

COMMITTEE MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Finance & Economic Resiliency Committee Members

FROM: Jimmy L. Morales, City Manager

DATE: May 8, 2020

SUBJECT: **DISCUSSION REGARDING FOOD DISTRIBUTION TO RESIDENTS IMPACTED BY COVID-19**

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected our community and residents in a variety of ways including mass unemployment and the correlating need for emergency services including food, rent and utility assistance.

The City began to receive an increase in food assistance requests the week of March 16, 2020 and began responding to these food requests through funds it had available through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP). Households requesting assistance were provided with food packages that included shelf-stable food that included rice, beans, canned vegetables and crackers, among other items. The value of these emergency packages was \$25 each and were packed and purchased through Publix Super Markets. The first delivery under this initiative was made on March 20th. A total of 70 households received these packages.

Once the need outgrew resources under the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, resources were shifted to ensure that those needing food were served. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and General Fund resources were leveraged with a donation of \$10,000 funds from Aryln Cypen to purchase additional food. In addition, \$4,000 in Publix gift cards were purchased so that assistance can be provided to new parents (diapers and baby formula) and those with specialized diets (Pediasure, Ensure, kosher, vegan, etc.). The City purchased a total of \$22,912.96 in food that has been distributed to 388 families. Sixty-one of these households received assistance twice since March 16th and April 28th. Ten households have received assistance three times within the same timeframe.

The amount of food requests began to increase on April 22nd which coincided with the beginning of the fourth week of the month when most families who rely on Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to feed their families typically would rely on their own funds to feed their households. The increase was dramatic as we went from 93 requests during this similar time period in March to 174 requests in the fourth week of April. The City currently has 471 households registered for food assistance.

ANALYSIS

In response to this significant increase in such a necessary service, the City will establish weekly food distributions in North Beach (North Shore Youth Center) and South Beach (Police Athletic League Building) as many of these households do not have cars and have been unable to participate in drive-thru distributions. The City will provide sufficient food to feed all members of registered households for one week with shelf-stable items (including protein, cereal, bread) and

fresh produce. The cost of these packages is estimated at \$73 per family of four and is being supplied through multiple vendors as bulk quantities are difficult to obtain in the marketplace under current conditions.

The City is tracking all food assistance and is ensuring that eligible households access other avenues including SNAP and county registration, as appropriate. More so, those households with SNAP benefits will be expected to exhaust their allocations prior to requesting additional City assistance.

Please note that more than a hundred families with children have been identified as acutely food insecure as these households have lost employment and are ineligible for SNAP benefits. The majority of these families were initially referred to the City by Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

CONCLUSION

The City will establish the food distribution service to ensure that our most vulnerable residents obtain food during this challenging time and will continue to seek ways to leverage other resources as they become available.

Assuming the City begins to re-open within the next month, it is estimated that the need for food distribution could be sustained for the next four months as schools are expected to reopen in September and a degree of normalcy is anticipated. If the City were to establish and maintain this program for four months for 600 households, the approximate cost would be \$700,000. The City would be advancing the use of these funds pending reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).