

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on July 7, 2015

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

June 16, 2015
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson McEachran, Commissioners Bruels, Kline, Mercer

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Perelman, Villar

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Leslie, Alex O'Reilly, Joseph Adriano, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Chair McEachran who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Perelman and Villar, both of whom were excused.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. May 19, 2015

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Bruels. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kline and it carried unanimously.

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS - None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Kline said she recently visited the Bellevue School District office and sat in on part of a PTSA Council meeting. The item of business discussed was the Family Connection Centers and the fact that school district funding for the program is in jeopardy.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly said she has been tracking that issue and explained that the funds are now mandated to be used for educational instruction. Eastside Pathways has formed a business group that has pledged to find money for the shortfall and in fact have been successful in doing so for the coming school year.

Human Services Manager Emily Leslie said staff will be scheduling a meeting with school district staff about the possibility of consolidating the grants they currently receive and using them in different ways.

Chair McEachran said he attended the recent awards luncheon of the Alliance of Eastside Agencies and observed Mayor Balducci receiving their elected official of the year award. He said he also attended the Parks and Community Services Board meeting at which Ms. O'Reilly presented the progress made on the Needs Update. He also noted that he watched the City Council meeting on television and saw the unanimous approval for the rezone of the St. Luke's Lutheran Church site where Imagine Housing will construct affordable housing on part of the site.

Ms. Leslie said the Committee to End Homelessness Strategic Plan has undergone additional revisions and will be going back before the City Council on June 22. The Council hopefully will take action on a resolution to endorse the Plan. The Governing Board is slated to take action on the Strategic Plan on June 30. Once the Plan is approved, the Governing Board will go away and be replaced with a Coordinating Board.

Ms. O'Reilly said a new intern, Jamie Fajardo, is on board and is being oriented.

6. DISCUSSION

A. 2015-2016 Human Services Needs Update - Phone Survey Results

Ms. O'Reilly said the technology around securing cell phone numbers has become more sophisticated, making it possible to obtain some cell numbers to include in the survey. There were 423 who took the survey, 171 online and the rest by phone, with the phone respondents about evenly split between land line and cell phone. Addresses are secured by the survey company through the post office. Letters are sent out explaining that they may be contacted. The letters include a link to the online survey or the option of being contacted by phone. With the addition of cell phone numbers, the survey included a better representation from respondents in the 18 to 34 and 35 to 54 ranges.

Ms. O'Reilly explained that the primary components of the survey have not been changed since 1988 when it was first done. It asks the respondents to rate a list of community level problems and a list of household problems. There are also questions around access to human services. In 2011 as the nation was coming out of the recession, a higher number of community problems were identified. That went down in 2013 and has increased again, though not significantly, in the most recent

survey. The rating of community problems is subject to recent events; a person whose car was recently broken into will likely not rate their neighborhood as being safe even if the statistics say otherwise.

The survey company was asked to produce a trend line of the different problems identified over the past 12 years. Money management came up both as a community and household issue. Homelessness has never made it into the top tier, though it has been close and it increased in the most recent survey. Lack of affordable childcare and lack of quality childcare were quite high on the list, possibly because questions about childcare were asked only of respondents having someone under the age of 18 in their household.

Commissioner Mercer observed that mental illness came in at 27 percent in 2011, 19 percent in 2013, and was back up to 27 percent in 2015 yet did not make it into the top tier problems. Ms. O'Reilly said it was very close to the top tier ranking. The question about mental illness was not changed but there has been more media about it lately.

Ms. O'Reilly said of the 32 community problems covered by the survey questions, nine had increases of five percent or more, including affordable housing which rose to the top tier; and five saw their percentages decrease by five percent or more, including unemployment and lack of affordable medical insurance and medical care.

Commissioner Mercer observed that people not speaking English well enough to function in society also dropped by five percentage points, even though the community is becoming more diverse and there are more residents who face that problem. Ms. O'Reilly said the survey was administered only in English, though one question asked what language is spoken in the home and it highlighted a lot of diversity.

Ms. O'Reilly said she was surprised to see a large majority of the respondents indicate that human services are accessible. Not surprisingly, affordable housing, financial assistance and mental health services were called out.

Turning to household problems, Ms. O'Reilly noted that in the past fewer problems per household have been highlighted when compared to community problems. That could be the result of people being unwilling to share that information. The number of household problems identified were close in 2011 and 2015 but increased in 2013. Childcare was once again a top issue, and it was surprising to see not being able to afford recreation ranked so high. The lack of community support and individual support as a parent or caregiver resonates with what was shared in some of the community conversations. Not being able to afford higher education rose in the ranks over the previous survey.

The percentage of respondents who indicated they sought assistance for household problems was slightly higher than 2013. About half indicated they sought help and found it.

Questions were asked in 2013 to determine how the recession was impacting Bellevue residents. With the recession officially over, the questions were revised slightly for the recent survey. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents indicated they were employed, 17 percent said they were retired, six percent said they were unemployed but not looking for work, six percent classified themselves as students, and only two percent said they were unemployed and looking for work. Of those who said they were currently employed, only 23 said they had more than one job. Of those who indicated they had been unemployed for a time, 15 said they now have better jobs with better pay and better benefits.

Housing and public transportation are growing concerns in the community. Affordability is the theme surrounding the top concerns in both the household and community problems questions. Homelessness has increased steadily as a major or moderate problem and in fact has doubled as a percentage of concern since 2005. Mental illness has also steadily increased as a highlighted issue.

Ms. O'Reilly said the provider survey was started about eight years ago and includes 43 questions. It was mailed out to about 100 agencies, 53 of which responded. A good range of types of services were represented by the respondents.

Sixty percent indicated they had seen a change in demographics over the past two years. The change was identified as increased racial diversity with a particular increase in East Indian and Ukrainian folks, and more people from Muslim countries speaking Arabic. The respondents also indicated an increase in the number of persons experiencing homelessness. Many suggested that because of the way the coordinated entry system works, homeless persons are not getting housed as quickly and thus are remaining homeless for longer periods of time. Additionally, people can only be put in the housing queue if they are literally homeless.

Ms. Leslie said a recent analysis found that the housing agencies had over 72 different criteria, and it has been a nightmare trying to find people who fit all of the criteria. What the coordinated entry folks are working on now is reducing and standardizing the criteria so the matching can take place quicker. They also found out that families in their initial assessments have not always been forthcoming relative to the issues they had; families were getting placed and the agency would later realize there was much more to be addressed.

Commissioner Bruels commented that the economics cannot simply be ignored. The agencies have traditionally had a great deal of control over who they would agree to take into their programs. The new system has removed that control aspect and that is impacting their interests. Ms. O'Reilly agreed and added that delays in placing people are also resulting in units being vacant for longer periods of time.

Commissioner Kline asked if the problem is actually fixable. Ms. Leslie said other communities have been successful in developing a coordinated entry system. Part of the issue locally is that the data system in place has not been adequate; the vendor is being changed in the hope of seeing improvement.

Commissioner Bruels pointed out the need to factor in the issue of addressing the greater good. One of the reasons why the Family Housing Connection started was the need to get families in crisis into housing first. If that means a couple of units go vacant for a few extra days, so be it. Ms. Leslie said the coming year will be the true test as more agencies go through the conversion of some of their units and revising and reducing their criteria.

Ms. O'Reilly said 87 percent of the agency respondents reported demands on their services were increasing, particularly services around homelessness and for children with emotional problems, mental health and substance abuse issues. A couple of agencies that provide healthcare services reported an increase in demand; that makes sense in light of the fact that more people have insurance now. The Bellevue School District providers that responded talked about seeing more low-income students in the schools.

Affordable housing was rated by the providers as the biggest gap in services. Over 50 percent highlighted additional gaps, including mental health services, emergency financial assistance, dental services and transportation.

The providers were asked to indicate whether or not they have wait lists. Forty-four percent said yes and 55 percent said no. Wait lists can be deceiving given that duplications can occur. Countywide, there were 2400 families on the wait list through the 2-1-1 call center as of the first quarter of 2015. The agencies that provide clinical services did not report having wait lists but people often have to wait up to a week or more for an appointment. Depending on the therapy, only about 50 percent of the mental health needs are being addressed. Some agencies like Kindering Center cannot under federal law put people on wait lists given that they serve protected populations.

Asked how they are being affected by budget cuts, only a few agency representatives said they have seen specific cuts. They did, however, highlight the fact that they are still recovering from cuts that had to be made during the recession.

The providers were asked about the services they provide to veterans. The themes that rose to the top in that category were mental health services and employment.

Questions about the collective impact were asked. A handful of providers mentioned the Eastside Pathways project directly, but most focused on collaborations and cross referrals. With regard to turn-aways, it was noted that people are turned away

primarily due to a lack of funding, to not offering the services needed, or to a lack of volunteers.

Ms. O'Reilly informed the Commissioners that to date 14 key informant interviews have been completed. She said the interviews always generate interesting comments. In a phone interview earlier in the day with the person who supervises customer service at the library in downtown Bellevue, the fact that homeless persons use the library during the day was talked about, as was the increased use of heroine that has triggered the need to modify the bathroom stalls and doors to discourage the use. Used needles are being found in the bathrooms but also in the main library rooms as well. The need for community policing is clear and Ms. O'Reilly said she has a meeting scheduled to talk with the person who works with communities on safety issues and block watch programs. There have also been key informant interviews with representatives of faith communities.

Ms. O'Reilly said the community conversations are winding down. As usual the conversations have highlighted interesting information that will make its way into the update. There have also been conversations with internal city staff from neighborhood outreach, code enforcement, community services, Bellevue Fire Cares, park rangers, and the police.

Nearly 100 consumer surveys have been completed to date. The Bellevue College ELL teachers gave them to their students, and they were available at mini city hall in Crossroads. The surveys were also distributed at the recent Jubilee REACH lunch celebrating the last day of their ESL classes, and at the Stevenson elementary school community connections center.

Ms. O'Reilly said the schedule calls for having the draft Needs Update before the Commission soon after Labor Day.

Commissioner Mercer asked if it is known how many residents are forced to leave Bellevue because of financial issues. Ms. O'Reilly said did not have that information but said it would be useful data to have.

Commissioner Kline pointed out that the Commission had at one time suggested that one of the community conversations should be with folks that work in Bellevue but do not live in Bellevue. Ms. O'Reilly said she met recently with Mike Ogliore with the Bellevue Downtown Association and put together a simple business survey focused on the needs of employees of businesses in Bellevue. Some who respond will likely work in Bellevue but not live in Bellevue. Over the years attempts have been made to work with employers and the Chamber of Commerce to identify groups of non-Bellevue residents who work in the city but the data has proved hard to access.

Commissioner Bruels said his suspicion was that the cost of living in Bellevue is what keeps many from living and working in the city. The Northwest generally is seeing an

influx of new residents from other parts of the country, which could be interpreted to mean that things are not as good elsewhere.

Ms. O'Reilly said she has heard anecdotally that those who do stay in Bellevue are often doing so at great expense. She shared the story of one family with a father who is disabled and which has one child in high school in Bellevue. Their rent for their home near Lake Hills elementary increased from \$1200 per month to \$1600 per month, and unless they signed a one-year lease the rent was going to increase to \$2000 per month. Moving to another city was discussed but the parents really wanted their child to continue in the Bellevue School District.

7. OLD BUSINESS

Commissioner Kline said the joint meeting held on June 8 with the commissions from Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond and Issaquah was very informative. There was clearly a lot of desire expressed for additional collaboration, and ideas were thrown out about how that could be done. It was noted, however, that Bellevue's process is skewed much earlier than the other cities and that some synchronization would be beneficial. Commissioner Villar made a comment about pushing the agencies to collaborate with each other while the cities do not seek to do the same.

Ms. O'Reilly suggested looking at the collaboration issue from other than the allocations process. One way to do that would be for the jurisdictions to take on a special project such as early learning.

Commissioner Bruels pointed out that the Kirkland group is not an actual commission and does not meet on a regular basis. That is a structural issue.

Commissioner Kline said she would like to see the cities work together in identifying which agencies are dependent on which cities funding, the degree to which the funding is proportionate among the cities and in relation to the population being served. Ms. Leslie said data is in hand regarding what the funding is by city and which agencies are funded. Commissioner Kline said it would be especially helpful to know what percentage of each funded agency's total budget comes from the various cities.

Commissioner Bruels added that there could be some efficiencies created by coordinating the funding of specific programs, leaving the agencies only one city to report to rather than two or three concerning a program. Grant Coordinator Joseph Adriano said that idea was raised a few years ago by Redmond but it fell by the wayside due to a general lack of interest. He said it could certainly be revived. Ms. Leslie added that Bellevue's total funding far outweighs the funding provided by the other cities, and such an approach could result in Bellevue funding almost everything, leaving only a few small programs to be funded by the other jurisdictions. She agreed there could be a better alignment of the funding process.

Mr. Adriano said one of Redmond's ideas was that there could be a point at which the commissions could agree to divvy up the specific issues, such as housing and food. Ms. Leslie said the idea was raised at the recent joint meeting but it did not receive a warm reception. There are political realities involved in the various cities wanting to have a hand in funding things like food banks and childcare, and in regard to funding across jurisdictional boundaries.

Commissioner Kline said the presentation given at the joint meeting regarding the Best Start for Kids levy highlighted the fact that none of the dollars would be directed to actual childcare. She noted that several of the commissioners present were aghast at that revelation. The indication was the dollars would flow to training. At the Eastside Human Services Forum meeting that followed, a member of the Issaquah Human Services Commission, whose day job involves working for the state agency that licenses childcare, commented on the huge need for more childcare. When it comes to quality, training is needed, but the reality is that the need is so great people cannot find the time to receive the training. There is not a general deficiency where training is concerned, but there could be improvements made in networking so childcare providers can know what services are available to them. There are also some issues associated with licensing, including the requirement to show a high school diploma. Many who end up working in childcare are from a population that lends itself to not having high school diplomas. Ms. O'Reilly said the requirement comes from the state Department of Early Learning. There is a new initiative that is coming in as a sweeping change from the state relative to the level of qualifications. There are many culturally diverse providers who will not be able to meet the new standards.

8. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Leslie took a moment to introduce new Commissioner Judith Mercer. Ms. Mercer said she is a long-time Bellevue resident and recently graduated with a Masters of Public Administration from the Evans School at the University of Washington. She said after graduating she took the Bellevue Essentials course. She said she works at Microsoft, volunteers for the city's mediation program, and has two children.

The individual Commissioners introduced themselves to Commissioner Mercer.

Ms. Leslie reported that the application process will be opened again to seek someone to fill the vacant seat on the Commission.

Ms. Leslie noted that the next two Commission meetings would include a review of CDBG applications.

9. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS - None

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair McEachran adjourned the meeting at 8:26 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date