

The Special Emergency Meeting of the City Council of the City of Panama City Beach, Florida, held on March 17, 2020.

ROLL

MAYOR MIKE THOMAS

COUNCILORS:

PAUL CASTO

PHIL CHESTER

GEOFF MCCONNELL

HECTOR SOLIS

CITY MANAGER:

TONY O'ROURKE

CITY CLERK:

MARY JAN BOSSERT

CITY ATTORNEY:

AMY MYERS

Mayor Thomas called the Special Emergency Meeting to order at 2 P.M. with all Councilmen, the City Manager, City Clerk, and City Attorney present.

Councilman Chester gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. O'Rourke updated the City Council on the emergency water break at West Bay. The contractor, GCUC, and Staff were able to make repairs; however, a boil water notice will be required until Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>. He reminded that this was a major artery to 60% of the island.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS (EMERGENCY ITEMS ONLY)**

Mayor Thomas opened the Public Comments section at 2:04 P.M.

1 Ms. Stephanie Colson, 107 Lakeside Drive. Ms. Colson read a prepared statement about tourists possibly spreading the virus during the fourteen day window. She spoke of overflowing college students and called this meeting dangerous. She urged the Council not to fail the locals.

2 Mr. David Humphreys, owner of Sandbar Grill at 275 S. Arnold Rd. Mr. Humphreys said he felt the State would provide guidance on the restrictions but without a vibrant economy, he would be out of business within two to three weeks impacting 45-50 families. He implored the Council not to overreact, keeping people safe but not put the City into a depression.

3 Mr. Richard Whitsitt, 2454 Pretty Bayou Blvd. Mr. Whitsitt spoke of the Walton County shutdown, leaving citizens with nothing to do, without paychecks. He said most workers had no savings and most businesses could only survive a two week float before going out of business. He said the virus had allowed the Federal Government to shut down all economic activity.

4 Ms. Kat Andrews, US Census. Ms. Andrews urged everyone to complete the Census as the website was live now, and the importance of completing the Census.

5 Mr. David Akins, Waste Pro Manager. Mr. Akins asked if they could start their trucks earlier than usual, at midnight, to limit exposure to his employees, and restrict refuse to merely the containers themselves so that his employees would not be required to leave the truck to pick up bags or cans.

6 Ms. Selma Hill, business owner for 20 years. Ms. Hill said she spoke on behalf of 80% of the workers who lived paycheck to paycheck. She spoke of the hysteria versus the chances of getting the disease when they sanitized constantly. She said she spoke for the workers who would not have a job after 5 P.M. today and future bankruptcies within the next six weeks.

7 Pastor Ramon Duvall, Beachside Fellowship Church. Pastor Duval urged the Council not to give in to the fear and hysteria. He spoke of putting faith in God's wisdom and to make common sense decisions.

8 A gentleman spoke of his company having virus meetings to protect not only his employees but also their customers. He urged the Council not to overreact as his livelihood and those of twenty families were 100% relying on the beach. He urged the Council to keep his business in mind.

- 9 Ms. Carmen Miran, the Glades. Ms. Miran said she had traveled overseas in the past to Hong Kong and Manilla and spoke of their culture. She said they lived in tight quarters with mass transportation. She said they did not have the open air but different health issues.
- 10 Mr. Paul Shiner, Texas Roadhouse. Mr. Shiner said his restaurant could continue to operate in a to-go capacity and bring food to the cars while keeping his people employed.
- 11 Mr. David Smithy, 111 La Valencia Circle. Mr. Smithy said during Hurricane Michael, Panama City Beach was the shoulder to Panama City and Lynn Haven while making repairs. He spoke of people's anxiety about food, rushing to the grocery stores. He urged the Council to act methodically.
- 12 Mr. Richard Rodriguez, small business owner. Mr. Rodriguez questioned what precautions the City was taking to ensure economic stability if the City closed.
- 13 Ms. Renee Valasco, small business owner. Ms. Valasco said her employees were concerned since many owners did not have the ability to pay employees two to three weeks with no income. She said she did not believe protecting citizens was mutually exclusive from keeping the economy running and she thought the City could do both.

With nothing further, the Mayor closed the Public Comments section at 2:32 P.M.

**ITEM 1 COVID-19 MEDICAL INFORMATION PRESENTATION: DALE BONE, M.D. AND SANDON SPEEDLING, MHS, CPM.**

Mr. O'Rourke introduced Dr. Bone, an infectious disease specialist. Dr. Bone said he had not seen this disease strain but he and another doctor had performed twelve tests with nine returning back negative. He spoke of the influenza worldwide with thirty million cases and seventeen thousand deaths. He said currently there was no vaccine for the corona virus, but a trial had started. However, the vaccine would take twelve to eighteen months to create. He added that even among the experts, they did not know if it would take one or two doses of vaccine. He added he was available if any questions. Mayor Thomas thanked him.

Mr. O'Rourke introduced Mr. Speedling, Administrator for the Bay County Department of Health. Mr. Speedling gave out a handout with the Governor's latest declaration and the most recent information on the Covid-19 in Florida. He said as of this moment, there were no confirmed cases in Bay County and no community spread in Bay County.

Mr. Speedling said the Department was actively monitoring the situation, working closely with both hospitals. He said the DOH would be a testing site as well as PanCare. He said they were working closely with the County partners, EMS, as well as the other municipalities.

In response to a question by the Mayor about testing, the DOH was testing even though no positive results had been confirmed. For testing sites, both hospital ERs as well as the DOH. He added that two physicians had also agreed to do testing. Councilman Solis added that the ER on Panama City Beach Parkway could test and as of yesterday had twenty to thirty test kits. Mayor Thomas thanked Mr. Speedling.

**ITEM 2 PROPOSED TEMPORARY ACTION PLAN ON COVID-19.**

Mr. O'Rourke presented a short presentation to educate the community and to get direction from the Council on the course of action. He said there were 167,515 cases worldwide, 5702 in the United States and only 192 in Florida, with over two thousand people tested in Florida. He spoke of protective measures to mitigate the severity and duration of the virus. He said it was imperative to flatten the curve, reducing the peak number of cases, and to take the pressure off the healthcare system. He said most of the beds in the US were already occupied with typical illnesses such as cardiovascular, cancer, diabetes, etc.

Mr. O'Rourke said the military was a perfect candidate to address that situation and he expected that in the upcoming days, the Federal Government would mobilize military field hospitals.

He outlined personal protection, such as washing hands, no face touching, and using hand sanitizers. He spoke of young people being asymptomatic and carriers of the disease.

For City Employees, if sick, they should stay home. He said with any exposure, the person would have to self-quarantine to break the transmission. He continued that they were discouraging people from coming into City Hall, but if they must, they would register at the front desk to be able to track the train of people in contact if tested positive. He said the City would add additional janitorial services. Mr. O'Rourke introduced a temporary COVID-19 Action plan placing guidance and restrictions on City employees, citizens and businesses.

Mayor Thomas questioned if the fields closing meant this would prevent families from going out to play. Mr. O'Rourke said no, only league sports such as competitive sports using the same equipment. He discussed groups on the beach congregating. Chief Whitman said his officers would be breaking up large groups.

Mr. O'Rourke outlined the environmental mitigation measures with cleaning, especially frequently touched items like phones and doorknobs. He outlined the upcoming event cancellations: Best Friends Relay, Furry Friends 5K, Doggie Easter Egg Hunt, Easter Egg Hunt, PCST Swimathon, Color Run for Autism, Seabreeze Jazz Festival, and Thunder Beach. He continued that most events had already canceled but at the Council's direction, Staff would contact the rest. Also many groups may have deposits with the City which would be returned. Most organizations were very cognizant of the situation, and even if the City did not cancel, they would cancel on their own volition.

Councilman Solis said he sat on two condo boards who directed the beach chair services to ensure the six feet apart distancing between the chairs. He questioned if the City should allow the HOA's to enact those guidelines. He continued that some resorts had closed their pools or already placed the pool chairs respecting the six-foot distances. He said it made sense to enact guidelines for beach chair services. Mayor Thomas stated he had just received a text that a larger resort property was already spacing their beach chairs and pool decks. Councilman Solis also recommended stopping all discretionary spending in the City, to be as conservative as possible.

Mayor Thomas said yesterday, he closed his dining room at the Donut Shop and took half of his tables out of the restaurant. Yet today, he received phone calls and emails that the Council was only caring about economics. He stated that all the Councilors had families here, but he also had fifty employees who needed to make a living. He reminded that the Council was responsible for the 1% business tax, and if no sales, the City would have no income. The Mayor stated that the Council was doing what they thought best not only for other families but also their own.

The Mayor spoke of Spring Break and the public's fear of the kids coming here after Miami Beach closed. He said the City did not need Sprig Break, but if it came, it would take years to overcome the image preventing families coming. He continued that in his opinion, the City did not need to close the beaches. He spoke of the City cancelling business that the people would need for the good of the community. He assured the community that the Council was no going to make uninformed decisions nor rash decisions.

Councilman McConnell said Ms. Myers might have to review the Franchise Agreement with Waste Pro before making changes. However, he was concerned with trucks going through the neighborhoods at midnight. Mr. David Akins stated that he disagreed, because if he lost his employees, service would decrease.

Councilman Chester said he had received emails asking if open air seating was also restricted. Mayor Thomas replied that it was still at 50% capacity and six feet apart.

Ms. Pease asked about beach bars and tiki bars, and the Mayor confirmed those would remain open if they were under the 50% Gross revenue of the restaurant.

Mr. Speedling answered an audience question about employee testing. He explained the wording was screening, not testing, and something the business owners could do for their employees themselves. Mr. Speedling said he would supply the latest version of the DOH screening.

Mayor Thomas said he would reopen the floor for Public Comments at 3:15 P.M.

1 Ms. Andrews, US Census. Ms. Andrews said she had been using the Lyndell Senior Center to assist senior citizens. She asked if another location could be provided to assist anyone that needed computer assistance. Mr. O'Rourke suggested the Public Library next door.

2 Mr. Joe Biggs, Thunder Beach Productions. Mr. Biggs asked if the May 1<sup>st</sup> date was flexible since his event was in the middle of that week and he could be flexible on those dates. The Mayor suggested to reach out to the TDC but reminded that the Council would be meeting frequently

before that date. Mr. Biggs said a lot of the bikers were coming to the beach, event or not.

- 3 Ms. Debbie Ward, PIO. Ms. Ward said she had received several comments on the FaceBook page, with the main one asking if the beaches were closing. She said people were asking if the number of people would be limited to ten in rentals.

Mayor Thomas said he would not vote to close the sandy beaches. He said he did not want to tell people they could not come here, as many were condo owners.

Councilman Casto agreed with the Mayor on not closing the sandy beaches. He said they should respond to the situation, not react to it. He also thanked the City Manager for the great presentation.

Councilman McConnell said at this time, he would not vote to close the sandy beaches, but he would not say never. He said the situation changed day by day.

Councilman Solis said he had received emails that the rumor was closing the sandy beaches at 5 P.M. he said the Council had never talked about that option.

Ms. Myers stated that the City Manager had prepared an action plan and there were no conflicts with the Governor's Executive Order. She said by the Resolution, the Council was adopting the action plan and authorizing the City Manager to adopt policies to implement and enforce the plan; suspend all special events and parades until May 1<sup>st</sup>; and grant the City Manager emergency powers for procurement and expenditure authority up to \$25,000 for supplies and cleaning services as may be necessary.

Ms. Myers read Resolution 20-80E by title.

**Councilman Casto made the motion to approve Resolution 20-80E. Second was made by Councilman McConnell and the motion passed by unanimous roll call vote recorded as follows:**

<b>Councilman Chester</b>	<b>Aye</b>
<b>Councilman McConnell</b>	<b>Aye</b>
<b>Councilman Solis</b>	<b>Aye</b>
<b>Councilman Casto</b>	<b>Aye</b>
<b>Mayor Thomas</b>	<b>Aye</b>

With nothing further, the meeting was adjourned at 3:29 P.M.

READ AND APPROVED this 23rd of April 2020.

**IN THE EVENT OF A CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FOREGOING MINUTES AND A VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT OF THESE MINUTES, THE FOREGOING MINUTES SHALL CONTROL.**



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Mayor

ATTEST:



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City Clerk