

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Mini City Hall Update – Informational briefing on the approaches Mini City Hall has taken to provide access to information and City services during the pandemic.

Ying Carlson, Mini City Hall Supervisor, 452-4342

Mike McCormick Huentelman, Assistant Director, 452-4089

Community Development

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**INFORMATION
ONLY**

This session will provide an informational briefing on how Mini City Hall has adapted services to improve access for residents to needed services during the pandemic. No Council action is requested at this time.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Crossroads Mini City Hall is a neighborhood service center extending City services and community connections to East Bellevue residents. Located inside Crossroads Shopping Center, the Mini City Hall specializes in personalized customer service and outreach to Bellevue's diverse population. Today, the program is well known as one of the best models in the Eastside for delivering culturally appropriate, linguistically inclusive customer service and building trust with underrepresented population.

Mini City Hall has demonstrated its power by successfully engaging with people from all walks of life, especially those who are new to the City of Bellevue or even fearful of government. In a typical year, Mini City Hall serves more than 20,000 visitors and handles more than 40,000 requests. The program and all its partnerships with the community organizations bring enormous value in securing Bellevue's future as a livable, inspiring, vibrant and equitable community.

Due to COVID-19, for the first time in 25 years, Mini City Hall closed its physical location temporarily following the Governor's order and pivoted to providing virtual assistance to the community. Also, all partnership agencies temporarily suspended their physical office hours at Mini City Hall.

Rising community needs during COVID-19

As the pandemic continues to rage on, the need for resources has intensified. In 2020, the number of individuals served by Mini City Hall dropped to just over 11,000 individuals, largely due to community partnerships providing direct service remotely as well. However, the number of requests served by Mini City Hall remained high at over 32,000 requests. Staff at Mini City Hall have also seen a sharp increase in human services related requests, 70 percent of all requests in 2020 compared to 57 percent of all requests in 2019.

Many of the service requests Mini City Hall received were unsurprisingly related to Covid-19 and healthcare. People who are experiencing economic hardship and seeking financial assistance are also

overwhelmingly represented in almost all the requests. There was also a significant increase in families with children seeking homeless shelters and Section 8 housing. Landlord tenant tension and disrepute are also on the rise. Below is a summary of some of the community trends:

- **Food insecurity** - long lines at foodbanks and increase of demand for assistance in applying for food stamp programs
- **Limited healthcare access or lack of insurance** due to loss of employment
- **Isolation** - vulnerable population especially those who are disabled, seniors and immigrants with cultural or language barriers
- **Racism and discrimination** – rise in discrimination against people of color including anti-Chinese/Asian sentiment, verbal and physical abuse around the topic of virus
- **Legal assistance referral along with immigration issues** - in the past year, many high-profile immigration law changes deeply impacted the immigrant community locally
- **Affordable housing and homelessness** – a looming eviction crisis of unprecedented scale
- **Rental and utility assistance** - residents' inability to pay rent (many since April) and debt accumulation
- **Increase of first-time requesters** - many who requested assistance are first timers who had never asked for help before the pandemic

COVID-19 Response

Due to increase in community demands, Mini City Hall sought to expand access and provide various ways for community members to connect to the resources they need:

COVID-19 Resource Navigator Program

In recognizing the need to support community members who have experienced the health and economic impact of the pandemic, Mini City Hall staff have created the COVID-19 Resource Navigator Program. The program focuses on providing timely, personalized and multilingual services to the public. Navigators research questions and customize solutions to best fit each situation and aid families who need extra support in these challenging times.

The COVID-19 Resource Navigator program is free, confidential and available by appointments on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and on Saturdays, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. A typical appointment is 30 minutes, and follow-up appointments may be longer depending on needs. Appointments are available in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Somali and many other foreign languages. Residents are able to schedule 30 minute personal appointments with COVID-19 Resource Navigators by phone at 425-452-2800 or email minich@bellevuewa.gov.

Social Service Resource Guide

A comprehensive resource guide was created as a way to expand our outreach and support to the community. The publication is accessible in multiple languages (English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese and Korean). The guide includes a wide range of community resources with a focus on COVID-19 information. It will be widely available at various community organizations that work directly with the general public, health clinics, grocery stores, and food banks in addition to the City website.

Mini City Hall Community Resource Map

As an effort to expand access for residents to locate community resources, Mini City Hall staff have created an online interactive resource map. We have utilized GIS platform ArcGIS to group a resource list categorized by service type, including social services, addresses, links, and a short bio of service. This comprehensive map provides community members the ability to navigate and access resources (Food, Housing, Transportation, etc.) available locally and regionally. The map is easily accessible on the [city website](#) and on the MyBellevue App.

Bellevue Welcome Guide

A Bellevue Welcome Guide, which covers a variety of topics, was created to assist those who are new to our community. In addition to being available on the City website and at community centers, outreach efforts will be prioritized with schools, property managers of apartment complexes, realtors and faith organizations in the community since they are often the first contact people make when moving to Bellevue.

Next Steps

Mini City Hall will continue to provide culturally appropriate and linguistically inclusive customer service for our community during these difficult times.

Mini City Hall will focus its effort this year on developing new partnerships with local public agencies and non-profit organizations to provide services that are urgently needed for those who are heavily impacted by Covid-19. Outreach to vulnerable and underrepresented populations and building trust with our diverse community has always been the signature service of Mini City Hall and will continue to remain a priority.

Additionally, Mini City Hall will be working with the Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center to assist community members with rental and mortgage renegotiation, especially those who have limited access due to language and cultural barriers. Staff from Mini City Hall also anticipate providing strong support to the Utility Rate Reduction Program which starts in the first quarter of 2021.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

Mini City Hall operates to provide culturally competent information and referral services for Bellevue's diverse community. It fulfills the following policy objectives:

- HS-9. Improve access to services throughout the community by removing physical and systemic barriers and empowering individuals to overcome other barriers that may exist.
- HS-11. Encourage culturally competent service delivery that respects the dignity of individuals and families, and fosters self-determination and self-sufficiency.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with implementing these changes.

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. COVID-19 Resource Guide
- B. COVID-19 Resource Navigator Flier

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A