

Item Title: Appropriation of Federal and State Relief Funds Associated with COVID-19 Response

Specific Action Requested:

That the Board of Commissioners amends the fiscal year 2021 budget to:

- 1. Accept and appropriate \$19,271,572.40 in federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program funds for the costs associated with Wake County's COVID-19 response to eviction prevention and utility assistance; and**
- 2. Accept and appropriate \$294,972 allocated to Wake County by NCDHHS for vaccination operations through Agreement Addenda 716 – CID COVID-19 Vaccination Program.**

Item Summary:

Purpose: Provide funds to cover the costs of salaries and overtime, necessary equipment and supplies, contract services, and other expenses associated with the County's response to COVID-19.

Background: The County is responsible for several functions during emergency events, including but not limited to public health and safety, emergency response, communications, and community recovery. In late December 2020, Congress passed a COVID relief bill. From this legislation, Wake County will receive \$19.6 million, mostly for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. The County may use these funds to assist applicants with rent in arrears, utility payments, and other expenses incurred due to the COVID crisis. A small portion of these funds is dedicated to planning vaccine distribution efforts.

Board Goal: Supports County operations for emergency response efforts.

Fiscal Impact: This item appropriates a total of \$19,566,544.40 in additional funding received from the US Treasury and the NC Department of Health and Human Services. The appropriation allows for the use of these funds through their expiration dates of December 31, 2021 and May 31, 2021, respectively.

Additional Information:

Emergency Rental Assistance Program: Following the passage of additional COVID relief stimulus funding in late December, the County was notified that, as a local government entity with a population greater than 200,000, it would be a direct recipient of funds appropriated to the federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program. That appropriation, totaling \$19.3 million, can be used for the following purposes:

- Rent and rental arrears;

- Utilities and home energy costs (including those in arrears);
- Other expenses related to housing incurred due, directly or indirectly, the COVID-19 outbreak.

Assistance can be provided for a period of up to 12 months, with up to 10% of support for program administration costs. An additional 10% of the total funding can be used for other, supplemental housing services costs not specifically related to eviction prevention and utility payment assistance. The first guidance and FAQ call was held January 13, and the US Treasury continues to work on guidance that defines eligible supplemental housing services costs, whether utility assistance can be provided as a stand-alone service, and how eligibility may be impacted by those who already received assistance under prior COVID-19 response programs.

The new Emergency Rental Assistance funds come with slightly different income eligibility, verification, and documentation requirements. As the County already was working with Telamon on the initial eviction prevention program, the County will continue to contract with Telamon to administer the new funds, including utility payment assistance.

Vaccination Operations: Wake County is now well into mass vaccination operations. As part of the additional federal relief stimulus funding approved in late December, North Carolina received funding to assist with local health departments with COVID-19 vaccination planning and implementation.

Because the supply of COVID-19 vaccine in the United States currently is limited, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), an independent panel of medical and public health experts. The recommendations were made with these goals in mind:

- Decrease death and serious disease as much as possible;
- Preserve functioning of society; and
- Reduce the extra burden COVID-19 is having on people already facing disparities.

The State funding is being awarded to local health departments to support these goals in the planning and implementation of on-site, satellite, or off-site vaccination clinics.

Summary

The County's response to the COVID-19 pandemic remains agile, considering our responsibility for public health, community needs, and funding received from the federal and state government to support these efforts. Given the fluid and volatile political climate at the federal level, the County continues to closely monitor and adjust how all funds received are administered to ensure the maximum benefit is achieved while maintaining compliance with all state and federal laws. County staff will provide a full update of funding at the February 8 work session, including the latest on the Coronavirus Relief Funds, for which the deadline to expend the funds was extended to December 31, 2021.

Attachments:

1. Budget Memo – FY 2021 Housing and Community Revitalization Special Revenue Fund
2. Budget Memo – FY 2021 Grants and Donations Fund