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The following are summary minutes for the meeting of the **City of Las Cruces – COVID-19 Task Force Committee** on February 16, 2022. At 3:30 p.m. at City Hall, 700 S. Main Street, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Members Present:

- Kasandra Gandara, City Councilor, District 1
- Yvonne Flores, City Councilor, District 6

Members Absent:

- Tessa Abeyta-Stuve, City Councilor, District 2
- Kathryn Olszowy, Ex-Officio member
- Adrian Larson, MountainView, Member

Others Present:

- Renee Armijo, Administration, Parks and Rec
- Phil Catanach, Recreation Services Manager, Parks and Rec
- Eric Enriquez, Assistant City Manager
- Becky Baum, Recording Secretary, RC Creations, LLC
- Christine Rivera, City Clerk
- John Webster, COVID-19 Project Manager at NMSU

- I. Call to Order:** Councilor Gandara called the meeting to order.
- II. Conflict of Interest:** There was no conflict of interest.
- III. Acceptance of the Agenda:** Councilor Flores motioned, Councilor Gandara seconded. The agenda was accepted.
- IV. Approval of the Minutes - January 19, 2022:** Councilor Flores motioned, Councilor Gandara seconded. The minutes were approved.
- V. Discussion Items:**

A. COVID-19 Vaccination Task Force

- i. Department of Health - Dawn Sanchez:** Dawn Sanchez thanked the Las Cruces Fire Department for helping with vaccinations. Dr. Whaley gave the presentation. Doña Ana County has had a little over 61,000 cases since the onset of the pandemic: roughly 28% of the population. The past seven days to February 11th, Doña Ana County had 1,600 to 1,700 cases; 7.6 to 7.7 per 1,000 residents which is pretty elevated. The test positivity rate stands at 21.2% which is still higher than what is the target which is 7.5%.

1 The at home test kits are biasing the numbers upwards but a large indication
2 that there is still widespread community spread going on.

3
4 In terms of day to day case load, Doña Ana County is now averaging 175
5 new cases per day which is down from the peak of 700 a few weeks ago.
6 Omicron is waning; shot up in middle of December, was flat for a week, and
7 is now starting to fall. The infection rate is now at 0.5 which means it takes
8 two positive people to infect one other person. The rate of transmission is
9 on a trajectory of halving with each cycle of the virus.

10
11 A table was shown of all the cases which are sequenced and have been
12 able to type; 1,900 Omicron cases. Of those cases, only one has died. It
13 is important to know that this is just among the cases which have been
14 sequenced, not among all the cases. This does show that the Omicron
15 variant is not as lethal as the Delta variant. The variants detected is mostly
16 Omicron since December; bad that it is more transmissible but good that it
17 is less severe.

18
19 The vaccination progress is doing very well. Doña Ana County has over
20 95% of population 18 and over have at least one shot; 82% have had either
21 both shots or complete dose in the case of Johnson and Johnson vaccine.
22 Children five to 17 are at roughly 55% of having at least one shot; 43.5%
23 have had the complete dose. Over the past week or two the numbers for
24 kids have plateaued; the outreach may need to be increased.

25
26 Breakthrough cases over the last month were roughly 18% of the entire
27 caseload statewide; fully vaccinated and with a booster. A little less than a
28 third of the cases were among people who had a completed vaccine. Half
29 of the cases statewide were among those unvaccinated. Deaths of
30 breakthrough cases were 9% among those with a booster. Two-thirds of
31 the deaths were among those unvaccinated; risk of death is twice as high
32 as those who are vaccinated.

33
34 Hospitalization rate information is lagged from receiving the necessary
35 information. However there is a decline showing at the moment. Dr.
36 Whaley recommended caution against looking at the dramatic slope the last
37 couple weeks as a lot of the decrease is from incomplete data. Once the
38 data is in there should show a slight decline. Nearly half of the breakthrough
39 cases are coming from Pfizer; more people have had the Pfizer than the
40 other vaccines which will bias the numbers up. When they control for that
41 bias, it is closer to the same between Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson
42 vaccines.

43
44 The percentage of new hospitalization by age group is relatively consistent.
45 There was an increase in 35 to 64 year olds with Omicron but it has now
46 switched back to more elderly. The age of mortality for Doña Ana County

1 is they have lost 271 people per 100,000 persons; there is control for
2 population but not population density. Doña Ana County is denser in terms
3 of people which means more infections.
4

5 The EUA Pfizer pulled back the approval for the six months to four year
6 olds; delayed until April. There was nothing in relation to the safety of the
7 vaccine but rather the number of doses. They are working with pediatricians
8 and primary care providers to be ready for that population once the vaccine
9 is approved. There has been updated guidance in regarding spread to
10 immunocompromised people 18 and over. The information can be found
11 on cv.nmvaccine website.
12

13 Testing is still necessary and a link was provided to show places to test and
14 find in home tests. There is a fifth monoclonal anti-body available; five
15 different treatments, IV and oral. The triage floor is no longer there;
16 person's interested use to need to have several different indicators in order
17 to qualify for the treatments but it has changed due to more supply. The
18 ICAT testing is available with the FEMA group at the Field of Dreams, PCR
19 and rapid test available. This will conclude on Monday February 21st. They
20 are available from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Demand for testing has gone down
21 but is still a critical component. Ms. Sanchez reminded everyone to get
22 vaccinated and tested as the need arises. The numbers will hopefully
23 continue on the downward trend. The current public health order mask
24 mandate goes through March 4th.
25

26 **ii. Office of Emergency Management - Stephen Lopez:** Stephen Lopez was
27 unable to attend but sent his information to the Board previously.
28 Distribution of at home COVID test kit continues to go well and people can
29 find distribution sites online at findatestnm.org. Case counts are coming
30 down almost as fast as they were going up. The seven day positivity rate
31 has gone from 25% to 11% and will likely be within single digits again within
32 the next week. The strain on hospitals are letting up though ICU bed
33 occupancy remains too high. It will likely take a few more weeks to come
34 down to the same level as general bed occupancy.
35

36 With the decreasing case counts and positivity rates it's likely they will see
37 the removal of the indoor mask. Requirements will be known within three
38 weeks. Mr. Lopez is urging the government leaders to start considering
39 they are moving from a pandemic to an endemic phase which means that
40 public health efforts will continue to be reduced as things become routine.
41 There are now plenty of preventative options available for people to reduce
42 chances to get seriously ill and there are four highly effective treatments for
43 people that do contract COVID-19 to keep them from getting worse. Mr.
44 Lopez is available throughout the day via e-mail for any questions.
45

1 Councilor Gandara asked if the treatments and where to find them can be
2 found on the website. She also asked if any of them required a doctor
3 referral. Ms. Sanchez stated they do require a physician's referral. The
4 listing of different treatments are available on the vaccine website as well as
5 who it's for. Councilor Gandara thanked Dr. Whaley for everything he's
6 done.

- 7
8 **iii. City of Las Cruces Staff Update:** Eric Enriquez gave the presentation.
9 The City continues with safe practices; getting N-95 masks out to staff, hand
10 sanitizers, and other safety practices. The City has been helping with home
11 test kits. Scott Rodgers has kept a spreadsheet of what has been sent out
12 and where. Testing kits are available at seven locations: Munson Center,
13 Meersheidt, Papen, Sage, Benavidez, and East Side. Kits are also being
14 distributed out of Transit. As of this afternoon 2,048 kits have been
15 distributed with 5,000 kits on location spread between the seven sites.
16 There is a process to drop ship additional kits at a site if needed; currently
17 they are fully stocked.

18
19 Chief Smith stated that the Fire Department is winding down on the
20 homebound vaccinations. The program did over 1,000 homebound
21 individuals with their full vaccination and booster. It will be closed within the
22 next week or two. Councilor Gandara thanked the Fire Department for
23 everything they've done to do that as well as staff for distributing the kits.

- 24
25 **iv. Community Messaging:** Mandy Guss stated that they have been sharing
26 the availability of the test kits and answered several media requests related
27 to them. Information from the Department of Health is continually being
28 shared. There were some media requests regarding the Field of Dreams
29 event. Different testing and vaccination locations are also being shared to
30 inform the public better. As the homebound program with the Fire
31 Department wraps up they will put out a news release regarding that; remind
32 those to get vaccinated if not. Councilor Gandara thanked Ms. Guss and
33 her staff for getting the word out.

- 34
35 **v. Discussion:** Mr. Webster gave an update for NMSU. They need to
36 maintain less than 13% of population positivity rate; last week they were at
37 4.88%. 78 were reported while Doña Ana County was 1,599 minus the 78.
38 Active cases are coming off the list as quick as they go on with the new five
39 day isolation periods. There are nine active cases system wide throughout
40 the state. Trend lines are going down as fast as those in Doña Ana County.
41 Several different areas are closely monitored. There was a testing or
42 vaccination mandate on October 1, 2021; from October to December 2021
43 the vaccinated individuals on campus had 1% positive case with a 5% of
44 non-vaccinated individuals. Vaccinated individuals are not required to test
45 so it is not based on the test themselves.

1 Councilor Flores asked how often students are tested. Mr. Webster stated
2 that the new mandate states they have until midnight on the 17th if they're
3 not boosted or eligible for a booster must submit weekly tests. Faculty and
4 staff are required to be vaccinated but not boosted. No students have been
5 dis-enrolled; all are complying. Two are in isolation in a population of
6 13,000 on campus; 23,000 students' total. If students aren't coming on
7 campus they don't have to test. The home test kits are being handed out
8 to students; a campaign for Spring Break is being done. Roughly 9,000
9 tests were received and roughly 4,000 has been distributed. If there will be
10 more than needed NMSU will partner with the City to redistribute as needed.
11 All student vaccinations have been tracked; they submit into Crimson
12 Connection.

13
14 **vii. Next Steps:**

15
16 **VI. Future Discussion/Task Listing:** Councilor Gandara asked if they need to meet
17 next month. Councilor Flores stated they should keep meeting to keep the stats
18 current. Eric Enriquez would like to meet to see what the mandate does. They
19 can also see what the trend is and if it's continued down. Perhaps after seeing the
20 trend the Committee can change to meeting quarterly; work on what information
21 needs to be sent out to the community.

22
23 Councilor Flores asked how the spike suddenly happens when things are going
24 smoothly and if there's any discussion or speculation on what COVID may come
25 to, perhaps like the flu. Dr. Whaley stated that variants happen every time the
26 virus replicates or there's another infection; the mutations are always random.
27 What dictates what mutation comes out is how good the mutation is at infecting,
28 replicating, and transmitting, largely a function of biology. The only thing that can
29 be done is stay vigilant and minimize the number of times the virus replicates. The
30 precautions taken right now with masking, vaccines, social distancing, and
31 etcetera is helping to mitigate the mutations.

32
33 **VII. Next Meeting Date - March 16, 2022:**

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35 **VIII. Adjournment:**

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Chairperson