

City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL DATE: MARCH 17, 2020

FROM: COUNCILMEMBER RONALDO FIERRO WARDS: ALL
COUNCILMEMBER ANDY MELENDREZ
COUNCILWOMAN PLASCENCIA

SUBJECT: SUSPENSION OF UTILITY SHUT-OFFS AND OTHER POSSIBLE ECONOMIC RELIEF MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ISSUE:

Suspend the utility shut-offs for a thirty-day period, with the option to extend, and discuss other economic relief measures to safeguard rent-burdened families and small-businesses.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Direct the City Manager to suspend discontinuance of water, electric, sewer and refuse utility service for non-payment for a period of thirty-days, and to extend that time period if still in a declared local emergency.
2. Discuss other possible economic relief measures for low-income residents and local small businesses.

DISCUSSION:

While the global community responds to an unprecedented viral pandemic and its subsequent health impacts, the widespread economic and social impacts of this crisis have the ability to be lasting and devastating to our local economy.

As of March 13, 2020, there are currently 8 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the County of Riverside, 198 confirmed cases in the State of California, and 1,663 confirmed cases in the United States. These numbers are likely to have changed, if not exponentially, by the start of this City Council meeting.

In an effort to mitigate the spread of the pandemic, social gatherings of all sorts, from small community events to Disneyland, have been cancelled, with state public health officials encouraging residents to remain in their homes as much as possible. The Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention recommend that people who are sick with COVID-19 or show symptoms for the pandemic self-quarantine at home for the full 14-day incubation period and instructs individuals to avoid interacting in public throughout the duration of their illness.

This, coupled with the immense fear of the growing pandemic, has the ability to bring our local economy and society to a halt. Those that are a paycheck away from homelessness will be the first to bear the brunt of this economic and social crisis.

The cancellation of large events, social distancing, quarantines, and the possible closures of K-12 education systems and daycare facilities has the ability to push already rent-burdened families into further poverty. It is those residents on the brink homelessness that are most vulnerable to the growing consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak; and it is those individuals that our city should make proactive measures to protect.

It is expected that this pandemic will continue to spread throughout our community. As more individuals get sick, especially at-risk populations, more and more members of our workforce will begin to take time off to care for family members and for themselves.

The social and economic impacts of COVID-19 will affect residents beyond those who contract the virus — from parents who have to take off work for childcare to hourly and gig economy workers with limited sources of income and benefits.

Many Riverside residents live paycheck to paycheck and may be unable to immediately pay their bills due to their reduced income, and subsequently could be evicted from their homes. Community transmission of the COVID-19 virus cannot spread if people isolate themselves at home and individuals cannot self-quarantine if their home is uninhabitable. Water and Electric Rules 7 both provide that the City *may* discontinue service for failure to pay. The City is not required to terminate service however. The City *cannot*, however, waive any payments. As stated above, and to alleviate any anxiety on behalf of many Riverside residents, a suspension of discontinuing service for nonpayment of water, electric, sewer and refuse utility should be implemented for at least thirty-days and then extended if the local emergency exists.

This measure would follow similar proposals from City Councilmembers in Oakland, Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Jose and San Francisco who are considering economic relief measures, including eviction moratoriums, pauses to utility shut offs, and direct financial assistance to renters and small businesses, including landlords.

REASONING FOR BYPASSING THE SUNSHINE ORDINANCE

Due to the quickly growing and changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and due to the uncertainty of the cancellation of future City Council meetings, proactive measures such as this must be addressed as quickly as possible. We have learned that in crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, major impactful developments can occur in the matter of hours, much less weeks. If the sunshine ordinance was not bypassed, this item may not be deliberated until April 7, 2020, a three-week difference.

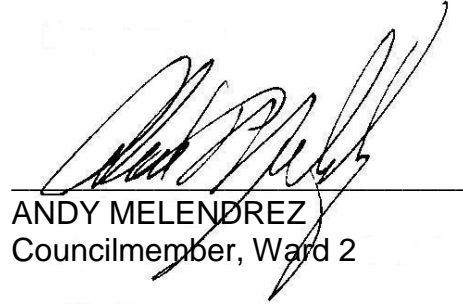
FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no anticipated immediate fiscal impact of this item.

Prepared by:



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