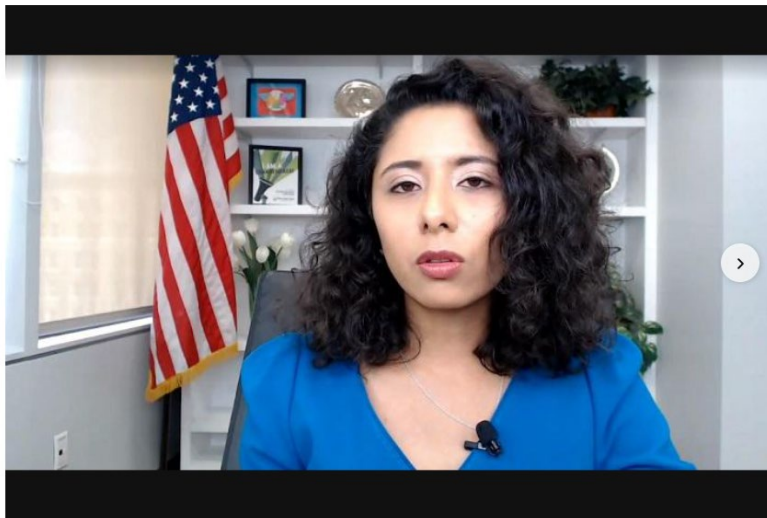


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Montgomery County Judge Mark Keough, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo give updates to North Houston Association

[Paul Wedding](#), Staff writer

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Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo talks about county efforts during a North Houston Association awards ceremony.
Microsoft Teams

Montgomery County Judge Mark Keough and Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo addressed the North Houston Association during the NHA's annual awards ceremony Thursday, providing updates about what their counties have been going through during the pandemic.

Keough said that, since reopening in April, Montgomery County has maintained a 98.8 percent recovery rate for COVID-19 cases.

"It's been said Montgomery County sacrificed public health for the economy and business," Keough said. "That is just not what has happened. As a matter of fact, our infections per thousand are some of the lowest in the region."

Data from the Montgomery County Public Health District shows 1,917 active cases in the county as of Thursday, with a total of 144 deaths and 12,747 total cases since the pandemic began.

Keough said he's taken the position of doing whatever he can to keep the county open and eliminate many restrictions other counties have taken during the pandemic.

"What I noticed was the people were listening to what our governor was telling us without us coming out with an order," he said.

Since the pandemic began, Keough said they've seen housing permits increase by 30 percent from last year. The county's sales tax has also been up about 2.4 percent from last year, which he said was remarkable given the pandemic.

Unemployment has gone down in Montgomery County as well, he said. They reached a high at the start of the pandemic of about 13.8 percent, which dropped since then to about 6.9 percent as of the end of September. He said he believes the rate should continue to drop below 5 percent before the end of the year and get back to the 3.8 percent unemployment rate they were at before the pandemic began.

Hidalgo said it's impossible to talk about the pandemic without talking about the economic impact, and said the county is working hard to support the community through these times.

Harris County has invested more than \$30 million in local general fund dollars to direct financial assistance for their communities to use for what they need. She said they also invested more than \$40 million on rental assistance and another \$40 million in small business assistance to help prevent evictions or businesses closing.

“I’m excited that the community is coming together to fight the impact of this,” Hidalgo said. “It’s hard, but we’re gonna keep pushing and I’m hopeful that we’ll come out of this and that our next generation is going to be ready.”

Hidalgo said Harris County has also still been pushing out drainage projects since the pandemic to prepare for severe weather events like Hurricane Harvey and Tropical Storm Imelda.

“We’re trying to be really smart in having uniform work throughout the county,” Hidalgo said. “We’ve asked all the cities that are receiving flood bond funds from Harris County to adopt detention requirements at least to federal standards so that we’re not flooding folks downstream when we build.”

Keough said Montgomery County was undergoing a couple of studies as well related to the Spring Creek Watershed to help prevent flooding in that area, which can flood down into Harris County as well.

“We must work together, because most of the flooding taking place is coming across our area and flowing to Harris County and impacting them,” Keough said.

To prepare for the anticipated growth in Montgomery County, Keough said they are also updating their county thoroughfare plan. The county will hold precinct meetings about the plan beginning in November and December, and then a project update meeting in January. He said they hope to have the plan in place by next summer.

“This is top-of-the-line awareness for us right now,” Keough said. “We’re not going to draw individuals here if they can’t move throughout the county.”

Hidalgo said Harris County is also focused on their own transportation plan but that it may not be completed by next summer. Along with that, she said the county is focused on affordable housing, which she called a big challenge in the area.

“A lot of people really want to sell (their homes), particularly after the rain event, but the question is can they find adequate housing that is equivalent somewhere else,” Hidalgo said. “So, we are looking at that holistically for the first time.”

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