

# City Council Special Called Meeting Transcript (Joint Meeting with Travis County Commissioners Court) – 02/08/2022

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[9:05:33 AM]

>> Judge Brown: A meeting of the Travis county commissioners court for February 8, 2022. And it's 9:05 A.M., and I'm joined with commissioners Travillion and Howard in person, and commissioner Gomez remotely. And we're meeting here at 700 Lavaca street. I first -- I guess that, mayor, if you are ready to call your side to order, then we -- I think that we have one caller on this item.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Not sure if --

>> Judge Brown: I can hear that one.

>> Mayor Adler: Same day, same time and we'll go ahead and convene the Austin city council meeting. We're here hybrid meeting and, judge, we're ready to proceed. You go ahead.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. I call to order the joint session of the Travis county

[9:06:33 AM]

commissioners court and the Austin city couple. Council. and today the court has a full agenda and the city needs to end by 10:15 so to have really press on the limit of one question per person. If that works for you, we would appreciate that. And then on -- I think that we have one caller at this time. So let's go to the public comment caller, Shelby.

>> Judge, we do have one caller, Zenobia Joseph. Ms. Joseph, please, go ahead. You have three minutes.

>> Thank you, judge and commissioners and council. I'm Zenobia Joseph. I wanted to make a few comments with social determinants of health. I wanted to ask specifically if you could speak to the Visa cards, how the vaccination program will work and when it will be launched. And I want the council to recognize as I mentioned to Travis county commissioners court last week, that cash for

[9:07:33 AM]

vaccination is actually a methodology being used by those and they are giving \$50 for each shot and I wonder if the \$50 per shot with a Visa card. And I want councilmember pool and Renteria to recognize that this is not charity to low-income individuals. That there are people who are actually getting benefit from Travis county as well so please be respectful of the low-income residents who receive these cards. And I also wanted to ask the city council to speak to the \$4.8 million that they're wanting to ratify to get refunded for public health services from the county. And just to recognize that there was \$110 million set aside by the county for the homeless initiative. And so if they're going to keep wanting money back and councilman alter and mayor pro tem asked for money for a childcare -- a matching of over

[9:08:34 AM]

\$4 million from our -- or \$3,485,000 last week and the county has individuals that are actually facing eviction. So they don't have the money to just keep repaying the city council. And so I would ask you to work collaboratively. And as it relates to the boiled water notice, I would just say that I appreciate that the city is actually having water distribution sites, but, please, recognize that the metropolitan park, even though it's via bus stop, it's about a quarter mile walk. And that a better location would actually be tech ridge park, and I ask you to recognize the need to have somebody who rides the bus when you are planning for emergencies. And if you have any questions, I will be able to answer them at this time. But I would ask the county to consider taking \$10 million back from the city to repay them for the money they're asking from them. Thank you.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. Shelby, do we have any other

[9:09:35 AM]

callers?

>> We do not, judge. Not at this time.

>> Judge Brown: Okay, thanks. So we'll move on to the briefing from Dr. Walkes and Austin public health and others. If y'all want to take it away.

>> Good morning. Good to be able to present today and give you some good news. Our surge from omicron has started to, and continues to move in the right direction. We're seeing the case numbers decrease. If you could move to the next slide, please. Here we're showing on the left the curve has made a precipitous drop. We've seen a large surge in cases, and hospitalizations. There hasn't been as much use of the icu as we've seen in previous surges because omicron,

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as we've been told, has had a milder course, particularly in those who are vaccinated and boosted. During the delta surge in the june/september period, we saw much higher use of icu. The impact, however, has still been quite large on our hospital systems as we know that there are staffing issues and shortages have been ongoing. But we have -- we're on the other side of this surge now and our community has stepped up to take those steps that we needed to decrease our hospital usage, particularly by vaccinating and using masking. A recent study showed that in those who are hospitalized during the predominant omicron surge, that there were those that had less severe illness,

[9:11:40 AM]

less requirement for oxygenation in those who were vaccinated as opposed to those who presented in the delta surge which caused much more severe disease. The approximately 20% of those hospitalized during this omicron surge had non-covid-19 conditions in presentation to the hospital. However, this does not decrease the burden on our hospitals, as those covid positive patients admitted to hospital require isolation rooms, use of ppe, and that all exacerbates shortages in those items as well as the fact that healthcare workers who are taking care of these patients were exposed and many of our health care workers had

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to call in sick during this surge. So the impact of omicron, although it seems -- appears to be less on our hospital system -- it has taken its toll due to the sheer magnitude of cases that we saw, the reaching of the vulnerable populations, and they're getting omicron and requiring hospitalization and the impact on our staff. When we -- next slide, please. When we look at deaths, which this is a lagging indicator, when we look at our pandemic and the surges that we've had previously, we know that deaths occur later on during the course of this disease. And during the delta surge, we had a total of 275 deaths throughout that surge. As of the first part of December to now, we've had 75 deaths. And we're anticipating that we

[9:13:44 AM]

may have more going forward in the coming weeks. However, the number of deaths during the surge has been less than what we've seen with delta. So far, and likely this is due to the protective nature of our vaccines that we have, particularly in those that are boosted. On the left-hand side of this slide, we see the comorbidities and the other medical conditions that are associated with those who have been vaccinated and succumbed to covid-19. And in this case the omicron variant. And see that the top three causes of comorbidity associated with death with those who had a vaccine breakthrough developing the disease, and requiring hospitalization. Our hypertension, diabetes and

[9:14:44 AM]

cardiac disease. So these comorbidities as I have listed are just a reminder to those that are vaccinated and require boosting that they go to get boosted so that they can receive full protection from omicron and any subsequent variants of covid-19 that may arrive here and continue to practice those things that protect as well to get the extra layer of protection, social distancing, and masking. Can you move to the next slide, please. This slide shows the protection that is afforded us when we wear a mask. A new study shows that wearing a mask indoors helps protect against covid-19, compared with those who reported not wearing a mask covering, people who recorded always wearing one in indoor public settings were less

[9:15:45 AM]

likely to test positive for covid-19. Respirators such as n-95s and K-95s were the most protective and so wearing a mask in indoor public settings helps to protect us and our loved ones and those around us from covid-19. Those who wore the n-95 or kn-59, received an 85% risk reduction in developing covid. A surgical mask provides 66% reduction in risk. And cloth masks protect and reduce our risk by 56%. So masking continues to prove to be one of our staples in protection. If you could go to the next slide, please. These are some images from our current dashboard. The left-hand side shows our

[9:16:45 AM]

seven-day moving average and the colored bars depict our risk stages. We are still in stage 5. We are, however, moving towards stage four. And that will likely happen in the next 10 days or so. We still have high community transmission rates, so we will take our time and making that move into relaxation of our current mitigation strategies. Vaccine will continue to be the pivotal message of all of our messaging that we do. It needs to come not only from our public information officers, it needs to come from within

this community. We need to ask ourselves to make the time, take the time to go get those boosters and vaccine

[9:17:48 AM]

shots, and each and every one of us can be a messenger to friends, family and colleagues, to encourage them to go out and get vaccinated and boosted. The protection that we will get from vaccines will help us move to a new stage in this pandemic response, and it will help us to make some changes in our mitigation strategies to allow for recent relaxation, but for now we need to continue to do what we're doing with masking. If you look on the right-hand side, you will see that the increase in masking that's occurred since the beginning of the omicron surge has correlated with the decline in cases that we've been seeing. So if we can protect ourselves, we will with vaccine and boosting and particularly when the under 5 vaccination is approved and available and get

[9:18:49 AM]

the rest of our vulnerable populations protected, we will be able to move forward and see the light at the end of this tunnel. Next slide, please. Masks and all of the mitigation strategies that we have used for the protection and mitigation of covid-19, which is an aerosol viral entity, have also impacted our flu cases in our area. There has been an increase in the positivity rate of the flu in our area, however, that positivity rate is calculated by the number of positive tests over the number of tests done and there were less tests done, so we have positivity rate that's unaffected by the number

[9:19:49 AM]

of tests more so than the numbers of cases, which is depicted on the graph on the right-hand side. The predominant type of flu that is circulating in our community at this point is influenza-a. The CDC reports that there's been a really good uptake of flu vaccine in the country, and in our area. This message has been put out to ask everyone to not only get their covid shot, but their flu vaccinations as well. And this vaccine for flu as well as washing hands, socially distancing and the use of masks have continued to help us to keep the numbers of flu cases down in our area. Next slide, please. As we look at omicron's impact on our schools, we had some tough times. We've had some days -- some

[9:20:52 AM]

weeks, where we've had over 5,000 cases reported in our ISDs. These numbers are continuing to decline. The recent cold weather event has kept some children -- our children at home, so that's also helped to keep our numbers down, but in all, the efforts of vaccination and masking and social distancing, hand washing and all of the measures that have been done by our schools and businesses and long-term care facilities have all afforded us this new period of time when case numbers are declining. And that, again, is good news. Next slide, please. To summarize, our hospital situation on this slide, we are seeing admissions have gone down week-over-week. Our admissions have been

[9:21:55 AM]

predominant in all age groups. There are pediatric cases in hospital now. 13 during this last period. And we had one admission to ICU of a child who had comorbidities. All of the pediatric patients in hospital at this time are unvaccinated, so it is important that we understand that our vaccines are safe. There's been over 200 million doses of pediatric vaccine delivered in this country to date. On the 15th of February, the FDA will be convening to hear the data that's been collected by Pfizer regarding use of vaccine in those under age 5. And we're hopeful that this will be approved and subsequently approved and we will receive guidance from the CDC committee.

[9:23:01 AM]

These numbers can continue -- will continue I'm hopeful to go down. We've had no reports of the BA-2 variant to date in our community. However, even if we do find that three weeks ago we submitted a sample because it does take three weeks for the results to come back, of the BA-2 in our community, BA-2 being Omicron that is reported to spread more quickly, I think that we will find that we will still have this decline in case numbers because our community is doing what it needs to to protect itself and to get these cases -- the spread of COVID-19 under control. The situation with getting our vaccination rates up will continue to be an ongoing struggle that really, really

[9:24:03 AM]

does require community effort. Our booster coverage right now is 31% of those who are fully vaccinated. So we have a long ways to go with getting the rest of our population vaccinated with the booster vaccine. There are some confusion about fully vaccinated versus up-to-date and I'd like to just take a minute to talk about that. A fully vaccinated individual is someone who has received the primary series of vaccines. So two doses of mRNA, or one dose of the J&J vaccine. A booster is a shot that's received subsequent to those primary series booster vaccines -- vaccinations. So in the case of the mRNA, Pfizer and Moderna, a booster is required at five months after the mRNA, Moderna or Pfizer.

[9:25:03 AM]

Boosters are recommended after two months for the j&j vaccination series, primary series. This coverage will be critical and crucial to our moving forward as I said to this new stage in our pandemic. And moving out of pandemic to endemic. So it is my hope that the community will again start to get out, go get your vaccines, become up to date which is the terminology used for anything after the primary series, anything that's been advised after the primary series and receive that. It's going to be important that we do that so that we can continue to enjoy lower numbers of cases, return to a new

[9:26:07 AM]

normal, and to allow us to be in situations where masking is not required because we are surrounded by a protected community who has been vaccinated. And with that I'll pass it on to director Sturup.

>> Thank you, Dr. Walkes. And I'm going to quickly give an operations update to allow time for our other partners to brief out, and then for commissioners and council to have questions. So here on this first slide, you see our overall response and our operations and services for the month of January. And a decrease in the number of covid shots that were given, so we really want to flip that around. And, conversely, there's been an

[9:27:07 AM]

increase for the month for testing. With a total of 21,000 covid-19 test administered. So I think this is information that folks know well. Here's our options for testing and, again, we want our community to get tested if they were exposed, get tested if they feel sick. When in doubt, please get tested. And so for the last week we did over -- just 610 tests, and as you are aware, operations were altered due to the cold weather. But we're back in business at the George morales dove springs rec and at the expo. We continue to offer mobile and in-home testing as well as facility testing. So when we turn and take a look at vaccinations by week in Travis county, last week over 7,000 vaccines were provided in the county.

[9:28:08 AM]

We remain at 72% fully vaccinated for those 5 and older. And 83% of the eligible population has received at least one dose. When we look at our winter weather operations, even though we weren't at our public sites, we did support at the point to provide testing as well as vaccines for our guests who

showed up seeking shelter. And you can see for all of the activations thus far, we have given out a total of 108 vaccines. And some of those were flu. And we've also provided a total of -- oh, that total looks wrong -- so I'll have to do some quick math. Three, 12, 14, 18 covid tests. When we look at the distribution for vaccine in Travis county by

[9:29:10 AM]

age, we can see that we're starting to see some numbers in the 5 to 11 population for folks who are immune compromised. And are receiving that third shot. We're also seeing the numbers go up for the 12 to 15 population for booster and third dose. When we look at aph's work with regards to pediatric vaccine, we continue to be pretty close to the distribution by race and ethnicity for our community. And then when you look at our total vaccine distribution by county, and we're trying to work with the data because we knew that there were some questions last week. So this slide shows a breakdown of the Travis county census population by race and ethnicity. And the other pie chart includes the fully vaccinated population

[9:30:11 AM]

by race and ethnicity. And so the fully vaccinated chart demonstrates that the other category is overrepresented compared to the other category provided in the Travis county census estimate. Additionally, the unknown category accounts for 4% of the total fully vaccinated population. The other and unknown category account for a total of 27%, or 235,412 individuals within the overall fully vaccinated population. When we look at Travis county residents with up-to-date vaccines, and thank you Dr. Walkes for making that distinction clear, we see our pie chart again. And within that fully vaccinated pacman, green pacman, we see just under 41% have completed the primary series only, with our booster rate being at 31%.

[9:31:12 AM]

So, again, as Dr. Walkes said, we really want to encourage our community to go out and to get vaxxed and get boosted. All but one -- when we look at our first dose vaccinated population by zip code, all but one zip code has achieved that 70% mark. And that is that 8705. And we look at our second dose population, two new zip codes moved into the green. 787723 and 77858 and that means that 70% or more of that population have received a second dose. And three zip codes moved into the yellow from the blue, and those are 77853, 77852, and 77842. So this is just demonstrative of all of the good work that our partners within aph, the county, and community are doing to get



[9:32:12 AM]

our folks protected. Our vaccine operations are the same for this week, at Delco, and Pfluger hall and Simms and southeast branch library. You can visit us at [www.austintexas.gov](http://www.austintexas.gov) to get the specifics for each location. We do have mobile ops scheduled for this week and those are listed there in the middle block. And, again, going back to the caller's comments, those mobile operations are strategically identified to address those communities that need additional support and resources to get vaccinated. And to her point as we see that there's a call for testing operations to be open for people to go to work, so we know that there are some folks in our community that don't have the luxury to even take care of their basic health needs. And so that incentive that we offer allows people to miss work and still be somewhat whole, still have money for groceries,

[9:33:14 AM]

or whatever their immediate basic needs might be. We continue to ask the community to help share our three core messages -- mask up, get up-to-date with vaccines, and get tested. And we continue our communication efforts with our media Q and As releases. And we will have a release today and we continue to make sure that our social media platforms have information in four different languages, English, Spanish, simplified Chinese, and Vietnamese. We continue our community outreach. To date, 30,000 individuals were reached through staff efforts. For this week we'll be at the locations listed there on your screen. And this last slide is just a reminder of the tireless efforts of the aph staff. We're out there in the cold at

[9:34:15 AM]

the southeast library delivering those vaccines, because we know that it is important. And I will turn it over to the judge, thank you for your time this morning.

>> Judge Brown: Thanks, director Sturup. I'll turn it over to chuck Brotherton to report from him and constable morales.

>> Good morning, judge and commissioners, mayor and council. I'm chuck Brotherton, the county executive for emergency services. I appreciate y'all taking time to get a brief update from constable George morales this morning as well as from Todd Hamilton with central Texas allied health institute. At this time I'll turn it over to constable morales.

>> Good morning, commissioners, councilmembers, judge and mayor. The goal of the mobile vaccine team is to continue to offer barrier-free vaccines, outreach and education, within our communities of vulnerable zip codes and our hard-to-reach populations. This last week, obviously, we were slowed down with the -- with the winter freeze. So we did did about 178 shots,

[9:35:17 AM]

bringing our total for the month to the year 8,566 total combined shots. Again, the highly affected zip codes, kudos to everyone who helped to bring the 58 and the 53 and the 24 up for vaccinations. And great job to aph and our mobile vaccine collaborative. Again, we're going to be working with the schools, aisd, and ISD and manor ISD, and this week the Mexican consulate. We will continue at our locations at j.d.'s grocery market, and, again, expo and rancho. This week, again, repeating Travis county expo, African-American youth harvest and the del valle community center. And I'll turn that back over to chuck at this time.

>> Thank you, constable. Mr. Hamilton, if you would give the court an update.

>> Yes, sir, and thank you, chuck. Good morning, everyone.

[9:36:19 AM]

Echoing the words of the constable and Dr. Walkes, central Texas health institute suffered a slowdown in vaccination due to the freeze. We delivered only 25 vaccination shots. We have in turn starting today and starting to go out into the community to remind people that we are here and we are willing to serve you as far as the vaccinations. We continue to follow the orders of the constable and the county coalition and the direction. Back to you, chuck.

>> Thank you, Todd. Judge, mayor, commissioners and councilmembers, I'm going to share my screen quickly and just show our viewing audience where they can find information regarding our vaccine operations on the Travis county public facing website, [traviscounty tx.gov](http://traviscounty.tx.gov) and click on the upper left to get covid-19 information. And that takes anyone to our

[9:37:20 AM]

daily schedule for strike team and vaccination clinics, day-by-day. And you can see Tuesday, February 8th, the hours of operation and the locations. Click on any one of these, and it's Pfluger hall today starting at 2:00 P.M. Types of vaccines available, ages, location, hours of operation, etc. So very convenient. And we do our very best to keep this calendar current. One final note, we are continuing as you heard constable morales say, we will continue drive-thru vaccine on decker lane Saturday and Sunday. And we are looking ahead later this month by the following weekend, February 19 and 20. We will be relocating our drive-thru vaccine operations from expo to the county tax office/constable precinct 4 offices at 4011 Mckinney falls

[9:38:21 AM]

parkway. And we will begin operations at that location, again, on Saturday, February 19th. We will be working with our public information team to make sure that that is publicized. Everybody will be made aware of that change, but, again, this weekend we will be at expo, as we have been for the last several months. At this time I will pause and turn it back to you, judge, for questions.

>> Judge Brown: Thanks, constable morales. I guess that it comes full circle back to where it all started?

>> Yes, it does, judge.

>> Judge Brown: Well, thank you for doing that and taking up the mantle of giving vaccines at your office, again at the precinct four location. So today, council, it has a hard stop at 10:15, they are going to ask questions first today. And we will ask questions second. We still -- we also have to end by 10:30, so, council, please do limit yourselves to one question each. Mayor, I will pass it over to

[9:39:21 AM]

you.

>> Mayor Adler: Colleagues, we're, as you have heard, we're trying to move through this more quickly, I guess, than normal today. But we're going to start with district 10 and then work our way up to district 1, and then I'll go. So, mayor pro tem, you want to start us off?

>> Harper-madison: Thank you. I think that you might have started with me last time but I don't have any questions, thank you to everyone for your work.

>> Mayor Adler: Councilmember tovo.

>> Tovo: [Indiscernible].

>> Shea: Oh, no.

>> I hear the chipmunk again.

>> Shea: Oh, no.

>> Mayor Adler: Kathie, should we come back to you? Let's do that. If tech folks could work with Kathie. Councilmember Ellis?

>> Ellis: Thank you, mayor. I would like a little more

[9:40:22 AM]

information if there is any expectation of subsequent booster shots, since a lot of folks have already gotten theirs. Is there any understanding that in the next year that we might need another booster shot?

>> On a CDC call yesterday, they said that they're discussing some additional vaccines and some changes to the scheduling of vaccinations, but there's more to come on that. We don't have the definitive answers on that yet.

>> Ellis: Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay, thank you. Councilmember pool.

>> Pool: Yeah, thanks. And I just saw a note from Kathie saying that she -- councilmember tovo was simply trying to say thank you to everyone. It came out as the chipmunk.

[9:41:22 AM]

And I add my thank you as well and I'm going to pack up and I'm going to head to our strategic planning session. Thanks to all.

>> Mayor Adler: Sounds good, thank you. Councilmember Kelly. Is she with us? How about councilmember kitchen.

>> Kitchen: Thank you. I just have a question. I do think that it bears repeating just to make sure that we're all clear, Dr. Walkes, that we are seeing a reduction, and we're headed towards stage four, if I've got that correct. We're not yet out of the woods though in terms of the surge, is that appropriate to say? So that continuing ask in those recommendations around that are important. Could you clarify that for us?

>> Yes, we need to move the needle literally and get more people boosted and continue what

[9:42:25 AM]

we're doing so that those case numbers goes down. Our community transmission rate yesterday was still high. Anything above 100 is high and we were in the 400s, so it is important for us to continue to do what we need to do to get the numbers down. But we're doing that. And with the continued efforts in this community to get their boosters, wear a mask in indoor public spaces, we will get there. And then we can all have that collective discussion about what our new normal is.

>> Kitchen: Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember --

>> No questions for me.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Councilmember Renteria.

>> Renteria: I just want to thank all of the good workers out there working really hard, you know, and just I want to say thank you and you guys are doing

[9:43:25 AM]

an outstanding job. So that's all I have to say, mayor.

>> Mayor Adler: Okay. Thank you. I don't think that councilmember Fuentes is with us. Councilmember harper-madison, is she with us? Okay. And I add my thanks as well. It's good to see the numbers coming down. What's really encouraging I think, Dr. Walkes, are the slides that you had in your presentation that showed what the community response was with masking. The community looks like the numbers went up on masking and getting up that and indicating almost an 80% level in our community at the time that we needed it most. You know, there's the discussion that you see on social media occasionally about whether or not the masking actually helps. So I appreciate the slide that you put in this time. And I want to just point that

[9:44:28 AM]

out, that while, you know, the best mask is highly effective, even a cloth mask is 50% effective. And that's a huge relative number. I'm looking at the numbers where we are right now and we're, what, just over 60 right now as we look at the 50 mark and four days we were at 80. So it looks like that number is going down pretty precipitously. I know that we don't necessarily move just when we get below 50, but that's kind of the indicator to give that a serious look and for the policymakers to engage in that conversation. But, you know, for a community I think that is tired, but doing the right thing, um, and watching what's happening around the country with respect to rules and regulations, we're looking at the same kind of

[9:45:28 AM]

numbers for us locally. And I appreciate the momentum that we have, and we're headed in the right direction, and we'll wait to be hearing when people can move to stage four activity. And to look at south by southwest coming up and it looks like the numbers are coming down. And my understanding is that they're working pretty diligently with you on protocols to make that event one that is safe, is that correct, Dr. Walkes, and director Sturup?

>> Yes, yes, they've presented a solid plan and things are looking good.

>> Mayor Adler: Great. I point that out because in past years at this point we probably had, you know, a couple hundred events kind of geared into that. And this year it seems to be lagging a little bit. I think that people are waiting for that kind of indication. So I think people should know as the numbers continue to go down, it becomes even that much more something that can be done in a

[9:46:30 AM]

safe and productive way. So I'm looking forward to that event happening and people participating. With that, judge, I will turn it over to you. Colleagues, we need to be for the sw20 -- sd23 meeting, I think it's an 11:00 A.M. Start and people will start moving over there at 10:30. So we'll see you over there. I'm going to at this point, judge, adjourn the city council portion of this joint meeting. Obviously, colleagues can stay on or can continue to listen if they want to, but here at 9:47, I'm going to adjourn our portion so that people can move if they need to. Thank you, judge.