

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on April 3, 2019

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

March 5, 2019
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Mercer, Commissioners Jain, Kline, Ma, McEachran, Oxrieder, Piper

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Alex O'Reilly, Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Joydeep Hazra, Philip Wang, Jessie Liu, Youth Link Board; Councilmember Zahn

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Mercer who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Kline who arrived at 6:02 p.m.

New Commissioner Anita Jain took a moment to introduce herself. She said she has lived in Bellevue for 15 years and has been interested in how the cities manage to take care of their residents. She said after taking the Bellevue Essentials course a few years ago she gained an understanding of and respect for each city department. She said she was happy to have been chosen to work with the Commission.

3. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner Piper reported that he and Human Services Manager Alex O'Reilly have started planning for a presentation or panel on child welfare, a topic that

reaches out into a number of areas of interest to the Commission. Four areas to be addressed have been identified, including DSHS or DCYS to gain a broad overview of the child welfare system; a service provider such as Lutheran Community Services; something at the school level relative to McKinney Vento; and Friends of Youth.

Commissioner Ma said he recently came across an article that outlined the response of the city of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. He said the city focused first on housing those who were homeless as a result of the hurricane even before addressing medical and employment issues. He said those who have a roof over their heads and have their basic needs met are often more successful in getting jobs and needed services.

Ms. O'Reilly acknowledged that Commissioner McEachran had been awarded the MLK Medal of Distinguished Service and congratulated him. The honor was awarded by King County Councilmember Balducci in recognition of Commissioner McEachran's commitment to putting faith into action and inspiring his congregation to make a difference in their community.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland took a minute to acknowledge all the work done by the shelters during the recent snowstorm event. She said they truly went above and beyond. Congregations for the Homeless was over capacity by about 20 people who they let sit in chairs in their day center. Catholic Community Services and Sophia Way both operated from their day center.

Assistant Director of the Department of Parks and Community Services Toni Esparza commented that while usually there is a gap between the day center open times and the shelter open times, during the storm they extended the times to do away with any gaps.

Commissioner McEachran urged the Commissioners to download and read the affordable housing strategy progress report. He noted that at the March 4 Council meeting Councilmember Zahn stated that during the recent storm event there were city employees and firefighters who were not able to go home and who slept on cots at city hall and said it was impressive that they had that access.

Ms. O'Reilly said the Eastside cities have asked the four shelters, Friends of Youth, Catholic Community Services, Sophia Way and Congregations for the Homeless about the additional costs they encountered to provide services during the snow storm. Many of their staff were also unable to go home. The Eastside cities are working to cover the additional costs for the agencies.

6. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. Youth Link Update

Philip Wang thanked the Commission for the invitation to make a presentation. He said he serves as the youth co-chair and is currently a senior at the International School in Bellevue. Joydeep Hazra said he serves as the adult co-chair.

Mr. Wang said the Youth Link mission statement is to be a catalyst in responding to the interests and concerns of young people by engaging the entire community and implementing an agenda developed by youth. The agenda flows from the Youth Involvement Conference that occurs every two years. The Youth Link program started almost 30 years ago by members of the community. The Youth Link Council and Board provides leadership opportunities for teens and addresses teen issues. It is the only board in the city that has youth representation. The Board works with the Bellevue School District and other organizations on the local and city level, and Councilmember Zahn serves as the City Council liaison. Youth Link partners with a number of organizations, including Friends of Youth, and with businesses to develop programs for youths.

Continuing, Mr. Wang said Youth Link functions as part of the Bellevue Parks & Community Services Department. Ms. Esparza helps to coordinate the program alongside Patrick Alina, the Youth Council coordinator, and Cecilia Martinez-Vasquez the Youth Board coordinator. Six of the Youth Link Board members are youth and six are adults, all of whom are appointed by the City Manager. The Bellevue Youth Council members must live in Bellevue and have a passion for helping youth in the community. The various action teams appointed by the Youth Council rotate on a seasonal basis.

Mr. Wang said the Youth Link Board would like to collaborate with the Commission relative to providing input about funding for youth endeavors. He said the Board used to be funded and that enabled it to walk the talk of the different initiatives people brought forward, leading to many of the big Youth Link programs, including the Bellevue Youth Corps and the Kids Care Coat Drive.

The Youth Link Council is made up of between 40 and 50 youth ranging from elementary to high school. The Council enjoys a good gender balance. Each participant gets between 50 and 60 hours of participation time. The Council has a 95 percent member retention rate. There are currently more than 500 Youth Link alumni spanning six continents.

Funding for the Youth Link Board was lost during the recession and it has not been restored. In 2017 the city did allocate \$25,000. Since that year the Board has been focusing on the youth homelessness crisis and recently added a focus on the youth mental health crisis. Several requests from non-profits and organizations made application for the funds and all \$25,000 was ultimately awarded to Friends of Youth to address youth homelessness in Bellevue through the purchase of supplies and the expansion of their drop-in services in Crossroads. The focus of the Board in 2018 continues to be on youth homelessness and the wellbeing of youth in the community.

Mr. Hazra said on average there are 200 or more youth in the city who are facing homelessness or otherwise in distress. He said one thing Youth Link focused on was raising awareness of the youth homelessness issue in what from the outside appears to be a rich city without such problems.

Ms. Jain asked if businesses in the city are asked to contribute to helping the youth who are in need. Ms. Esparza explained that the Board was initially funded as a grantor organization, much like the Commission is. An amount of money was allotted by the city and the Board took in applications for those funds and made funding recommendations. That is no longer happening now that the city has ceased setting aside funds for that purpose. There are currently discussions about how Youth Link can still have influence and impact without being able to self-direct funds. Youth Link represents a voice that could give wisdom to funding decisions.

Commissioner Kline asked about the Youth Link recruitment process. Mr. Wang explained that when vacancies occur a press release is sent out to all of the schools seeking applicants. During the Youth Link open house in September the Board manned a booth at which information was handed out.

Ms. Esparza added that at both the Council and Board levels the conversation about celebrating diversity has continued. There has been a unity through diversity event. One of the conversations that has been ongoing has focused on how to increase diverse representation. Mr. Alina has been spending a lot of time at local high schools trying to build knowledge in places where student applications are not typically coming from for the Council, the Board and Youth Link University, which is an entrepreneur program in which students learn from business leaders.

Commissioner Kline asked if Youth Link coordinates with the youth entrepreneurship program offered by the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Esparza said she was not familiar with that program but would be happy to check it out.

Commissioner McEachran suggested it would be wise to schedule a community conversation directed to a youth panel, in collaboration with staff, aimed at a venue that would give youth in the community at different levels the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Commissioner Oxrieder asked if there are particular areas Youth Link would like to have a voice in but does not currently. Mr. Wang said at his school he sees a lot of issues around mental health, including depression. He added that in many ways technology has led to isolation for many youth. The school district has students doing their homework in One Note, which has its benefits, but that also means other things are given up.

Chair Mercer explained that the Commission's funding process occurs every other year. During the off year the Commission works closely with the staff to develop a document called the Needs Update that outlines needs in the community. She said

the document will be updated during 2019 and added that the Commission would welcome suggestions for capturing the youth voice. Ms. Esparza suggested there were ways to have Youth Link involved in both the Needs Update and the allocation process, including by having youth encouraging participation in online surveys. The Commission could also make a directed effort to invite the Youth Link Board to attend meetings at which specific topics will be presented and to participate in the conversation. The city has not chosen to have youth sitting on boards and commissions as other cities have, but there may be a direct way for them to be linked to the application review process or the discussions regarding allocating funds.

Commissioner Oxrieder noted that Washington administers the healthy youth survey every two years for 8th, 10th and 12th grader. Ms. O'Reilly said that survey always coincides nicely with the time the Needs Update is being worked on and the information from that survey is regularly used.

Chair Mercer said it would be helpful to invite Youth Link to formally review the youth section of the Needs Update once it is drafted.

Ms. O'Reilly said she had had two conversations with Mr. Alina and Ms. Martinez-Vasquez about how to go forward with some kind of a youth survey. Surveys are typically coupled with community conversations. Plans are being made to move ahead with that.

Commissioner Oxrieder pointed out that Best Start for Kids gave money to Youth Eastside Services to conduct surveys regarding mental health in all middle schools. She suggested steps should be taken to make sure that work is not duplicated. Ms. O'Reilly said the funds were used for a mental health assessment rather than a survey, but she agreed it would be good to look at the results. Ms. Esparza said the assessments were done with individual children so there would be no results that could be shared with the Commission. Ms. O'Reilly said it might be possible to get aggregated numbers and some information about what will be done with the results.

Mr. Wang said it would be good for a Commissioner to attend a Youth Link Board meeting as a step toward forming a partnership. Commissioner McEachran volunteered to attend the next Youth Link Board meeting.

Chair Mercer suggested the Commission and Youth Link should spend the coming year partnering in a few ways and then as the funding cycle nears give consideration to how to incorporate the Youth Link voice.

Commissioner Ma asked how it works in other municipalities where youth are invited to play a larger role. Ms. Esparza pointed out that the Youth Link Board does have designated representatives for Eastside Pathways. Jessie Liu, a member of the Youth Link Board, added that the two representatives are no longer able to serve in that capacity so there is currently a transition while two new members are formalized.

Ms. O'Reilly asked if the Youth Link Board or other members would be interested in doing some research into how other jurisdictions incorporate youth into their boards and commissions and then provide a report to the Commission along with suggestions for a successful model. Ms. Esparza said she would help facilitate that. Ms. Stangland pointed out that Redmond involves youth in their processes.

Commissioner Piper said he would welcome having the youth voice in the funding cycle as something that would be extremely useful.

Commissioner McEachran encouraged Youth Link members to attend and make themselves known at all of the city's boards and commissions.

Ms. Jain asked how homeless youth in Bellevue become connected with Youth Link. Mr. Hazra said that is one of the biggest challenges faced. The group cannot label anyone as homeless, nor can it ask anyone to identify themselves as homeless. Homeless youth usually have a need for nutrition and have falling grades. Ms. Liu added that homeless students are essentially invisible because the other students do not know when another student is homeless. She said in talking with one of her teachers she learned that by far the biggest problem with homeless kids is attendance. Teachers are a very valuable resource given that they are generally more perceptive and as such their voice should be brought into the mix.

Ms. Esparza added that statistics are being drawn from the school district's McKinney Vento coordinator. That is the person within the district who administers services to anyone that falls under the umbrella of being considered a homeless student.

Ms. O'Reilly agreed to have staff put together a summary of what the 2019-2020 human services allocations fund relative to children and youth. She allowed that some programs serve the whole family and as such include children and youth.

Chair Mercer acknowledged the presence of Councilmember Zahn. Councilmember Zahn noted that she serves as Council liaison to the Youth Link Board and allowed that there has for a while been an interest in seeing youth more involved with the city's boards and commissions.

****BREAK****

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. Needs in the Community

Ms. O'Reilly reminded the Commissioners that Council liaison Deputy Mayor Robinson recently asked the Commission to address some of the human services needs that have been noticed in the community. Deputy Mayor Robinson was not interested in calling out specific agencies, rather where some of the top needs are being seen, and what services are present or needed to address those needs.

Commissioner McEachran, reflecting on the panel discussion at the Commission's meeting on February 20, commented that the strain and the gap was outlined as being remarkably huge, that it will take money to address those gaps, and that there was a call for collaboration. He said in a recent conversation with the director of resident services for Imagine Housing he shared that what is happening with agencies overall is that the staffing is so lean because no one can afford to live in Bellevue. The day will come in the next funding cycle or possibly the one after that where if resident services are lost, the whole issue of support will become more critical. The needed collaboration must engage the cities and the county in saying that trickle down funds are not going to work. There must be a real impact at the street level.

Commissioner Kline said she has perceived a lack of coordination for volunteer manpower, including at the higher skilled assistance and executive levels. United Way many years ago used to fill that void that a lack of resources for training has helped to create. There is no one stop shop for matching up experienced volunteers with agencies in need of specific skills. While not a funding priority, it is certainly a need. Ms. Stangland stated that Bellevue Essentials pulled together a list of people with specific skills who are willing to volunteer. While that is not an active matching service, non-profits can post that they are seeking board members or volunteers with specific expertise.

Commissioner McEachran commented that successful organizations have within their boards folks who recognize the needs of their organizations and who network to see those needs addressed. Commissioner Kline agreed but stated that because of a lack of funds to support paid staff, organizations are often stretched to the max trying to simply get day-to-day operations handled and they are not left with any time to address higher level issues. Even cultivating a board takes time and resources.

Ms. O'Reilly said the lack of coordination for volunteer manpower at a higher level is certainly something that could be shared with the deputy mayor as a need in the community.

Chair Mercer said something that came through in the last funding cycle was the issue of how to keep someone in their house and avoiding eviction. She suggested it may be that the amount of funding for that category needs to be increased. Some time should be spent focused on gaining an understanding of all the associated issues and who is providing the services need to address them.

Commissioner Kline pointed out that the emergency financial assistance panelists highlighted the need for child care. That has been a focus for the Commission in the past. It has been two or three cycles since YMCA came to the Commission seeking funding for their child care program and no replacement provider for the service has ever been found. The Commission should pivot and get back on track in regard to funding child care slots.

Commissioner Ma agreed with Chair Mercer in regard to funding services to prevent homelessness, and with Commissioner Kline about the need to fund child care. He added that simply focusing on basic needs can improve the effectiveness of other organizations that offer services such as child care and healthcare. He said his worry was that the issues being seen in Bellevue are simply a microcosm of the national wealth inequality issue. Bellevue has a lot of wealth but it also has a lot of disparity. Population growth will continue but not everyone will share in the prosperity and there will be an increased burden on many.

Commissioner Oxrieder commented that there are a number of systems in place, all of which need to be working. She suggested the City Council should look at whether or not all of the government systems are working.

Commissioner McEachran said coordinated entry is one such system. He noted that three years ago the new program was unveiled for the Commission and its ultimate success was highly touted. Since then, however, there has not been much positive feedback from providers. Ms. O'Reilly allowed that there is a new version of coordinated entry that is being rolled out. She said it would be good sometime in the late spring have someone from King County come to a Commission meeting to talk about it. Additionally, the All Home system is also currently undergoing a vigorous reorganization.

Commissioner Kline suggested combining updates from those two organizations with an update from ARCH. Ms. O'Reilly said that would be a good combination.

Chair Mercer Chair Mercer said she was reminded of the ask heard at the public hearing during the summer of 2018 about trying to find ways to fund smaller organizations and trying to help them build capacity. The current funding cycle does not always allow new organizations to gain funding for a variety of reasons, even though some of those small non-profits might be addressing needs in a more agile way.

Commissioner Ma pointed out that many small organizations exist solely because of volunteers. They would be good candidates for tapping into a database of experienced volunteers. He also suggested it might be helpful to have a job posting site for organizations to use in seeking volunteers. Commissioner Oxrieder agreed but pointed out that it would take someone to keep the site updated.

Commissioner McEachran commented that Congregations for the Homeless, Sophia Way and Imagine Housing are finding that older people are not providing the same level of volunteer support they were five years ago. A concerted effort needs to be put into seeking younger people willing to volunteer their time and expertise. Imagine Housing has successfully lowered the average age of its board by virtue of deliberately seeking out young professionals.

Chair Mercer highlighted all the work done by the Commission with regard to transportation. The result was a list of options and a hefty price tag. Given that transportation is a big issue, it should be included on the list for Deputy Mayor Robinson to consider as a system need.

Commissioner McEachran said the impact of transit-oriented development for the future of human services should be studied. Such units are located on transportation routes and often in areas where the residents can simply walk to where they need to go.

Commissioner Kline pointed out the need for general operational funding at a lot of agencies. In the current environment agencies are seeking funds for specific programs while the health of some agencies is suffering from a lack of funds with no strings attached.

Commissioner Piper said youth homelessness is an issue that has been discussed by the Commission in the past, though the presentation by Youth Link helped to raise awareness of the topic.

Commissioner Oxrieder raised the issue of mental health issues and said she hoped some data could be drawn from the Youth Eastside Services study. She suggested that may also be a way to get a sense from the police department as to how many arrests are made due to mental health issues. Ms. Jain said she would like to see the police also asked for data regarding victims of domestic violence, which is an important element to homelessness.

There was agreement to divide the issues up into three buckets: 1) non-financial issues in need of someone to step up and coordinate; 2) overarching issues for which there is a simple need for more dollars; and 3) systems gaps. Ms. O'Reilly said she would sort the issues raised into those three categories and return them to the Commissioners for review by the end of the week.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Stangland reported that a two-pronged approach is being taken by the Eastside cities to address the issue of building capacity for less mature organizations. The initiative that has been put together includes looking at the immigrant and refugee population and any relative gaps, and the small grassroots organizations that rely heavily on volunteers, particularly organizations that have either not chosen to apply for funding or which have applied but have not been successful. The process is in the planning stage but will likely involve taking several different tacks, including outreach and community conversations focused on participants. The findings will be shared at a joint commissions meeting later in the year.

Ms. O'Reilly pointed out that the findings will play double duty as they will also be germane to the Needs Update. Additionally, the work will include pulling together a

list of all the policies and practices in place by the Eastside cities related to requirements for applicants for funding. The focus there will be on developing commonalities.

Chair Mercer asked if how to go about doing a special funding for smaller organizations will be part of the mix. Ms. O'Reilly said that will be one of the components. She said intern Natalie Minas is in the process of reaching out to a number of organizations that do have a specific funding process for small organizations at different levels of maturity. A summary of what others are doing will be put together.

Ms. Stangland said staff was still looking for ideas for setting up community conversations and asked the Commissioners to offer suggestions.

Ms. Stangland said she is also working to set up agency tours and said she would also welcome suggestions for which agencies to tour.

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Nicole Jobson, director of supportive services for Imagine Housing, said she is excited about the work being done by the agency. She said the 30 Bellevue project would be opening within the next couple of months. That will increase the agency's portfolio of properties from 14 to 15, for which there is a staff of eight to cover them all.

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Kline. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McEachran and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Mercer adjourned the meeting at 7:58 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date