

City Council Chamber, City Hall, Thursday, September 8, 2005

A Special Emergency Meeting of the Houston City Council was held at 5:00 p.m. Thursday, September 8, 2005, with Mayor Bill White presiding and with Council Members Toni Lawrence, Mark Goldberg, Ada Edwards, Addie Wiseman, M. J. Khan, Pam Holm, Adrian Garcia, Carol Alvarado, Mark Ellis, Gordon Quan, Shelley Sekula-Gibbs, M.D., Ronald C. Green and Michael Berry; Mr. Anthony Hall, Chief Financial Officer, Mayor's Office; Mr. Arturo Michel, City Attorney, Ms. Marty Stein, Agenda Director and Mr. Jose Soto, Deputy Agenda Director present. Council Member Carol M. Galloway absent.

At 5:22 p.m. Vice Mayor Pro Tern Goldberg called to order the Special Emergency Meeting of the City Council and called on Mr. Terrance Fontaine, Mayor's Office, to give them a briefing. Mayor White and Mayor Pro Tern Alvarado absent. Vice Mayor Pro Tern Goldberg presiding.

Mr. Fontaine stated that Mayor White wanted him to give them a briefing on what had happened today and a little status on where they were as far as occupation of homes and motel and hotel rooms, that the Mayor had an initiative of consolidated efforts from like organizations to try to get better information as to how to get people in tune with what was going on in the City, not only the private homes but the tens of thousands of people who were in private homes and were either evacuees and/or survivors, that they also had approximately 34,000 people in hotel and motel rooms, that the status between George R. Brown and the Astrodome was somewhere in the neighborhood of 9,000 residents at this time, that he had been spending a lot of time at the George R. Brown Convention Center and they had been doing a lot of health concerns in that area, that they had administered 23,000 prescriptions in that facility, that today Mayor White would address the debit card issue, which was of great concern in the community as far as communication was concerned, to try and figure out exactly what Red Cross and FEMA was going to do so they could all be in sync in the community as far as that knowledge was concerned, that Metro had stepped up in the Vietnamese Community and was providing free transportation to State Representative Vo. Mayor White absent. Mayor Pro Tern Alvarado presiding.

Mayor Pro Tern Alvarado stated that they had not called the meeting to order and requested the City Secretary to call the roll. Mayor White absent. Mayor Pro Tern Alvarado presiding.

Upon questions by Council Members, Mr. Fontaine stated that Mayor White would answer the questions about debit cards, that the gas cards from Shell and the food cards from Kroger would be combined and go out to six different resources, one to the Mayor of Sugarland, State Representative Vo, the Urban League, and a package to the Astrodome/Reliant Center and one to the George R. Brown, that they spread them out around the City to the areas they thought had the most volume of people, that there were 5,000 Shell cards and 25,000 Kroger cards, that there was a data sheet, a sign in sheet, and every single card had a control number and it was attached to a pin number and before they left the facility they had to sign the control number and give them the address they were moving to, that he did not think there was a restriction on the cards to buy cigarettes and alcohol with the cards. Mayor White absent. Mayor Pro Tern Alvarado presiding.

Council Member Quan asked how was the process working, that he had people who were looking to get apartments and had apartment owners who wanted to make apartments available, that some had signed agreements and others had not.

Mayor White requested Mr. Guy Rankin, Harris County Housing Authority, to come forward and brief the Council.

Mr. Rankin stated that since last Friday when the situation got pretty rough in terms of housing and people looking for housing needs, they did take 101 people out of the Reliant/Astrodome arena and provided them with housing, furniture and social services, that as to the process, first, there was a housing resource center being developed at the Astro Arena in the southeast corner called the pavilion, it was for the 8,000 people at that site, that tonight at 9:00 p.m. there was a mobile command center coming in from Phoenix with 14 satellites to provide mobile services to all the Red Cross shelters in the surrounding areas of Houston and Harris County and down to Sugarland next Tuesday, that in terms of housing services they were not forcing any one to go to any one location, that they had senior housing, family housing, SRO, assisted housing, housing vouchers to live where they wanted to live, that they were getting calls daily about other areas in the Country providing jobs and housing and they were paying for it, that he had two today, one from Colorado Springs and the City of New York, both asking for 100 residents, with 100 jobs and that was the process, so when they went to the Housing Choice Center each person or family would be able to choose the type of housing or where they wanted to go, that they wanted to move those 55 and older out of the Astrodome complex, that as of today they had 200 people moving, that he thought they had the Astrodome cleared out of all the active, adult, single or population without kids who wanted to go to a home, that those 55 still attached to family members inside or outside the Astrodome who wanted to go to a family member were still there or went to a family unit, that the George R. Brown would be coming up soon with everybody who was an active adult and 55 and older to take everybody out, that all of the Red Cross centers would be coming on line to take those active adults out, that they had several ministers ask about faith based housing, where they owned complexes where they wanted to help and there would be a faith based housing person at the Housing Choice Center to provide faith based housing, that it was critically important that they coordinate all of this, that he was not present as a County or City person, he was present as a citizen who was volunteering to make sure it was coordinated. Mayor White absent. Mayor Pro Tern Alvarado presiding.

Upon questions by Council Members, Mr. Rankin stated that the mobile unit would go to the shelters, that it would provide other services, that they would be able to register their FEMA registration there, that apartment owners who placed people in apartment before the Housing Choice Center was set up should get with Mr. John Walsh, to sign a contract with the City, that they needed to register and sign the contract. Mayor White absent. Mayor Pro Tern Alvarado presiding.

Upon questions by Council Member Khan, Mr. Walsh stated that the program they had set up now provided that until there had been a contract written with the landlord and a lease written by the tenant, the Houston voucher program was not valid, that was trying to protect the tenant from being in a property that had not been certified and to protect the landlord so that they were not exposed to a tenant that had a criminal background. Council Members Edwards and Green absent.

Mayor White stated that they had looked at the housing issue, but wanted to give people a big picture on emergency relief and where they fit in, that first the most valuable was that right now people should register for FEMA, that they had about 421,000 registered nationwide, they knew there were 1.2 million and if they were in the shelters they should get registered, that second, there were processes under way, they had to manage the communications very carefully about the means and mechanisms for getting both Red Cross and FEMA debit cards to people where the cash transfer or check was not viable, that they had to communicate locally about it, not every decision made in the next 36 hours was going to be made locally but he thought there were issues of logistics and a great 18 hours was on the issue and they were trying to get the procedures and empower their local decision making, and people were committed to that concept but it was so foreign to empower local decision making that they were overcoming some obstacles, that third, on the issue that Council Member Khan had indicated obviously if they could get some money in the hands and some housing vouchers in the hands of people soon rather than later that was their goal, that finally, why did they call the emergency

meeting, for two reasons, first to give some legal authorizations to do things which he was told would and could be reimbursed for that were needed, and also to get their judgment about something, that he was going to tell them something and then wanted some discussion around the table and would come up with a decision making process and structure in order to do it, that they had a bunch of people who had been living in homes all throughout the City and probably some of the highest priorities were those homes and communities shelters where they basically had family based groups in some areas where people did not have a whole lot savings and as everybody knew they were not all going to go down to the warehouse on Harrisburg and look through shelves and then try back out to Channelview and do all that, that FEMA was giving large amounts of money that could be available for shelter, that the only people not in need were the people in the organized shelters and that was actually a small minority of the people that were in their community, that they did a partial canvas of hotel and motel rooms and there were 37,000, that the FEMA rep said they could pay for shelter and not housing, that they had the HUD authorization to do the vouchers for housing but this was shelter, that they could pay for shelter and if someone sought shelter in a home they sought shelter, so they could get reimbursed for that, that as they got the kinks out of the system and until they got checks in peoples hands through FEMA or debit cards, he wanted to make sure that just because they were not in the Reliant Center or the George R. Brown and one of the Red Cross shelters they were not forgotten, that he was looking for some kind of way and means to reach out, through the Urban League or the United Way or some existing agency working with organizations to figure out a way where people could get a little bit on a per diem basis, much less than the \$2,000 per head that FEMA was looking at, but it would be a lifeline, that the negative about it was that yes it would not be the easiest thing administratively, that if they could not come up with something that worked then they would not spend anything, and that was the issue that he needed advice or counsel on, that everybody was focusing all the resources on the people who were in the shelters and they were trying to avoid that and were doing a good job with the social safety network and their local government organizations, but they needed to make sure that the people who were putting people up in their home or family need, the people who had made that choice, were not left out of the whole system, that his plan was that Terrance or Dwayne or somebody from HCD would come up with a leadership team, put up with an organizational structure underneath or as part of a non profit, that on the non profits they were dealing with virtual organizations, they outstripped all of their capacity so they setup the systems for them and help them get it underway, that he knew when he was in the private sector they raised money and it was done through the Urban League and it was done effectively for the people who were fired from Enron, so they would not lose their cars or houses and there was money left over, there was accountability and controls in the whole process, that he just needed that kind of mechanism right now because everybody was shrugging their shoulders about when would they get to those people.

Upon questions by Council Member Sekula-Gibbs, Mayor White stated that the Red Cross did not have a program like this, that they were in the big shelter business, that it was no criticism of the Red Cross. Council Members Garcia, Alvarado and Berry absent.

Council Member Goldberg stated that one of the things that they were voting on was the agreement that had been handed out to all of them, that it was between the City of Houston and blank ( ) and he was wondering what would be filled in in the blank, and Mayor White stated that it was a form of the agreement and probably the first one would be the Urban League, that they were doing a quick assessment of the institutional capability, that they would make an assessment overnight of the United Way to see that it was appropriate, that maybe no money would be spent under this authority but that would be two that had accountability and controls, and Council Member Goldberg stated that he would ask that they take a look at the administration costs and was sure Mayor White would get some figures of how much it would cost to administer the program and that it would not be out of line, and Mayor White stated that none of this money was to be used for administration, and Council Member Goldberg stated that they had passed out another form that said Controller's Office at the top and it was to certify where the money would come from but there was nothing checked off and Mayor White stated

that it would be the fund that was established, that because about two hours ago the fund they created the other day had not been certified but now it had been, and Council Member Goldberg stated that he would suggest they allocate the \$15 per person and then put the item back on the agenda for next Wednesday and see how the program had gone, that it might be they needed more money or allocate more money per person and also it would give a chance to see if there were abuses or bugs or problems.

Upon questions by Council Member Holm, Mayor White stated that it was short term, about a week, that there ought to be some criteria established and their intention was to try to do it tonight, and run it by a community group tomorrow at 8:00 a.m., just get some feedback so they could put it in place tomorrow, that the issue of should it be per capita or family unit was an issue that they had to come up with some criteria, and Council Member Holm stated that before she could support something she needed to know what the criteria was and what was the accountability.

Council Member Quan stated that he was on the Board of Catholic Charities and they had already given out over \$200,000 to different in need and there was also a lot of other organizations who had set up funds to try to help people, that he knew they had setup the Houston Katrina Relief Fund and Mayor White had indicated that there was a board that was in place that was community based, that he thought a lot of people just wanted to help and were not looking to get reimbursed at all, that as far as figuring out what organizations they made a contract with and who was going to make the determination as to who got the money he was a little bit uncomfortable, and Mayor White stated that he thought that Council Members Quan and Holm raised a good point, that he was trying to do something for tomorrow night and the night after that and he was not going to be able to work through the institutional problems to anybody's satisfaction and the only way it would work was if people said they were going to do the best shot with the best people they could and come up with a situation to provide relief in this temporary deal, and Council Member Quan stated that he would like to see which organizations they felt were in touch with the community groups, designate that, that people would know that they could go to those five organizations and for those in need they could reimburse up to \$15 per person, and Mayor White stated that his intention would be consistent with what Council Member Quan stated, and Council Member Quan stated that \$500,000 would go in no time flat, so if they could fund five major organizations at \$100,000 each, and Mayor White stated that he was not going to give it to any group that could not tell him that if he authorized them to do that they could not do it within about 24 hours, and Council Member Quan stated that he did not want every little Tom, Dick and Harry organization come and say they wanted to be part of it.

Council Member Wiseman stated that she shared some of the same concerns that had been expressed by her colleagues, that one thing they had to understand that the Special Emergency Meeting that was called they were finding out that there was not enough information to make a great number of the Council Members comfortable, they were being told \$15 per person, they did not know how many people or for how long, the posting notice said that they were going to authorize the disbursement per diem payments for a specific period of time but there was nothing anywhere that addressed the specific period of time, that they were not being asked to again appropriate what they had already appropriated, what they were being asked to do was to approve and authorize the contracts, but as was pointed out there were some blanks in the contracts, which she, for one, felt a little uneasy about, and then they did not know if they were going to do it per person or family group, that they had to know something, that with respect to the Enron situation the private sector was able to set up a situation, but that was the private sector, the public sector was being asked to do this, that they did not know what the administrative costs were going to be, they also did not know if they were going to have any reimbursement, that when she had asked for specific information on the \$10 million appropriation nothing anywhere was mentioned about per diems, that they were told that the appropriation was going to be for public safety overtime expenditures, for the expenditures for the food, for Solid Waste services, that there were a lot of unanswered questions, they ran the

risk of being told by FEMA that they would not be reimbursing the City of Houston, that they may find out by FEMA that they would not be reimbursed and that cost may be born by their constituents, if they had something more concrete, something that was very descriptive and definitive about the who, what, when and how's then she would be ready to take action, that it was very difficult to do so now in this situation, that they had to be held accountable to their constituents because they did make that commitment to them, that any aid would not come at the expense of their public services and public safety.

Mayor White stated that when he posed the issue to FEMA this was how they recommended they handle it to get reimbursed, that he was not arguing with Council Members, if they could not figure out what do to with folks he might just have to get back on the line, that this was a hole in the safety net and maybe a deliberative body as this was not going to be the way that they were going to be able to address the issue, but he wanted to give them an opportunity to figure it out with him.

Council Member Khan stated that he was present when the discussion took place and when Mayor White asked FEMA a specific question about shelter and housing and all that and was glad that Mayor White had clarified that this was one of the ways that FEMA suggested that they do that, and Mayor White stated that the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security was on the line there, that he had talked to every member of the Senate and every member of the House on these issues every day, that the President was going through details of each thing, they were trying to cut through red tape on it and he did not know whether this authority would be utilized, that he would not do something like this without talking to the City Council, that was one reason he brought it up, that he just wanted to be able to answer somebody straight in the face who had been putting up somebody who they had asked to for the last ten days and they were running out of money and FEMA says that they can reimburse the City if they give them relief, and Council Member Khan stated that Mayor White had done due diligence with FEMA and with the federal people, that they were dealing with an emergency situation.

Council Member Garcia stated that \$500,000 was not going to do a whole lot, but he thought that for them as a body they had to have an assessment and he proposed that they hire staff for the organizations to do the specific job to help them gather information and use it in an effective manner, and if they did have a data base already collected of people who had some of their neighbors in their homes \$15 was not going to give them a whole lot and asked why not give them credit on their water bill, that he thought they needed to step back and understand what the goal was, that he thought the goal was one, getting the City back in the business of doing conventions and business, second, was to understand what had been the local impact, and third, he knew they wanted to provide some support but \$15 in the hands of the community was not going to get them a whole lot of deliverable, that he thought it was more meaningful to give them a credit on a product that they were obviously using for their neighbors.

Mayor White stated that he welcomed the suggestions and wanted to build a consensus of whether they do anything to fill the hole publicly, that they may or may not do it.

Council Member Berry stated that he did not think there was a Council Member at the table that trusted FEMA and did not think there was a Congressman or Senator on either side of the aisle or the President or anyone else that thought that FEMA was doing a good job and at some point the City of Houston taxpayer subsidized FEMA for Allison and thought they all knew they were going to get stuck with some of the bill, that his personal preference was for the next 16 hours they all go out and raise \$500,000 in private funds, that he just did not think that the taxpayer ought to have to bear the brunt again from their services, that their taxpayers deserved to pay their tax dollars for their roads, some of the companies could come up and step up for it and thought there was probably somebody on one of their rolodexes that would write \$100,000, that he thought it should not have to come from the Houston taxpayer.

Council Member Edwards stated that most of the shelters in District D started housing

people before the Astrodome and George R. Brown Convention Center became the major shelters, they were calling the Red Cross to see how to do it and they said they were not going to permit any new shelters so their suggestion to people was to keep records and at their shelter, their church, they devised a form that had peoples names and so forth and the number of children and all that kind of thing, that Mayor White might have to have two or three solutions, that she would start with the people who had the records and were verifiable, and there needed to be some kind of meeting or session where they could bring their records and they could be verified, that it could be churches and/or individuals, that she would also suggest that people who had been doing that be part of the solution building, that most of the people she knew were not doing this to be reimbursed, but her advise to them was to keep records.

Mayor White stated that he thought the entire U. S. Government was committed to getting people back on their feet and giving them some cash pretty soon, that he thought the whole thing was going to be sorted out within a couple of weeks on people getting reimbursement with checks or debit cards or whatever the solution, what was their judgment in that interim period of time, what did they think, how would they approach that, if they thought that there was enough people who could hold on for the next two weeks then they could work it out, and Council Member Edwards stated that they just needed to find a starting place, and Mayor White asked if she thought they ought to vote to do it or not, and Council Member Edwards stated that she would be very hesitant to vote, but would be willing to vote for it because they needed to do something.

Council Member Alvarado stated that she would agree, there was not a textbook on how to do it, there was not a process in place, they had never been through this, that she thought the proposal that the Mayor had come up with was a reasonable one, do they have all the questions answered and the criteria set, no, but she thought that was why they were having the discussion, there were people out there that they simply could not get to but the organizations and subcontractors that the Mayor had named as an example were the folks who were out there in the trenches, the neighborhoods and the communities working and they knew how to go out there and get the message out, that they did not have the time to create another level of bureaucracy to deal with the issue, that she did not think they could wait until next Wednesday because next week the need may be something different, that she thought as the elected body it was their duty to do something about it, she thought most people agreed that these group of individuals that were not in the main shelters needed to be addressed. Council Member Ellis absent.

After further discussion by Council Members, Mayor White stated that this was the way FEMA suggested that they do it to get it reimbursed, and Council Member Edwards suggested that after it was all over if they could have a discussion with the local Chapter of the Red Cross because a lot of it could have been avoided. Council Member Goldberg absent.

Mayor White requested the City Secretary to call the item. Council Member Goldberg absent.

1. Ordinance approving and authorizing one or more contracts to provide for the disbursement of per diem payments to shelter-providers for a specific period of time, subject to certain limitations; making findings and provisions related to the subject; and declaring and emergency - Not to exceed \$500,000 - Hurricane Kristina Aid and Recovery Fund - was presented. Council Member Goldberg absent.

Council Member Garcia moved to postpone Item No.1 until next Tuesday, seconded by Council Member Wiseman. All voting aye. Nays none. Council Member Galloway absent. Council Member Goldberg absent. MOTION 2005-0884 ADOPTED.

There being no further business before Council, the City Council adjourned at 6:57 p.m. Council Member Galloway absent. Council Members Wiseman, Ellis, Quan, Sekula-Gibbs, Green and Berry absent.

DETAILED INFORMATION ON FILE IN THE OFFICE OF THE CITY SECRETARY.  
MINUTES READ AND APPROVED

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Anna Russell, City Secretary