

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on March 19, 2019

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

February 20, 2019
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Jain

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

GUEST SPEAKERS: Kristine Burkett, Salvation Army; Karina Wiggins, Friends of Youth; Lucy Pyeatt, Hopelink; Dilek Anderson, Turkcha; Jennifer Fischer, LifeSpring; Kathy Fleming, Attain Housing; Kevin Hamel, Catholic Community Services; Theresa Curry Almuti, Solid Ground

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chair Mercer who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present, except for Commissioner Jain.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 2, 2019

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner McEachran. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ma and the motion carried unanimously; Commissioner Kline abstained from voting.

B. January 15, 2019

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None
5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner Ma reported that a recent article in the *Seattle Times* regarding homelessness was very interesting. The article noted that the city of Atlanta recently reduced their number of transitional housing units because they found it was better to go straight from homelessness to an apartment.

Commissioner McEachran said the Council received a briefing on Affordable Housing Strategy implementation and were told about some of the work that will be required.

Chair Mercer reported that her employer, Microsoft, recently made a commitment toward homelessness in the area.

Human Services Manager Alex O'Reilly reported that at the February 19 Council meeting Anita Jain was appointed to fill the vacant seat on the Commission.

Grant Coordinator Dee Dee Catalano said the passing of the federal budget on February 15 gives HUD 60 days to get all of the entitlement funding amounts determined for 2019. The city should receive word on its allocation by early to mid-April.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. Panel of Emergency Financial Assistance Providers

Chair Mercer took a moment to allow those in the audience who are members of other Eastside boards and commissions to introduce themselves. Present were Annie Smith, Aleric Bien and Jacob Brown from Redmond; Stan Gunno, Joyce Bottenberg and CJ Kahler from Sammamish; Esra Usta with Turkcha; and Rebekah Smith from Issaquah.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland thanked all for attending. She noted that representatives from MCRC and LifeWire were not able to attend.

Chair Mercer opened the floor to the panelists and asked them to address the gaps in the emergency financial assistance services being provided, and how those gaps are being alleviated.

Ms. Dilek Anderson with Turkish Women Charity and Aid Organization (Turkcha). She said the organization was started primarily to support immigrant and refugee women and families in the area. Workshops and activities were scheduled and from those activities requests for financial assistance were made. The financial assistance provided includes funding to pay for car insurance, drivers lessons, meals and supplies for homeless women in shelters. The organization targets low-income residents in the greater Seattle area. The organization is staffed with Turkish people who seek to share their culture with others. The workshops are aimed in part at providing emotional and motivational support for immigrant and refugee women. The organization is new and has limited funds available for emergency financial assistance. As requests are received, the organization reaches out to its donors and members, though efforts are being put into developing a pool of funds from which to make allocations as emergencies arise.

Ms. Karina Wiggins with Friends of Youth said the emergency financial assistance funds available for allocation by the agency come from United Way of King County. The fund began with \$26,000 and currently stands at just over \$2600. The agency is in the process of applying for an additional \$49,000 from the same source. The funds are designed to support young people who are literally homeless in shelters or on the streets. The funds cannot be used to support young people who are couch surfing or in other interim circumstances, and that is an identifiable gap. The agency also has homeless prevention funds through Best Start for Kids, but folks applying for those funds cannot have engaged in a service within HMIS within 90 days, which is another barrier for some in need of assistance.

Ms. Lucy Pyeatt, Director of the Energy and Financial Assistance program for Hopelink, said she manages the program across the five service centers in north and east King County, including Bellevue. She said the primary gap seen by the agency continues to be limited availability of financial assistance dollars and the fact that assistance dollars often carry with them very specific qualification requirements. It can be a challenge to obtain the required documentation from clients in need. The process can be very difficult to navigate for non-English speakers and economically vulnerable families. Many of the eligibility requirements for what constitutes a family in crisis do not take into account the living wage requirements of the area. With so much time spent up front in determining and acquiring proof of eligibility, the interactions with clients risks feeling like a transactional service alone. The organization seeks to address the gaps through the Financial Resiliency pilot program that is in its second year in Bellevue. Hopelink provides its own fundraising dollars for flexible financial assistance to address the financial shocks that can lead to not being able to pay rent and being evicted. The agency has developed a program that seeks to support clients prior to the crisis of eviction. The program includes two stability resource specialists who focus on resource navigation with clients while also

providing financial assistance. The specialists work at multiple points of interactions with clients to address their crises and needs, and they follow up with making connections with and referrals to other agencies, and by helping clients navigate the many programs available at Hopelink. The organization has also implemented a trauma-informed approach that involves looking at the realities of clients and the effects of poverty. To the extent possible, the eligibility and documentation requirements are simplified for the clients. Clients often must make tradeoffs when facing a financial crisis and the organization seeks to provide assistance in other areas, even where a client does not meet the financial assistance requirements.

Ms. Kristine Burkett, Social Services Coordinator for Salvation Army, said the agency has been in its current building for two years and is in the process of adding classes and resources. Financial and computer literacy classes are coming up. Hygiene kits are available along with hats, coats and mittens, and sometimes sleeping bags and tents. Salvation Army does not operate a food bank but does have food to distribute. Scholarships are given out for summer camps and summer in-house youth programs. The dental van often visits the site, and the agency serves as an agent for Eastside Baby Corner. A free community dinner is served Monday through Friday from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. She agreed that the eligibility requirements for emergency financial assistance act as a gap to the service. There are frequent requests for bus voucher and taxi scrips, gas cards and move-in assistance, but given the funding sources the agency limits its emergency financial assistance to eviction prevention. Clients usually must visit multiple agencies in order to achieve the full amount of rent they have due. Clients are limited in the number of times they can receive emergency financial assistance to once per year for rent, and once per year for energy or other utility assistance. The agency is reaching out to more local churches seeking donations to help cover the gaps and also collaborates with other agencies.

Ms. Jennifer Fischer, Executive Director for Bellevue Lifespring, said the non-profit was established 107 years ago in Hunts Point as the Overlake Service League. The focus is on serving children and families living in the Bellevue School District, with the child served first and then the family. The emergency financial assistance and rent assistance programs only serve parents with children in the home. A full month's rent is provided to families who provide eviction notices. The assistance is limited to once per year. In 2017, the program served 106 individuals and 26 families. During 2017 emergency and utility assistance was also offered. At the end of 2017 the board determined that because other agencies in the community provided that support, including Salvation Army and Hopelink, the agency would cease emergency utility support to focus solely on rent support. In the first six months of 2018, 44 calls for assistance had to be turned away; to date in 2019, no families seeking support have been turned away, and that is the ultimate goal. The Bellevue School District is a critical partner and Superintendent Duran serves on the agency's board. She reported that in December 2018 she had been asked to moderate a panel discussion on homelessness in Bellevue. The Bellevue School District was represented as was Hopelink, Congregations for the Homeless and the police chief. As a result of the conversation, a commitment was made to convene all Eastside non-profit providers

that are working on homelessness prevention and housing. At the first meeting of the group, Attain Housing, Salvation Army, Hopelink, Friends of Youth, Youth Eastside Services, Catholic Community Services, Imagine Housing and Sophia Way all participated. The second meeting is slated for April to continue learning from each other about the services being provided and to identify ways to partner together. The primary gap for Bellevue Lifespring is funding and to that end the board has ended its policy of not seeking government funding. Rent is expensive in Bellevue and clients served on average spend 59 percent of their income on rent. There are 9100 low-income households in Bellevue but only 3000 affordable housing units.

Ms. Kathy Fleming, Executive Director for Attain Housing, said the agency has been working on its financial assistance program for five years. It is specifically restricted to eviction prevention and move-in assistance. The historical gaps identified by the agency include the high barriers many organizations have put in place for those seeking eviction prevention assistance. To that end the agency no longer requires clients to come to the office, doing everything by phone or online. Another gap has been ineligible referrals from partner agencies due to a lack of understanding of what each agency provides and the parameters under which each operates. Attain Housing has set geographic boundaries in which it operates. While MCRC has no such geographic boundaries, they do require clients to seek assistance from other agencies first and only come to them as a last resort. An agreement was reached for MCRC to refer to Attain Housing as a first option, and for Attain Housing to refer to MCRC those who fall outside the set boundaries. Another problem has been landlords who have not been willing to work with the agency, largely because of a lack of understanding of the process. A strong relationship has been forged with the affordable housing landlords, including Imagine Housing, and the result has been the referral of tenants to Attain Housing. There continue to be gaps, primarily because of program limitations between each of the programs. Most agencies have limits on how much they will give clients, how many times clients can be served, and how many dollars will be given out in a given month or quarter. Once the limits are reached, clients are forced to go to other agencies seeking assistance. About a third of the clients Attain Housing sees are working with multiple agencies. Clients often need help in navigating the system, which points out the need for case management. They often do not realize they qualify for child care subsidies, food stamps, energy assistance or other things, thus they pay those bills first, letting their rent go unpaid. Case management can assist clients in learning how to use the system. She said there should be a central database of landlords. There is a need for multiple agencies to be involved, but they all need to work together.

Mr. Kevin Hamel, Program Manager for the Emergency Assistance program of Catholic Community Services, said he had personally experienced homelessness and struggled with drug addiction. He said having pulled himself out of those issues, he views his work with Catholic Community Services as a calling and not a job. He said there are numerous gaps in the system, many of which are experienced by the various agencies, though agencies also experience unique gaps. The biggest gap for the Catholic Community Services program is that it is administered for all of King

County by only two people. The way to alleviate that gap will be through obtaining more funding. Bellevue is the program's largest funder. On average, client households receive between \$400 and \$450, an amount that does not really accomplish much of anything, making it necessary for clients to visit more than one agency. Catholic Community Services works to minimize to the extent possible the barriers faced by clients and to that end does not require a lot of documentation. Income eligibility is the biggest requirement. Much of the paperwork can be done over the phone and electronically. He said Catholic Community Services offers translation services and through the agency he has access to a number of different programs, including bus tickets, food bags, Safeway gift cards, hygiene items and day centers with shower and laundry facilities. The agency works hard to leverage the dollars it receives.

Ms. Theresa Curry Almuti from Solid Ground said she manages the Homeless Prevention program for which the city provides funding. She said the program faces many of the gaps identified by others, but added that Solid Ground is able to help with higher funding amounts than some other agencies, with the usual maximum amount \$2000 and with some exceptions above that. There are clients, however, who need even more than that to bring their rents out of arrears, and that gap is addressed by partnering with other agencies and by leveraging limited private funds that are available. The program provides assistance primarily with rent payments, though it does on occasion help with utility payments where there is a connection to the risk of losing housing. In addition to eviction prevention, the agency provides move-in assistance funding. One gap is the fact that the agency cannot pay ahead for future months, such as where a client on the 30th of the month knows they will not be able to pay their rent that will be due the next day, thus facing a possible eviction notice. Some of the gaps can be alleviated by working together with other agencies. The agency does provide case management, in some cases one-time and in other cases for up to six months.

Chair Mercer thanked the panelists for their comments and opened the floor to questions from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Piper said the goal of the meeting was for the Commission to gain a better understanding of the emergency financial assistance programs system. He thanked the panelists for helping to enlighten him. He said one common theme he had heard was the need for clients to go to multiple agencies. He said while there was talk of referrals and collaboration, which is a good thing, it appeared as though there is no formalized system for doing so. He noted that in past years there was a more formalized system in place called Meeting Needs Together and asked if any of the panelists were aware of that or were part of that system.

Ms. Burkett raised her hand and noted that Salvation Army hosted the program in its first year.

Commissioner Piper noted the program ultimately failed because of funding mechanisms incompatibilities. He asked for comment on what other failings the program had. Ms. Burkett said she was in fact new to Salvation Army and indeed the area at the time, as were many of her superiors resulting in the blind leading the blind.

Commissioner Piper asked if there were any fundamental roadblocks to a more formalized collaboration system. Ms. Fischer said some agencies use the county's coordinated entry system exclusively, making it necessary for clients to go through that referral system, while others have a hybrid system in place and still others do not use the system at all. The Meeting Needs Together group was meeting up until a year or two ago. The new group that is now meeting will hopefully get back to that approach.

By way of background on the Meeting Needs Together approach, Ms. O'Reilly explained that some folks highlighted the need to have a coordinated system and United Way stepped up with funding for a facilitator to help develop a system that included a common application form. However, one major roadblock was the different eligibility requirements.

Ms. Fischer stated that a universal application is being developed for the Bellevue School District for use by those who serve kids in the district. It should be ready for next school year.

Ms. O'Reilly asked if anyone envisioned having a single organization in place to handle all intakes for emergency funding. Ms. Fleming said that is essentially what the coordinated entry system had tried to accomplish. It is a work in process. Having a way to communicate in the moment what the various agencies offer and what their limitations are is needed. That could be in the form of a live interactive database. A once a month meeting will serve to build relationships but will not really accomplish much by way of being in the moment.

Mr. Hamel said the approach would require some streamlining of the intake process and eligibility requirements. He said Catholic Community Services does not require clients to have three-day eviction notice in hand, it simply requires that the client be within ten days of getting one. Clients trying to be on top of things should not be penalized. Limited funding is something a centralized intake process would have to face. Catholic Community Services has an intake line callers are encouraged to go through, though referrals are also taken from various sources.

Commissioner Ma asked how many clients actually tap into the help that is available to pay utility bills as a way to avoid coming up short when it comes to paying the rent. Ms. Fleming said people who have been in low-income and affordable housing for a long time, they likely have worked with case managers and know the system and the help that is available. Even so, they may be struggling and Attain Housing is seeing many in that category. The agency is also seeing more and more first-time clients

facing eviction and those people have no idea about the various services that are available. Building up case management can help keep the problems from reoccurring.

Ms. Pyeatt said that issue speaks to the need to have multiple points of entry into the agencies. She said Hopelink staff work to help clients make connections with services once they are in the door, which can occur in various ways, including through the food bank. Eviction often triggers the need for services beyond just emergency financial assistance.

Commissioner Ma pointed out that transportation continues to be an issue for many in terms of needing to get around. He asked to what degree transportation issues play into clients running into trouble paying their rent. He added that public transit can be very expensive and certainly can be time consuming. Ms. Fleming said there certainly is a cost associated with transportation, but transportation issues also are impacted by things like where a person lives in association with where they need to go to drop kids off at daycare and where they work. Ms. Almuti agreed and added that housing that is convenient to public transportation is often the most expensive. Affordable housing is almost by definition not located near public transportation.

Mr. Hamel commented that typically, once a client gets to the point of needing financial assistance relative to eviction prevention, everything has become a major expense for them. Ms. Fischer added that 67 percent of clients served by LifeSpring are single parents for whom child care is a major expense. The Bellevue School District spends \$300,000 per year transporting kids who are experiencing homelessness to and from their schools.

Ms. Wiggins indicated that the homeless young adult population served by Friends of Youth is more concerned with the cost of time than the cost of transportation services. The transportation system is not set up to get people to their destination in a reasonable amount of time and it can thus take a long time to get to a single appointment. That is a huge barrier where someone is also expected to hold down a job and access child care services.

Chair Mercer stated that there are ten agencies working in the community that offer emergency financial assistance. She said one option for the Commission when it comes to funding the various programs would be to simply take the total dollars available and divide them by ten, giving each program an equal share. However, there are limits in place relative to what each agency can offer, so agencies have to talk to and work with each other to see clients served. All of the various agency staff required to make those connections must be paid and from a funding point of view all of that overhead seems inefficient. If the goal is to have more dollars placed into the hands of those who are in need, it makes no sense to spend dollars hiring people to go help people. Agencies like Hopelink offer a multiplier effect in that clients seeking financial assistance from them are then also connected to other services, including utility assistance and food. She asked if the Commission should in fact look to put its

emergency financial assistance dollars into the one or two agencies that take that approach as a way of better serving those in need.

Mr. Hamel said Catholic Community Services takes the money received from the various cities and returns half of it directly to residents of the city; the other half to cover program costs. Catholic Community Services then kicks in the amount needed to balance the budget. In 2018, City Council received roughly \$25,000 from the city of Bellevue, and those funds were matched with \$29,057 in non-city funds.

Chair Mercer asked the panelists to put themselves in the shoes of a funder in answering the question of how to maximize the city's contribution to emergency financial assistance in terms of getting the money into the hands of those in need.

Ms. Wiggins pointed out that the funding received by Friends of Youth does not fund staffing. Only a minimal amount of the flexible funding dollars are used for administrative costs. The program, however, serves a very particular demographic. Ms. Almuti added that programs like those offered by Solid Ground not only serve a particular demographic they also serve specific geographic locations. Most agencies leverage dollars in ways that means the city is not really paying for staffing at all ten agencies, or at least not the full cost. She agreed that there would be efficiencies associated with having all of the emergency financial assistance programs folded into a single program, but the answer is not necessarily to give all the funding to one agency. Clients need the money they seek, but they also benefit from case management and planning, and different agencies do that in different ways because they have different specialties. Building on that thought, Ms. Wiggins said there are unique and creative ways the agencies work with clients to see their needs met.

Ms. Fleming allowed that each agency's program has different requirements and parameters and stated that there will always be clients who fall outside the parameters who also need to be helped. In a single system approach there is a need to become very formalized about processes. Smaller agencies can often be far more individualized and flexible, even if that takes a little more time. Most of the work is in fact done by existing staff volunteers.

Ms. Almuti said another drawback to having a single system is the limits set on how often clients can seek funding. Most agencies have a once a year rule in place. If everything is handled from a single pot of money, and if that rule is in place, clients who once again are in need three or six months later could be left out in the cold.

Mr. Hamel said the focus needs to be on the overall approach that will benefit the most people. The answer to that question is tied to how the agencies work with specific populations.

Chair Mercer allowed that the answer likely falls in between simply dividing the available funds equally among the agencies offering the services and giving more to

some agencies based on the work they do and the clients they serve. The issue will be how to determine what the right allocation is.

Ms. Fischer suggested the determination will to some degree need to be focused on impact and outcomes. She said one option would be for the city to build into its budget funding for case management staff to work on understanding the Eastside network and making referrals.

Commissioner Kline said the Commission struggles with maximizing the effort to put dollars into the hands of those who need them rather than having them absorbed by overhead. At the same time, the Commission recognizes that there are limitations on the availability of funds to fund overhead and staff, which is needed to keep agencies healthy and able to operate effectively. She noted that the issues of criteria, parameters and eligibility had been mentioned often and said she would like more color on the control over those things by the agencies.

Ms. Wiggins said for Friends of Youth the limits are set entirely by the funders. United Way hands down policy guidelines that must be followed. Where a client has an expense that exceeds the thresholds, staff can request more dollars, but the ultimate decision is made by the funder.

Ms. Usta said Turkcha as a small agency has the luxury of looking into request case by case and making funding decisions accordingly.

Ms. Pyeatt said Hopelink does have some unrestricted funds in addition to funds that are policy controlled by the funders. In allocating the unrestricted funds, care is taken to ensure consistency across all of the agency's programs by making sure the required proofs are submitted.

Ms. Fleming said the Attain Housing board determines the overall funding for the Financial Assistance program. The program director, however, decides the requirements and limitations. There is a clear need to keep the budget balanced, but in late 2018 as the available funds began to dwindle and allocations were halted for two weeks, the board overruled the decision and directed that all clients should be served. The agency's privately raised funds have no restrictions on them and it is relatively easy to fundraise for the program because it appeals to a lot of donors.

Ms. Fischer said the LifeSpring board stipulates all policies, which allow for serving clients up to 200 percent of the federal poverty line. Where there are extenuating circumstances, adjustments can be made. The agency does not receive any funding from United Way, the YWCA or from the government.

Ms. Almuti explained that the vast majority of Solid Ground's funding is from King County, some of which are federal passthrough funds that carry with them strict requirements. The funds received from Bellevue are treated the same as the funds

received from the county. The use of private funds are allowed some leeway in line with being fiscally responsible.

Mr. Hamel said Catholic Community Services tries to keep its restrictions and requirements to a minimum. With the restricted funds from the cities, the focus is on keeping things fair. There are household outcomes that must be met every year so it is a simple mathematical calculation to determine how much each household can be served. Some households need more while others need less, and the job of the program manager is to watch the balance to make sure it all works out at the end of the year. With the non-restricted funds that come to the agency from grants and private foundations, the only restrictions are that the funds must be used for families with children. The goal is to be good stewards of the funds received.

Commissioner McEachran said over the course of his 35 years as administrator of a faith community has included ten years serving with the Commission and in the affordable housing arena. He noted that the Commission gets that attainable housing is a major issue, but the metric overload is stunning. Supportive services are not often mentioned as a part of the economy that creates a work place open to everyone. He said his opinion was that the coordinated entry system does not work. It takes a number of FTEs to achieve the coordination. Collaboration is a better approach. In doing so, common language and vocabulary should be sought and used. He said he would like to see a spreadsheet showing where the various agencies get their funds, and an outline of how they sort those funds. Narrative builds capacity. He asked the panelists to offer a few sentences about their passion for being involved in emergency financial assistance.

Ms. Almuti said Solid Ground believes the root cause of poverty is racism and other forms of oppression. The solution to a more just society must involve addressing the web of oppression. She said her passion was to work against a system of privilege and oppression.

Mr. Hamel reiterated that his work with clients is not a job but a calling, noting that he knew firsthand what it is like to be homeless and to experience the depression and the humiliation. He said he did not start out as a drug addict, rather he became one after becoming homeless. It is extremely hard for a person to come out of homelessness.

Ms. Fleming said her roots lie in having lived a privileged life as a resident of the Eastside for 30 years. She said when she saw people and children who do not have the opportunities she had, she wanted to do what she could to help them. She said she wanted both to tell and show people that there are people on the Eastside who are not living lives of privilege.

Ms. Fischer said for her it is all about preventing families from becoming homeless and experiencing homelessness. She said she truly believes that breaking the cycle

of poverty involves serving the children first by keeping them in their homes and providing them with an education.

Ms. Burkett said she has been married for 30 years to a field grade military officer. She said her youngest child got involved with drugs and that led to her being homeless on the streets of Olympia. She said that is one reason behind her involvement.

Ms. Pyeatt said her passion is to support working with safety nets that no longer exist and systems that are broken and doing so as professionals. She allowed that each of the panelists are professionals who are focused on efficiencies and best practices and moving non-profits from what used to be a cottage industry to truly engaging in making a difference.

Ms. Wiggins said she is involved in the work because she wants to bring building blocks to those who have not had the opportunities, especially those who will in the future be leaders. Every young person who walks through the doors of the agency could be the next president or serve in any other leadership role and they deserve to have the resources they will need to reach their goals.

Ms. Usta said she was lucky to be raised in a warm household and has been lucky enough to be able to give that to her children as well. She noted, however, that it takes very little to be on the other side. She said it was her privilege to work with those in need.

Chair Mercer opened the floor to comments from members of the audience.

Ms. Anny Smith with the Redmond Human Services Commission asked if an increase in funding would lead to a fight for wider parameters relative to how much can be allocated per household, or to seeking easier ways to change the guidelines. Mr. Hamel said increasing the amount of funding received from the city would not also increase the outcomes to be met.

Mr. Alaric Bien with the city of Redmond said there have been talks in the past about changing the maximum amounts. He also stressed that outcomes should not be confused with output, which would be the number of households helped. Increased funding along with an increase in the allocation amounts would not necessarily mean increasing the number of households served.

Chair Mercer said she would prefer to see real narrative in the applications outlining clearly what how each program goes about making decisions.

Ms. Pyeatt said Hopelink is constantly doing needs assessments and updating its data. That includes looking at how many people there are in the community who are living in poverty, and calculating the dollar amount that would make an actual impact toward avoiding homelessness, providing housing, preventing crisis and moving

clients out of poverty. There is a balancing act involved. Allocating too little may not make a difference or fix a problem. A lot of work goes into the process of making sure decisions are made based on facts. Careful consideration also goes into determining the number of staff needed to serve the number of clients, and paying staff a wage sufficient to allow them to live in the community.

Mr. Stan Gunno with the Sammamish Human Services Commission asked the panelists to comment on whether or not they tap into the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy funds. Ms. Fischer said LifeSpring recently changes its policies to accept government funding and is working on getting the county application. Ms. Almuti said the levy plan breaks down the available funds into very specific pots and a new RFP is put out almost every week, making it necessary for agencies to pay attention to which pots of money fit what they are doing.

Mr. Gunno said there is quite a lot of funding available, much of which comes without restrictions relative to using the funds for staffing. He said one of the biggest downfalls in working with the human services fund is being able to do follow-up case management.

Mr. CJ Kahler with the Sammamish Human Services Commission and a retired pharmacist said he would like to see more collaboration among the Eastside cities.

Ms. Joyce Bottenberg with the Sammamish Human Services Commission said she was thrilled to hear about the group that has been meeting. She said she would welcome anything that would make it easier to work through the large number of applications.

Ms. Rebekah Smith with the Issaquah Human Services Commission said some of the things that gave the commission pause on many of the applications was vague or missing outcomes and undefined accountability to the city council and residents about the choices made. She asked for suggestions for steps to take when coming up against such things. Mr. Hamel suggested that where outcomes are missing the application should not be considered complete. If the issue is that the outcomes are vague, the applicant should be asked to offer a clarification.

Chair Mercer commented that some outcomes are hard to understand because of the way the application forces the questions. She said it is always helpful for the narrative in the applications to include a clear outline of what the program actually does and what the outcomes are. Ms. Almuti suggested that having a larger character limit would help in that context. It is often difficult to give clear answers to the questions in the number of characters currently allowed. Chair Mercer allowed that the Commission recognizes that to be an issue, particularly for smaller organizations.

Mr. Hamel said every human services committee meeting and city council meeting he has attended has had the need for clear narrative stressed. He allowed that he has not made good use of the narrative section.

By way of summary, Commissioner Ma said he had gleaned from the conversation that there is benefit to allocating the available funds to different agencies because the organizations each serve different demographics and geographic areas. Face time with clients is also very important. He noted that some funds are restricted and some are unrestricted which the agencies seek to standardize in order to keep things fair, an approach that does limit to some degree what the agencies can do.

Ms. Burkett said she used a spreadsheet to calculate averages. She said where some clients need less it makes it possible to give other clients a little more. Of course, some funds are very clearly restricted to a maximum amount. She said she looks for other ways to work within the limits, like offering funding to pay utilities in order to free up client dollars to pay the rent.

Mr. Hamel said if he is helping a Bellevue resident using Bellevue funds and finds out during the intake process that the person is also eligible for family funds, the allocation can often be increased.

Chair Mercer thanked the panelists for their contribution to the process and said she hoped it had communicated to the agencies that the Commission takes the topic and its responsibilities very seriously. She said she also appreciated the attendance and input from other human services committees and commissions in the area.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland asked the Commissioners to provide her with the name of agencies they would like the Commission to tour. She also asked the Commissioners to be thinking about possible community conversations as part of the Needs Update process.

Commissioner Kline reported that she had recently received an email about how Snohomish County had reframed its homelessness challenge. She said it made her wonder what the city has done with that information. Ms. O'Reilly said it was her understanding that several agencies after receiving training retooled some of their language to help people understand their outcomes. It would be a good thing to review the materials during the Needs Update process.

9. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. O'Reilly mentioned that Angela Murray, the Executive Director of Sophia Way, would be leaving the agency in March.

Commissioner McEachran added that the Executive Director of Friends of Youth also recently stepped down. Ms. O'Reilly said the organization hired Paul Lwali to be the new executive director. Mr. Lwali formerly was the executive director of the Bellevue YMCA.

Commissioner McEachran mentioned that he had been receiving numerous inquiries about ARCH given the recent media reports. Ms. O'Reilly said she had reached out to the new director of the organization with an invitation to meet with the Commission. A date has not yet been set. The Commission has in the past allocated CDBG dollars to ARCH.

Grant Coordinator Dee Dee Catalano informed the Commission that the last time CDBG funds were allocated to ARCH was in 2016. The practice ceased due to the fact that ARCH projects are not carried out solely in Bellevue and because of the timelines involved that do not mesh with the HUD guidelines for the use of CDBG funds.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

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 8:00 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date