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Item:
Updates on Homeless Support and Food Insecurity Task Force Work

Date of BOCC Meeting: May 4, 2020

Request for Board Action:

The Board is requested to receive this report and ask any questions they wish.

Unemployment and economic hardship have increased steeply across the nation, the state of North Carolina, and here in Durham since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both homelessness and food insecurity have seen significant increases in recent weeks and months. From late March on, the Durham County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has included a Homeless Support Task Force and a Food Security Task Force working to help understand and address these growing needs in partnership with many other community organizations.

The Homeless Support Task Force is headed by Colin Davis, Homeless Program Manager in the City’s Community Development Department. Donna Rewalt, also head of Durham County Cooperative Extension, is leading the Food Security Task Force. Both task forces are doing important work to protect vulnerable populations in Durham. At their April 27th meeting, Commissioners requested updates on the work and progress of both task forces.

The common challenges faced by these groups include:

- Understanding the nature and location of increasing needs in Durham County;
- Understanding what other resources, including federal, private/corporate, philanthropic, and City funding, may be available to help meet these new needs;
- Understanding as best we can, with input from our Emergency Management and Finance Departments, what the timing and level of FEMA and state reimbursement for different kinds of proposed or real expenditures is likely to be;
- Trying to appropriately calibrate levels of effort (including funding) to issues where both severity and

the possible duration of the issue are difficult to assess with any exactitude.

- Employing high levels of flexibility, creativity, and innovation to develop solutions as typical approaches to emergency response for hunger and homelessness are often not applicable or safe.
- Accelerating the speed at which staff and government systems are able to align within and across government entities and respond with decisions and resources.

Alignment with Strategic Plan: Appropriate homeless and food security supports for vulnerable populations within Durham County’s align most strongly with Goal 2 of the Durham County Strategic Plan.

Resource Persons: Drew Cummings, Chief of Staff (and head of the Human Services Branch in the EOC) ; Donna Rewalt, Director of Durham County Cooperative Extension (and Director of the Food Security Task Force in the EOC) ; Colin Davis, Homeless Program Manager with City Community Development (and Homeless Support Task Force Director in the EOC).

County Manager’s Recommendation: The County Manager recommends that the Board receive this report and ask any questions they wish.

County Manager: _____