

Information Item

Date: March 22, 2022

To: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, and Members of the City Council

From: Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager
Johnnie Taylor, Assistant City Manager
Dr. Marquis H. Barnett, Human Resources Director

Subject:

Update on Implementation of the City's COVID-19 Vaccination Incentives and Testing Policy

Strategic Focus Area: Service Excellence

Strategic Objective: No

Strategic Plan Action Item: No

Key Work Item: No



Since last fall, variants of COVID-19 have contributed to a rise in positive cases and hospitalizations across the country and locally. To increase the vaccination rate among City employees, the City Manager offered eight hours of paid time off for employees who provided proof of full vaccination. Less than 900 employees, or approximately 34%, took advantage of this benefit.

In October, City management presented a proposed COVID-19 Vaccination Incentives and Testing Policy that would award financial incentives to City employees who presented proof of full vaccination status as of Sunday, December 5, 2021 (\$1,000 for Full-Time Employees and \$500 for Part-Time Employees). Employees who elected to become vaccinated after December 5th would be eligible for a reduced vaccination incentive. The Mayor and City Council approved the policy on October 18, and the policy went into effect on Monday, October 25, 2021.

As of December 6, 2021, 1,818 employees (78 percent of the City's workforce) had provided proof of full vaccination status. Under the new policy, effective December 6, 2021, those employees who remained unvaccinated (493) were required to submit to weekly COVID-19 testing. This initial testing period remained in effect for four weeks and ended on Thursday, December 30, 2021.

City staff provided an update on the City workforce's vaccination status at the Community Development/Housing/General Government Committee meeting on December 14, 2021. At that time, 82% of the City's workforce was fully vaccinated. The City subsequently paid out \$1.8 million in full and partial vaccination incentives as part of the December 17 payroll. In January, the Mayor and City Council approved a budget amendment to appropriate both health benefits fund reserves and a portion of the City's allocation of Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to cover the cost of the incentives.

At the Community Development/Housing/General Government Committee meeting on January 11, 2022, City staff presented proposed revisions to the City's vaccination policy to provide

additional financial incentives for employees to get fully vaccinated and to revise and extend the weekly testing requirement for unvaccinated employees, including additional progressive disciplinary measures. At that time, 1,920 employees, or 85% of the City’s workforce, had provided proof of full vaccination status and received the vaccination financial incentive. A total of 383 employees remained unvaccinated and were required to submit to weekly COVID-19 testing, which ended on Thursday, December 30, 2021. The estimated weekly cost of the testing totaled approximately \$35,000, to be paid out of the City’s health benefits fund.

The following are key provisions of the revised COVID-19 Vaccination Incentives and Testing Policy, which was approved by the City Council and went into effect on January 18, 2022. Unvaccinated employees had to comply with the weekly testing requirement by Friday, January 21.

- Established a vaccination financial incentive of \$200 for Full-Time Employees (\$100 for Part-Time Employees) who receive a booster.
- Extended the availability of the partial vaccination financial incentive of \$500 for Full-Time Employees and \$250 for Part-Time Employees beyond the four-week mandatory testing period.
- Required unvaccinated employees to provide proof of a negative test result each week by the deadline.
- Reinforced that those employees who test positive for COVID-19 must follow existing protocols for positive COVID-19 test results. Employees are not to report to work. In addition, if an employee tests positive for COVID-19, or is diagnosed with COVID-19 by a licensed health care provider, that employee will be removed from the system for mandatory testing during their quarantine period and will not be penalized for failing to adhere to weekly testing protocols.
- Established additional disciplinary measures for non-compliance with the weekly testing requirement. The proposed revisions to the policy add the following progressive measures, highlighted in the table below.

First Missed/Refusal Week	Written Reprimand
Second Missed/Refusal Week	One-Day Suspension Without Pay
Third Missed/Refusal Week	Three-Day Suspension Without Pay
Fourth Missed/Refusal Week	Five-Day Suspension Without Pay
Fifth Missed/Refusal Week	Ten-Day Suspension Without Pay
Sixth Missed/Refusal Week	Indefinite Suspension Without Pay

The progressive disciplinary process did not start anew with this revised policy.

- Stated that the City Manager will provide periodic reports to City Council and seek additional guidance regarding future measures.

The City's original policy was adopted prior to and independent of the OSHA Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS), which was stayed by the U.S. Supreme Court on January 13, 2022. Based on information shared with City staff, it appears that the North Carolina cities that are requiring unvaccinated employees to submit to COVID-19 testing are continuing their respective

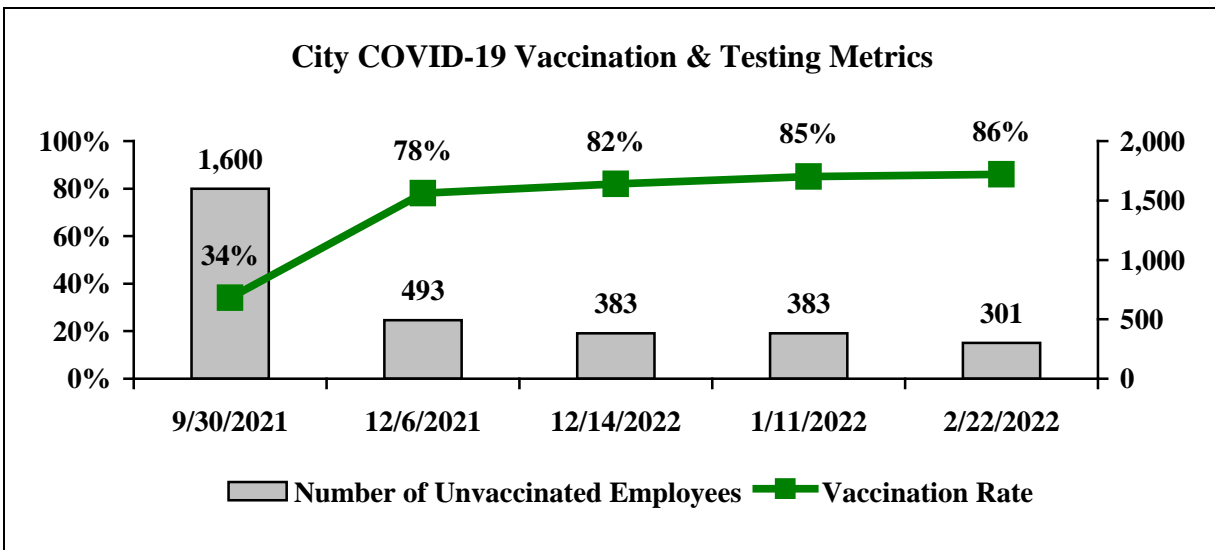
testing policies, until their testing periods expire. The attached table provides an update on the large North Carolina cities' vaccination policies.

Per the revised policy, City management has prepared this information item to provide the Mayor and City Council an update on the City workforce's vaccination status, pay-out of financial incentives, compliance with weekly testing requirements for unvaccinated employees, and disciplinary actions.

The following table provides the City's vaccination and testing metrics as of March 17, 2022.

Number of City Employees Vaccinated	1,944
Percent of City Employees Vaccinated	86%
Amount Paid out in Full and Partial Vaccination Incentives	\$1.8 million
Number of Employees Who Have Submitted Proof of Booster	612
Amount Paid out in Booster Incentives	\$114,900
Number of Unvaccinated Employees Who Continue to Submit to Weekly Testing	301
Number of Unvaccinated Employees Who Have Tested Positive for COVID-19	81
Number of Unvaccinated Employees Who Have Received Disciplinary Action	34

The following chart shows the trend in the City's vaccination rate and the number of unvaccinated employees who continue to submit to weekly testing, since the City Council approved the policy. The original policy went into effect on October 25, 2021. Please note that the number of unvaccinated employees on September 30, 2021 is based on the number who submitted proof of full vaccination to receive the additional eight hours of paid time off. This number most likely was lower.



City management will continue to provide regular updates on the City organization's vaccination and testing metrics.