an amendment that would require an appropriation. However, the local government code does require the fiscal impact be developed for this and included in the election notice, so voters will be able to see the potentially financial impact that are on the ballot.

>> Alter: Going back to my original question we could put forward, not at this point in time because it wouldn't substitute for the initiative, but were this to not pass we still would be able to put forward an ordinance that did the same thing, something similar, but with better rules, if we chose? And the voters declined? It.

>> I don't see a prohibition on council implementing a different kind of public finance program through ordinance. Currently, our current public finance ordinance, as long as it complied with the provisions in

[12:31:18 PM]

the city charter that are about campaign finance in article section 378.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Colleagues?

>> I just have a follow-up on Alison's.

>> Mayor Adler: Go ahead.

>> Ashley, then that ordinance change would then be subject to veto by the mayor?

>> If strong mayor is on the ballot and then it was voted in, you know, I guess if we are -- if we are thinking -- if democracy dollars were not to pass, strong mayor is passed, and then council wanted to implement its own version of democracy dollars, at that point, assuming those two things, then, yes, that is subject to veto.

>> Can the question veto override of a veto or that has never happened.

>> There is nothing in the provision that would provide for override of an override.

>> Okay. Thanks.

>> Sure.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember

[12:32:19 PM]

alter?

>> Alter: Are we going to have time either today or on Thursday in executive session to have some legal questions? Because I do have some legal questions about other petitions or petitions in general of the three.

>> It is our intent to do it in executive session today.

>> Alter: Okay. Great, thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: All right. So we are going to break for lunch. We will have an hour of that. You and Ann's concern of wanting to here let's come back at 1:30 to here and we will handle the remaining two - we will have both the pulled items and -- and then we will go into executive session and handle those things. So here at 12:30 2:00 we are going to be in recess until 1:30 and I will see you all back on this channel

[12:34:32 PM]

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[Lunch recess]

[12:45:54 PM]

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[Music].

[1:34:54 PM]

Matures we are back in --

>> Mayor Adler:, we are back in work session on February 2, 2021. We have three pulled and then we have an executive session. Alison, you pulled the first item, which is number 8.

>> Alter: We, thank you. I think I pulled it today to give my colleagues an update on the conversations that we've been having with staff over this item, and the direction that we are exploring. I hope that we will be able to post something tomorrow to give a head's up for Thursday, but I wanted to show some of the directions we are going. Again, I don't yet have language, I just heard back from staff with some specifics last night. So one of the things we're looking at is how the data should be updated that underlies the funding model.

[1:35:55 PM]

Some is tied to population and a lot of it is tied to data. So we want to look at providing some direction on how often they need to update the underlying data. And that is likely to align with when they are negotiating and executing new contracts. And we want to ensure if a new equity chamber is added comes jointly with the equity, non-equity chamber buckets and is not all coming out of the meca chamber's bucket so they have a lowering bucket all the time. So we would like to have funding from the city moving forward. I want to think through if there are some ways to provide bonus dollars for performance and incentives for measures. That's the one I'm not sure

[1:36:56 PM]

we'll be able to get to for Thursday or not. And finally I want to add an equity factor that is focused on language with the chambers. If you think about them meeting the needs of their members they need the ability to translate it into multiple languages, sometimes as many as 20 languages, and there's not a mechanism in the current funding model in my view that really captures that serious equity need that is there in order to be able to reach the populations that we are trying to help with this funding so we are going to be working with staff to prepare that language and when we have it we will post it as soon as we're able. And if we're not able to get it for Thursday then I would ask to postpone it for the next meeting.

>> Mayor Adler: Real quickly, staff, Paige needs to be brought over into this

[1:37:57 PM]

meeting. What was the piece, Alison, that you said you were going to have the wording for.

>> Alter: We're trying to figure out if there is a way to include in the model a way to have like bonus incentives for certain performance measures. The way that the funding model is set up is that the performance issues are all taken care of. And we're trying to figure out if the mechanism that would allow us to elevate our desire to have performance based funding included as well. It was not included in the base funding model with the logic being that you have different groups with different abilities and that's what you're trying to address so it's hard to hold them to the performance standards because the reason you're looking at it from that lens is because they may not have equal ability

[1:39:03 PM]

to reach the performance incentives, but even in what we've set out that are more aligned to their capacity and their needs for their community and more tailored, if there's a way to do performance incentives in there so that they have incentive for meeting additional needs in the community. That was not something that the consultant fully addressed and it was something that I know with my other colleagues who worked on this with me was something that we were hoping to find a way to include, but the

[indiscernible] Did not allow that in the basic funding model.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Any other comments on this item number 8? Hearing and seeing none, Kathie, Pio, speak up since I can't see you if you want to say anything. We will now go on to the next item.

[1:40:04 PM]

It is pulled by councilmembers Casar and kitchen, item 32. Councilmember Casar?

>> Casar:

>> Mayor, this is the item to create an independent forensics department. This is an important change for public safety and for community trust and as the city grappled with the lab being shut down and forensics we know how we need high quality forensics in our department so we don't have that again. And the city studies and national experts have pointed to Independence to hit the highest quality scientific standards, but then also an important step for community trust. Independence helps people trust that the lab will follow justice whenever it leads, exonerating people who are innocent and holding people who cause harm accountable. So the Independence part is

[1:41:04 PM]

really important. So I've posted an amendment on the city council message board and I appreciate several of our colleagues here who have supported this and make it really clear in the ordinance when we get had this 20 to have high quality science and follow justice is in accordance of any of the new department. I appreciate this work. I appreciate all the departments that have been working on this change because there have been so many folks at the city that have been working on it. I hope this can go on consent and wanted to offer on the message board for it to go that way. Wanted to raise that here in case folks had any questions.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Ann?

>> Kitchen: Thank you, councilmember Casar. I appreciate what you laid out and I agree with that. I just had a question for

[1:42:09 PM]

staff, an operational question. I think it might be timely to do that right now. This is a question related to -- we had an analysis and a report and some of that involved taking a look at what was done in Houston. And in Houston there were some advantages seen from using if fully independent model like a local government corporation. And so I wanted to ask our staff just to -- and we also had the advantage of, you know, talking with someone in our community now who actually did the start-up for the Houston one. So I'm wanting to ask, this brings forward a recommendation related to a department which I'm fine with, but my question is is there going to be continued consideration in the future of pursuing a local government corporation or a more independent model? Of course we have to be -- we would not want to do that unless we were able to

[1:43:10 PM]

address the concerns that our employees might have. Given the ability -- if we had the ability to address those concerns and maintain their wages and benefits, then I'd like to understand. So I'd like to understand what the staff's thinking was and if they foresee continued exploration of the potential for like an lgc or a more independent approach.

>> Thank you, councilmember, and I'm pass it over to acm Arrellano to provide further details. As you know we are a learning organization and we are constantly looking for ways to make sure that we are not only improving ourselves, but also providing further transparency and accountability to our community. And so the short answer to your question is, you know, we'll always be exploring those options no matter what action is taken on Thursday, but I'll let acm Arrellano to describe why we went forward with this

[1:44:10 PM]

recommendation at this time.

>> Thank you, city manager and good afternoon, mayor and council. Councilmember kitchen, the action that's before you this coming Thursday really is in the context of reimagining public safety and taking those steps that help to decouple a function that in many ways has been thought about over the past number of years. And really highlighted some of the work that was done by the quadrant center for the fair administration of justice when they looked gnat collaboration with city and county participants as well as how best to deliver services specific to the D.N.A. Lab services but applicable to forensic science services as well. And so in order for us to move expeditiously to create what the direction is that the council has provided for these kinds of services, we come forward with a recommendation for creating a separate department which achieves many of the

[1:45:11 PM]

recommendations and goals that have come out from the quantity rant report. As the city manager said, we are certainly open to looking at the onstream after we get past these number of actions that, again, carry out the council's will, related to how can we focus the police department on the law enforcement aspects, direct law enforcement aspects of a department. And, certainly, we'll take a look at whether or not it makes sense to further create a more independent organization in forensic science bureau as an L.G.C. For the time being, if I may, just briefly touch on the D.N.A. Lab. The D.N.A. Lab services will continue to be provided as they currently are in an outsourced provision of service, managed by the new forensic science department.

>> Kitchen: Okay, so it sounds

[1:46:12 PM]

like the -- that perhaps one of the considerations was to be able to move quickly, is that the -- is that what the thinking -- that the department approach offered that?

>> That's correct. Both quickly and at -- I would say, at no cost impact.

>> Kitchen: Okay. Well, I'm going to have more questions for you offline but that's what I wanted to understand. Thank you.

>> Certainly, question member.

>> Mayor Adler: To that point, re, this issue of the forensic lab became a real hot issue, much discussed, much top of mind, a couple years ago when we were dealing with the forensic lab associated with sexual assault cases. And there was discussion at that time and engagement with the prosecutor's office as well as them asking for an analysis of what it might look like to be

[1:47:14 PM]

not just independent within the framework of the city, but independent of the city. And we had that study done that analyzed each of those options but didn't make a recommendation. Just laid out that information. To the degree that the community wants to continue that conversation to Ann's point, the prosecutor's office or anyone else, we're still open for those communications. But in the meantime, pending those communications, we've taken steps to make that function. More dependent within the city structure and not taking any money out of public safety, and generally not changing the function or the personnel, but changing its reporting structure, is that correct?

>> It is correct.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Council member alter and then council member pool.

[1:48:15 PM]

>> Alter: Thank you. First, I wanted to just appreciate council member Casar's comments today and the comments on the message board and recognize the leadership that you have shown on the D.N.A. Lab and the forensics -- the forensics issues started before I joined on council and I have been very concerned, particularly with the D.N.A. Work. And I think that this is a really important next step. And the reason that I wanted to flag those comments is that I was struck in reading the back-up how little information there was about why we were embarking on this step. And I think that it is really important, the kind of background that has been added so far today, but just that the real value that is out there and recognized in the reseah for having a forensics lab independent, and I would ask that staff make sure that some of these reports that we have

[1:49:16 PM]

used -- some of the background material that were the basis for making this decision, be included in the back-up. Because as I read the R.C.A. There wasn't even really a recognition why this was important and what we were accomplishing in doing that. And moving forward as we have these conversations over reimagining public safety, you know, this is one that long created any action that we took in August with the desire of the council. And we have lots of material that support the direction that we'll be taking on Thursday. So I would ask that you take a step and make sure that some of that information is in the back-up and that moving forward we clearly articulate some of the rationales and the other things. I did have one question as well. We know that the city relies on grant funding to elevate and to expedite our forensic efforts, including the analysis of sexual assault kits, etc.

[1:50:18 PM]

And I wanted to understand what steps we're taking to make sure that in moving the forensics lab, we are ensuring the flow of those grants. I know that there are independent forensics departments around state, so I don't anticipate that it should be a problem, but I want to make sure that we have dotted our Is and crossed our Ts, since so much grant comes from there.

>> We have ensured that we continue to get the grants that are particularly related to forensic science services. The A.P.D. Grants manager that I work very closely with has reached out to our grantors to brief them on the actions that we are taking and I have received feedback, certainly, about things that

we need to make sure of. And in addition the law department as well has been looking very closely to make sure that we can continue to

[1:51:18 PM]

provide the forensic services that would then be eligible for these grants as well as being able to gain access to the ability to upload data, for instance, into the coda database and other functions that would continue, had they been still within the police department. So you can be rest assured that we have covered the basis in that regard and certainly we would keep our eyes open should any issues come forward.

>> Alter: Thank you, I appreciate that reassurance. Again, I think that is something as we go through the process of decoupling, we need to make sure that we're addressing. It's probably more straightforward in this case than it may be in other areas. And so we want to make sure that we are paying attention for that continuity of the flow of funds. Thank you.

>> Certainly.

>> Tovo: So I wanted to thank Greg for his suggest amendments

[1:52:18 PM]

and I think they read strong and I am supportive of adding those, making those amendments. And I wanted to press a little bit more on what Ann talked about, the Independence of the forensic sciences lab. I recognize that what we're doing here is taking the first step to move it all out of A.P.D., and kind of get our arms around what it's going to look like on the other hand more administratively independent leadership. But I would like to keeopen to the potential of making it entirely independent if, indeed, we find that additional layer of separation is a positive change. And also to keep Mr. Hawkeburg engaged and he's the fellow who headed up the first independent lab in Houston. He was a state rep, and he and Ann served together in the house in the early 2000s, which is

[1:53:19 PM]

also where I got to meet him. So his input was really helpful I thought and instructive. And I'd like to kind of keep him on board in case we realize that we need to have additional separation and create a completely independent forensics science lab. But I support the moves that we are making at this time. This is a huge step toward the reimagining and the first really concrete change that we can actually communicate and see in a chart in some instructional ways. I appreciate all of the work that staff has put

in so diligently to make this happen. So, thank you so much and I look forward to voting for this on Thursday.

>> Mayor Adler: Mckenzie.

>> Thank you for pulling this item for discussion and it's important to talk to the community why we support this important initiative. I too support it after talking with the police department. And they also agreed to my

[1:54:20 PM]

knowledge that this is something that needs to be done. I wanted to circle back for a moment though for something that you had spoken about council member Casar, about the integrity of the actual forensics work being done. Did we have any examples of where that wasn't completed because I'm new and I may not have been part of those discussions last year and I was hoping that maybe you could clarify for others who might not have been following that.

>> Thank you for the question, council member. Mayor, can I take that up?

>> Mayor Adler: Go ahead.

>> Thank you for the question. And a few years ago we did have real scientific challenges and issues at the D.N.A. Lab. There were leadership changes and there was reorganization and it was one of the key tasks that I know that A.C.M. Arrellano took up. And so it was a serious and a

[1:55:20 PM]

significant issue. Some of it dating back decades, some of it having to do with very specific scientific issues that were brought up by oversight agencies. But it's been a real -- a real challenge. And changing the structure in of itself does not in of itself solve those challenges, but many experts have said that this kind of structure where scientific leadership is not several layers down is one structural way that we can try to avoid some of those things coming up again.

>> Kelly: Thank you very much for clarifying that for everyone.

>> Casar: And I'd like to thank the council members for their support on the amendment and thank you council member, alter, for the context and for your work on these issues as soon as you got on the council, because I know that you have spent a lot of time on this. And I appreciate that. And council member kitchen and pool mentioning their work and looking at the Houston model and other models moving forward.

[1:56:23 PM]

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. We ready to move on to the next one? Let's go ahead and do that. Ann, item 49.

>> Kitchen: Thank you, and thank you, colleagues. On behalf of my co-sponsors, I wanted to just bring your attention to the corrected message board post that we put out with a fact sheet and some question-and-answers. The other thing to note is that that post lists amendments that we are bringing forward that should be posted by the end of the day. So I want to take just a minute to talk through with you and then I want to ask you if anyone is anticipating bringing any amendments or has some questions that we can answer right now. So just quickly, because I don't know how much bandwidth people have had to really think about this. As you know that this initiative

[1:57:25 PM]

is a strategy. It's something that we started talking about in 2019. But it's a strategy to immediately to connect people to housing, and then to create a path to permanent housing and then, of course, over time to eliminate the need for unsheltered camping in our city. And I want to emphasize something that's been one of the biggest questions that we've had about it and that's that the resolution does uphold the city's commitment to the decriminalization of homelessness. And it recognizes -- I'll get into more details in a minute. And it does -- but it does recognize that unsheltered camping is really not a sustainable solution for those experiencing homelessness. So what "Heal" does is that it recognizes that, you know, first off the emphasis is on connecting people to housing and creating that path to the department of housing and to

[1:58:26 PM]

providing the services that are needed for that. The services and the housing. But it does recognize that there are some places in our city that pose health and safety risks and that people are living unsheltered in unsafe situations. So the resolution -- the resolution also asks the city manager to come back to us. This is not for action on Thursday, but to come back to us in March to provide some strategies that we can discuss and think about. And an implementation plan for disallowing camping upon completion of the "Heal" initiative in these locations. I want to emphasize that. The first priority is to connect people to housing and services. To get them on a path to permanent housing. After that's completed for everyone who is in identified locations, then the intent is to identify those locations as unsafe for camping.

[1:59:27 PM]

So that they would be locations that we would disallow. And we are asking the city manager to help us with one of the conversations that we had back in 2019, is how do we make it clear that these places are

not allowed, that they're unsafe? Is that signage? Is it some other approach? The intent is -- the intent of this initiative is to provide that path to do what we all know and agree is important and necessary for homeless individuals, and then to cease camping in unsafe places, without relying on policing and without relying on citations. So over the past couple of days my co-sponsors and I have appreciated the opportunity to talk to the community. We've had a number of conversations about concerns and questions that people have raised. And we have a list of amendments that I've chaired on the message board plus, and I'm going to talk through them really quickly just in the interest of being

[2:00:28 PM]

clear and trying to address some of the concerns and misconceptions that -- or the misinformation that people have had about what this -- what "Heal" initiative does. And I want to first thank my co-sponsors, council member tovo, pool, Kelly and Renteria and also thank council member alter who has added her support and a request for co-sponsorship publicly on the message board. So I'm going to run through these lists of amendments. First, we are incorporating council member alter's amendment to include areas where camping is currently not allowed such as parkland, when identifying phase two and phase three locations. Second, we're specifying consultation with the Austin homelessness advisory council. Third, we want to more clearly state the intent that individuals will be connected to the services and housing options

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based on what they need, what they express they need, their expressed and individual needs. Fourth, we want to clearly state that the intent is to offer a path for each individual to permanent housing. With the supports necessary for those individuals to maintain that housing over time. Sixth -- well, fifth -- I lost count -- sorry. We want to make it clear that we're -- this program will connect individuals and offer assessment through the coordinated entry system. Up next we're asking the city manager to return to the council on March 4th with strategies and an implementation plan for disallowing camping after completion of the "Heal" initiative, with strategies that do not rely on policing or citation.

[2:02:28 PM]

Next, we're asking the city manager to return to council on March 4th with documents to dedicate at least -- at least \$3 million for this phase one of the "Heal" initiative which is the phase one for locations. Next, we are specifying more clearly the intent that funding will not be diverted from existing programs serving homeless individuals. And then, last, we are specifying that the -- there's a lot more in the -- there's information in the resolution asking the city manager to report back to us on a regular basis, at least monthly, on progress and a number of other aspects of it. We have included asking for a report on

demographics of individuals served and consideration of equity in identifying locations. So I wanted to go through all of that, and I thank you for your patience as I go through it. I think that we've had good conversations with folks and I

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think that this list of amendments is addressing the concerns that have been raised to us to date. I also want -- I really want to emphasize that it is so important that we take some action. I really believe that it's time for us to act now. And I want to emphasize again that this is not a new idea. It is something that we first discussed in 2019. It's an idea that council member tovo had raised at that time and was in a resolution. And we had some conversations, but we didn't take action at that time. And I want to emphasize, again, that I think we all share -- we all share and I think that our communities shares the concern about people who are living unhoused. And I think that we have a broad consensus to move quickly to provide housing and services to our unhoused neighbors. And I want to emphasize again the longer we wait, the longer people are going to continue to rely on living situations that

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pose major health and safety risks to I would just say that the other thing that I think that is important to remember is that this resolution is a commitment to start developing the "Heal" initiative. It's going to take time to develop it and to implement it. And we've -- as I have said before, there's some steps in the process of developing. The city manager is going to have to return to us like I said before with regular progress updates and also come back to us with actions necessary for dedicating the funding, come back to us with actions necessary to address approaches for disallowing camping in unsafe places. So I wanted to just go through all of that with you. Thank you for allowing me to go through all of that. I also wanted to mention that we will answer questions as are my co-sponsors. I would also encourage you to

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speaking to Dianna grey, our homeless strategy counselor. And I think that she may be available now, if she can take the time. But we have written this resolution in conjunction with her and it sets up the process to make this initiative successful. So I would invite, mayor, if -- if it's all right with you, I'd like to invite my co-sponsors, if any one of them would like to add anything to what I have said.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay.

>> I really want to thank Ann for bringing this up. You know, just the people that we had a strategy plan in 2019 and we were working with downtown commission to build this big [broken audio] On the state land in my district.

[2:06:32 PM]

And we also bought a hotel, the rotary inn in the district, so that we could provide transitional housing and a path for permanent housing for the homeless. Because of this pandemic, that caught us offguard, no one thought that we'd go through this, that we're going through. But now that we have the vaccine coming out and there's going to be -- there's a light at the end of the tunnel, and I feel that we need to really start refocusing our attention to provide the services and the support that the homeless population are living out there in this very dangerous situations -- especially at intersections where, you know, that is so close to the streets. It just really frightens me. So I really want to thank my colleagues for really working on this. And I think that this is a start of a new year for us on

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addressing the homeless issue.

>> Mayor Adler: Any other sponsors who want to say something? Yes, Mackenzie.

>> Kelly: Thank you, and thank you, council member kitchen and other co-sponsors for your hard work on this. Being a part of my first resolution was an eye-opening experience, but it also allowed me the opportunity to see the kind of work that goes into making these things a reality. The time to act is definitely now. We need to help our unsheltered neighbors get into that permanent supportive housing and off of the dangerous locations where they are currently camping. I really look forward to seeing this pass and to providing the city residents with a plan of action that we can be held accountable to. I think that it is beyond time to have for the city, so, thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Any other sponsors want to speak? Council member alter.

[2:08:35 PM]

>> Alter: I just want to thank the group that brought this forward. I'm pleased to join as a co-sponsor. The spirit of this initiative really reflects work that we have been doing for several years, the direction -- some direction that was adopted, some direction that we never took up to vote on, and pull that together in a way that I think that is appropriate for where we are at this point in time to meet the needs of those who are experiencing homelessness in these areas and the communities that surround them. And I appreciate the balance and the humaneness with which this is constructed. So, thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Ann, I appreciate you bringing this and the leadership that you have shown, together with the co-sponsors, on this. There's been a lot of questions that have been raised in the community. As I was going down your

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amendments I think that you may have ticked off the ones that I had seen and I look forward to seeing the amendments. I think that generally you hit the issues that have been raised. And I know that it's neither your intent nor any of the sponsors' intent to criminalize homelessness. And that it is the intent to make sure that everybody ends up in housing. But I think that this is -- you know, the concept is entirely consistent with what it is that we're all trying to do. In fact, some of this was actually part of what we passed back in June -- what is it -- 1919 now, where the very first thing that we had in the resolutions spoke to setting up -- while we were decriminalizing homelessness and recognizing that there were places that people should and shouldn't be, regardless why they were, they just should or shouldn't be in certain places. We asked for that to be laid out

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in a way that the entire community could buy into and we could live that way, and it never quite happened. I appreciate the leadership that council member tovo showed and trying to get that back in front of us. It hadn't happened there. And I think that it needs to happen in the community. Two things that we need real badly. We have done a lot of work and we know what works and we have been successful in getting children off our streets, we know what works. But there's two things that we need. We need an implementation schedule so that everybody in the community knows exactly how long we're planning on this taking and what needs to happen over time and the benchmarks to measure. And the second thing that we need is being able to take a look at where we are today and making sure that we're doing this progress and this step to

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end homelessness in a way that is constructive and helpful and protects everybody. I think that the intent hasn't changed, the goals haven't changed. We learn as we go. And I appreciate the sentiment that you were expressing in terms of initiating this and there are several other touch points that are coming up to be able to look at, what is the best way to make this happen. You know, I was just reading a few minutes ago the support email that came in from integral care on this resolution. I don't know if it was the last paragraph or the second to the last paragraph, and also recognize that as we get into this that there are things that we are going to learn with our stakeholders and those involved, to make sure that we're doing this wholefully in the best possible way. I'm really proud to be part of a community that is not waiting until our homelessness gets so

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bad that the scale is so great, that being able to treat everyone in the community as our neighbors and humanely to get people reintegrated is of a scale that they just can't do anything about it. I don't know what you do if you were in L.A. Or Seattle. But we have to make sure that we never get to that place. And I know that there are several of us on behalf of the rest of us -- behalf of the rest of us work forward with the stakeholders and some in the community and I think that we'll be hearing shortly that a lot of us will be working for all of us. And there may be things that come out of that with respect to this strategy where the stakeholders are looking at it to help to facilitate it and to be able to move it forward. And I look forward to -- to that kind of input coming from there and from everywhere to make sure that we actually get to the place where we end homelessness in this city.

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I know that is everybody's goal. So I know that your intent and your co-sponsors' intent was not -- and is not to -- to undercut the policy directions that we set. I look forward to the amendments that you bring. Council member Casar.

>> Casar: I also want to appreciate this latest message board post. And I know that it's been, you know, what action we'll take on Thursday, you know, and I hope that folks understand that when we see the actual amendment language, that it will be clear. But many as the mayor said, many of the questions that -- that came to my mind and that I have received seem to have indicated answers here on this message board post. And so, you know, there have been folks who have asked whether or not this would be

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going back to strategies and relying on policing, or citations to move people around, rather than housing them. But here in the latest post I think that you have indicated that the strategies that you're supposed to come back on do not rely on policing or citations. Folks have asked whether this initiative would be funded in a way that just moves people temporarily into shelter and then back to streets without actually having solved the problem when people leave an encampment. But you have listed here that the intent would be to offer a path for each individual to supportive housing to have supports to maintain housing over time, so we're reducing homelessness, rather than just moving it around. There have been questions whether this would divert funding so that ultimately we're not actually reducing homelessness through this, because we're just supporting some folks experiencing homelessness rather than others. I appreciate what is written

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here on the message board that specifies that funding should not be diverted from housing and from other folks experiencing homelessness. So I think that is important. Ultimately I think that, you know, we all agree that we don't want folks in any place that is dangerous to themselves or others. There are places where it's prohibited to be. I don't think that there necessarily have to be changes to ordinances if, in fact, what we're doing is finding ways to make the current ordinances work by saying if someone is in a place that is actually dangerous to themselves or someone else, we need to find a way to house that person as best as we can. But there are still obviously rules where a person can and can't be at night. So I appreciate the message board posts. It will be very helpful to me to see the actual wording of the amendments as we head into -- as we head into Thursday. And I will do my best to air any other questions that come up. But I do think that those major

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points that we're going to be focusing on health and safety, we're going to be -- that this is not supposed to be relying on police or citations, that this isn't going to be diverting money from existing programs, I think that -- that those seem to be many of the major concerns that have come up. And if those are addressed, then I think that it may be -- it might be an easier, shorter conversation on Thursday. And, of course, we have to wait to see the language yet incorporated into a draft.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Anyone else on this topic before we go. Yes council member.

>> Council member Casar answered my question during his comments. But I wanted to get a sense from staff if we have staff on the call, about the -- the feasibility of being able to find dollars to implement the "Heal" initiative without diverting funds from currently

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serving our unhoused neighbors. And so I just wanted to get a sense of the likelihood of that happening or if we have a good feel that that is possible.

>> I'm available to speak to that. This is Dianna grey, the homeless strategy officer, hello, council member. I would say that this fiscal year we currently have general funds in our budget that were allocated new for combating homelessness. And we are still in the process of programming those, both for this fiscal year and going forward. Because some of the initiatives that we are contemplated and dedicating -- dedicated to deploying will only begin in the latter part of this fiscal year, there will likely be more availability of funds in fiscal year 2021, than there would be

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going forward. As an example, the candlewood hotels -- excuse me -- not the candlewood -- but the Texas bungalow hotels that council approved purchase of last week, we would anticipate occupancy beginning probably in the fourth quarter of the fiscal year. And then full cost in the following fiscal years. Leaving some additional dollars in fiscal year 2021 to allocate. We have several ideas for effective and efficient ways to utilize those dollars. But I think that the short version of that long explanation is that we do believe that there are currently dollars in the fiscal year budget for this year for the \$3 million that has been identified as needed.

>> Fuentes: Thank you.

[2:19:47 PM]

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you, Ann?

>> Kitchen: Yes, to let everyone know that we are on schedule and post by the end of today. Hopefully I'm not giving anyone heartburn by saying that, but we expect to have it posted by the end of today so you can look at it this evening and tomorrow.

>> Mayor Adler: Sounds good. I thank you, colleagues. Anything else? Council member tovo.

>> Tovo: Yeah, thank you. I just wanted to add my thanks to council member kitchen and the other co-sponsors for moving forward. As council member kitchen said, the idea of having an encampment response strategy is not a new one for this council and not a new one for our staff. We have -- you know, as a council we were actively considering and deliberating on a resolution to deploy an encampment response strategy. At the same time, the staff took that, you know, or implemented

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that particular strategy outside the arch in building relationships and then working to find permanent housing for the individuals who were in need of it, who were in that particular area. So I am really glad to hear my colleagues, the rest of my colleagues on the council's questions. I think that the amendments that council member kitchen will post are addressing the main concerns that we have heard. You know, we're all receiving a lot of email this week about a lot of topics. And I am just so going to emphasize again that there is clear -- there is a clear and very explicit commitment within this resolution to not criminalize homelessness and to ask staff to come back to us with a plan. So I want the public to understand, one, that's the commitment as several other people have amplified. That is an explicit commitment in the resolution.

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And also that there's a time that -- that there will be a time for staff to think about how best to address this situation -- the issue and to come back to us with a proposal around which we'll have opportunity for public comment and council conversation. So, again, thanks. Mayor, you mentioned that we've been talking here and elsewhere about the idea of whether having safe and secure -- I think this is what you were referring to -- safe and secure areas where people can potentially camp is something that we've thought about. And that is an issue that my office is -- has been doing some work on and is intending to bring forward for consideration. So, you know, the other thing that I want to emphasize in my comments to the public is that

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we have the ability in this community to end homelessness. This is something that we as a community can do. And I really believe that it has to be a community effort and not just a city effort or a non-profit effort, it has to be something that we do in partnership with individuals in our community as well as the private sector and businesses. You know, but we can and I think that we're on a path to ending homelessness. This is just one strategy but I think that it will be a key strategy in that effort. So not the only thing that we're doing but it is an important step up and I'm happy to support it. Because I'm talking about emails, on a related subject, we're getting thousands of emails over the last couple of weeks. And I just wanted my colleagues to know that I'm not sure if it's a glitch in the system or we need to do better wording on our website. Because a lot of those emails are coming in in duplicate and sometimes 20 of the same email

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and sometimes 30, and sometimes four. And I want you all to know that my office has raised that as our tech folks and so hopefully there will be a fix. And if not a fix, because some of it may be user generated error, hopefully we'll be able to get some language on the website. I think we all want -- it's challenging when we're getting so much email and a lot is coming in in duplicate to give each and every one of those emails the attention that it deserves. So hopefully we'll get the duplicates weeded out through the system.

>> Mayor Adler: Council member Casar.

>> Casar: I was trying to flip through the message board post while going through work session. Two of these issues may or may not have been addressed, especially since there's two copies of it of the message board post. But two remaining questions or issues are, one, how it is that we can set up guardrails or guidelines around when we think that we have offered sufficient

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housing to people camped in a location. You know, whether do we decide that we -- when do we decide that we have achieved success is one question that I'm going to be thinking of. That I didn't quite see an answer to in the resolution or the message board post. Correct me if I'm wrong. And second, I think that I alluded to this some, but I do have some concern about choosing -- let me rephrase that -- I believe that the best thing is to choose locations based on them being already prohibited by ordinance or locations that do pose a health and safety risk. It's always hard to determine subjectively what -- living on the street in and of itself is a health and safety risk. But I believe that folks experiencing homelessness are often choosing an underpass because it is the safest alternative that they have before them. So the question is, how do we make sure that as we are

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prioritizing where to -- how to house folks and where we're saying that it is not legal to camp, how are we making sure that those are objectively and truly not healthier, safe places, compared to the alternatives, is also important to me. So I just wanted to raise those things in advance of Thursday.

>> Mayor Adler: Council member

>> Casar: >> Kitchen: Thank you council member, Casar. There's language related to your second question about prioritizing based on objective information. I think that we have an additional amendment that makes that clearer related to data and information. And then the first thing that you asked about, the guardrails, we anticipate that the process that is set up for staff, you know, for our homeless strategy officer in collaboration with

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service providers, that we'll be designing and implementing the program, that is one of the key things that they will have to do is they'll have to define what success is. We have stated our intent that, you know, the intent for people to get permanent housing. And so the thinking at the moment is that is -- you know, what is complete? We don't want to dictate that or to try to define that right now. We think that is a function that our homeless strategy officer has to define in conjunction with the service providers that she'll be working with. We have an intent stated in the resolution. Happy to talk about that more after you review the revised version. If you want to post a new -- any suggestions on the message board, I'm happy to hear them.

>> Casar: Thanks.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay, anything else, guys? All right, as we said we've

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taken care of all of the items. Don't forget that it looks like on the 9th that we'll be having a special called meeting on the ballot issues potentially in -- and so make sure that it's on your schedule. The city council will now go into closed session and take two items. Pursuant to 551071. Through the government code. The council will discuss legal and real estate matters related to e2. Personal exchange and lease value of real property and pursuant to government code, the council discusses legal matters related to the potential may 21 election, 2021 election. Without objection, colleagues we will now go into executive session. At the end of executive session I'll come out and close out the

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work session. No one will need to come out with me. See you all in the executive session. It is 2:28. We'll give everybody, you know, three or four minutes to stretch their legs and then let's get into executive session.

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[Executive session]

[Mayor Adler: We are out of closed session. In closed session we discussed real estate matters related to item: E2. Legal matters related to items: E2 & E3. That concludes all the business we have for today's work session. Today is February 2, 2021 the time is 4:07 p.m. and today's work session is adjourned. Staff thank you, Anne thank you.