

Emergency Assistance & General Assistance Town Hall Notes
5/11/2020, 4 - 5 p.m.

Questions:

Brad Griffith: Where will the town hall recordings be located?

- The recordings will be posted on the Ramsey County website. You can also email Ameer Xiong.

How are you going to use disparities data to structure the tiers of support to reach the most vulnerable first?

- Holding events like this to find gaps.
- Want to leverage community voices to serve those in most need

Nick Muhammad: There is a loophole in the CARES Act making non-custodial parents who are in arrears ineligible for benefits. This affects 4200 parents. How will RC address those left out of funding?

- FAS received \$26 million from CARES Act to be allocated as follows:
 - \$10 million for food and basic needs (food shelves, transportation)
 - \$15 for EA and EGA (3-4 month rent subsidies)
 - \$1 million for temp workers

Nick Muhammad: Is the budget set or can there be changes?

- The dollars are set but there could be adjustments in how it is allocated.

Ben Weiss: Who will qualify for the 3-4 month housing subsidies?

- Eligibility is still being determined.
- Subsidies could be extended to 6 months.

Is this in combination with EA/EGA if someone is behind in rent and not immediately able to afford their unit?

- Yes, they would qualify.

Brooke Walker: What are EA and EGA eligibility requirements?

- Housing needs to be affordable (income at least equal to your rent obligation)
- Cannot have used EA in the past 12 months (this has been suspended)
- Max issuance is \$812 and must resolve the emergency need (this has been suspended and looking at greater amounts)
- Have no resources available to resolve (\$2,000 asset limit)

Are non-biological/non-custodial parents eligible for EA or EGA?

Yes. Being behind on child support does not make you ineligible for EA or EGA.

Emily Cheesebrow: Are people who have still not received unemployment or are in appeals process required to show they can afford their rent going forward? If so, how would someone who is not certain if or when they will be rehired do so?

- Current EA and EGA policy required income in the household for affordability. This policy is being reviewed for CARES funding.

Tina Curry: We are currently underspending in EGA for this year. Needs to be spent by June 30. How can we get the word out?

- Consistent outreach to community-based organizations
- TV commercials

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Denise Butler: If someone had two jobs to show rent affordability but they lose one, does this affect eligibility negatively? Recommended not automatically denying people due to affordability criteria not being met due to one of multiple jobs were lost due to COVID.

- No.

Ronald Buford: Osiris is currently planning and developing a project to provide laptops (free-low cost) coupled with virtual training opportunities (IT & business applications) to community members who have been displaced from their current job due to COVID and/or are interested in a career change. We will be seeking finding and partnership resources to assist with development. Currently in discussion with MN Computers for Schools and St. Paul Parks and Rec. Looking for others that are interested, willing and able to engage with this initiative.

Nick Muhammad: Where is the flexibility to meet the community where the needs are? Is Ramsey County taking these suggestions seriously?

- Ramsey County is serious and wants to look at current policies during COVID and beyond.
- Will keep community informed about progress

Deborah Reiter: The process for applying set in the April 5 bulletin has been implemented. Is there a phone number for people to apply over the phone?

Tina Jo: With the high cost of rent, are you able to increase the \$812 per household to their individual current rent?

Tasha Belshan: What my agenda runs into is that families move into their new housing while waiting for their WGA application to process. Consequently, the family is denied because they are already living in the unit and the county says it is no longer and emergency. While working with families in crisis or experiencing homelessness, it is a challenge to convince them to wait to move when the unit is ready and they have no other options.

Ben Weiss: The biggest barrier to spending EGA has been the \$812 limit. That is too low to resolve most emergencies and people get hung up trying to find other assistance to fill the gap. I know the county overspent when the limit was 2x the rent plus court costs. In the immediate term, lifting the limit will likely help. Going forward, the limit should probably be somewhere in the middle.

Housing comments:

- People have applied to avoid getting behind and have been denied. Flexibility would be helpful.
- People are worried about eviction after moratorium is lifted
- expand affordable housing options

Would you issue EA to a family that can no longer afford their high rent due to loss of income? They want to move to more affordable housing. No eviction notice has been given.

- Tina – people can apply now before an eviction notice is received

What about families who speak another language and may have 3 generations in the home not working due to COVID. Do you need to look at everybody's income and what if one family member applied for EA and other family members haven't used any? Can that family still qualify for any help?

Will you send the meeting information for Friday by email to all of us on the meeting currently?

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Brooke Walker: Where are all the changes to EA and EGA being posted/shared?

Affordability is defined by Ramsey County. What are suggestions from the community for other definitions?

- Nick: Median household income, current employment rate, unemployment rate, percentage of renters vs. owners. This has demonstrated that people don't have the means to live.

Nick Muhammad: What are radical changes/measures to begin to deal with disparities more aggressively?

Denise Butler: What are we doing for those paying child support and those who are in arrears?

- This is not a question for FAS but will be sent to the County Attorney.

Denise Butler: What is RC doing for small/micro businesses?

- Ramsey County Economic Development in looking at ways to infuse money into minority owned businesses. Unsure if non-profits qualify for these funds.

Denise Butler: Can Ramsey County spread out subsidies on a monthly basis rather than providing one-time help?

Can Ramsey County work with residents to redesign income thresholds?

- The county can be more flexible around EA.
- EGA is a state program in statute so less flexible. We are pushing for as much flexibility as possible.

People are having difficulty reaching their financial workers. What is Ramsey County doing to help people get access to answers?

- Considering having staff proactively do reach out to clients.

Nick Muhammad: Can parents who had stimulus recaptured can still apply for EA/EGA?

- Yes.

Information about assistance can be found under COVID-19 on the Ramsey County website.

<https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/assistance-support/assistance/financial-assistance>

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Attendees

Tracy Joseph, Ramsey County FAS
Tasha Belshan, Metro HRA
Jon Sevald, Community Development Director, Mounds View
Pedro Bustamante – YMCA School Success at Maxfield
Jacquilan Spiess – RC Emergency Assistance Unit
Kayling Vang-Lor, Public Health Family Health Division
Sara Morris-Perry, CommonBond Communities
Jolie Wood, Policy Analysis at RC Policy & Planning
Ronald Buford, Director of Business Development at Osiris Organization
Ben Weiss, Southern MN Regional Legal Services
Amy Anderson, Ramsey County FAS
Mary Hernandez, Ramsey County Public Health
Julie Shappell, CAPRW-Head Start
Will O'Brien, Workforce Solutions
Amy Blair, Ramsey County HWAD
Gail Moerke, RC Corrections Continuum of Care
Grace Motivo, Ramsey County HWAD
Emily Cheesebrow, Thies & Talle Management Resident Support
Lily Tharoor, Project REACH – Saint Paul Public Schools
See Lor, Wilder Foundation
Ruby Rivera, Wilder Foundation
Denise Butler, African career Education & Resource Inc (ACER)
Richard, McLemore Holdings
Cindy McGowan, Saint Paul Public Schools
Dana Janowiak, Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health
Nina Harris, RC Attorney
Brooke Walker, CAPRW
Sara Hollie, Ramsey County
Amee Xiong, Ramsey County
Becky Milbrandt, Ramsey County
Tina Curry, Ramsey County FAS
Maria Sarabia, Ramsey County
Karen Saltis, Ramsey County