

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

October 4, 2011
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Beighle, Commissioners Bruels, Habib, Perelman, Plaskon, Stout, Yantis

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Leslie, Alex O'Reilly, Joseph Adriano, Terry Smith, Evita Almassi, Department of Parks & Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Debora Gay, Veteran's Program, King County Department of Community and Human Services; Kathy Gerard, Veterans Affairs Puget Sound; Dennis Brown, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Chair Beighle who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Habib who arrived at 7:12 p.m.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. September 8, 2011

Chair Beighle called attention to the fifth paragraph on page 4 and pointed out that the sentence "About 40 percent and 40 percent of homeowners paid more than 30 percent of their household income for housing..." should read "About 40 percent of homeowners paid more than 30 percent of their household income for housing...." She also suggested that in the last paragraph on the same page the sentence "Financial assistance provides, such as Catholic Community Services, the Salvation Army and Hopelink..." should be revised to read "Providers, such as Catholic Community Services, the Salvation Army and Hopelink...."

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Stout. Second was by Commissioner Bruels and the motion carried unanimously.

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Stout said she and Councilmember Chelminiak had a very interesting visit to Youth Eastside Services. She said she had not previously seen the facility in its entirety. YES director Patti Skelton did a very good job of explaining the work done by the agency.

Commissioner Bruels reported that he attended the Open House event for Andrews Glen. He said the beautiful new facility is a wonderful achievement. He said he was particularly impressed with the number of players and the complexity of bringing the project online.

Chair Beighle said she attended the opening as well and was pleased to see how many people attended. All of the veterans units have tenants selected for them.

Chair Beighle said she also attended the Naturalization Ceremony held at City Hall recently, the first such event to be held in the city. A total of 51 persons representing 23 countries became US citizens in the very moving ceremony.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly introduced graduate student intern Evita Almassi and noted that she is an Eastside resident.

6. DISCUSSION

A. King County Veterans Plan to End Homelessness

Debora Gay with the Veteran's Program of the King County Department of Community and Human Services said she welcomed the opportunity to review with the Commission the Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness for Veterans. She shared copies of the plan with the Commissioners and highlighted the full report done in February 2011, noting that the research document is a tremendous resource for anyone wanting to know about veterans in King County. Veterans affairs is usually a federal issue and prior to the February report no county had taken a close look at its veteran populations. The document includes a complete listing of programs and services targeted to veterans in the greater King County region.

Ms. Gay said King County enjoys a tremendous support system for veterans because the voters of the county overwhelmingly approved the Veterans and Human Services levy.

In November 2009 the Veterans Administration announced a Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness for Veterans across the nation. Their intent was to put resources and political weight behind the goal. In June of 2010 the Washington State Veterans Affairs Department convened a housing summit; that event was the first time that the state had talked about the homeless veterans issue. Shortly after the summit, King County began talking about the issue with the Committee to End Homelessness and took the opportunity to have the two systems working together. Representatives from both systems, along with providers, various veterans-specific services, and the housing authorities met to talk about what was needed; that was the group that oversaw the writing of the report.

Ms. Gay said the Five-Year Plan has become an investment priority for the Committee to End Homelessness. Research was done to determine the housing gap for veterans. Of course projecting the number of homeless persons is always a difficult task; to determine how many of the homeless are veterans adds another layer of complexity. It was estimated that between 1000 and 1150 homeless veterans in King County based on the One Night Count taken in 2009. The number of additional housing units needed to handle the homeless veterans is between 610 and 770. The figures will be updated annually to see what the trend is, especially given that about a thousand more veterans come to King County every year, some of whom are newly returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. About a third of the newly arrived veterans go to the VA for specialty care ranging from mental health support, drug and alcohol abuse programs to brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). About a hundred of those who arrive in King County every year are expected to become homeless, making the gap even larger.

The widely accepted myth is that veterans simply must go to the VA to have all of their problems solved. The truth is that many veterans will not go to the VA and will show up first in the community service systems, though those systems do not always seek to know if the client has served in the military. Additionally, many who did serve but not in combat areas do not consider themselves to be veterans; women do not usually consider themselves to be veterans.

The provision of services begins with service agencies finding veterans where they are, working with other service agencies, and with aligning funds. The Veterans and Human Services levy has about \$1 million per year available for veterans housing, and those funds can be made to go farther when added to resources coming from the federal government. There are, of course, pressures on every level of government to reduce spending, thus many non veteran-specific housing supports, like the Housing Trust Fund, are under a lot of pressure to get funding in the next legislative round.

King County is leading the nation in terms of veterans services for many reasons, one of which is the veterans levy. The levy provides a wealth of support that is not available anywhere else in the country. That means the area enjoys additional PTSD support, additional support for families, and support for the National Guard and reservists. The Human Services and Veterans levy yields about \$13 million per year,

half of which is dedicated to veterans. Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing vouchers available, as are Section VIII vouchers, both of which are resources used to house veterans.

Ms. Gay said the largest group of veterans in King County are from the Vietnam war; the second largest group is comprised of Gulf War veterans, and the third largest is made up of older veterans from WWII and the Korean war. The number of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are slowly coming into the service system and it is expected that within the next couple of years the numbers in that category will increase substantially.

Veterans as a percentage are declining in King County given that military service is all volunteer, though a greater number of veterans are females. Two-thirds of the returning veterans are married and have families, which is a change from the past; 49 percent of career military veterans are married. The statistics point out the need for services to women and families.

The experience of war for veterans varies greatly depending on the war in which they participated. Each war yields specific types of injuries, and those who are coming back from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are presenting with a high level of mental health issues, though with a culture that is more open to talking about mental health issues. PTSD is a key injury for the group, as is military sexual trauma for both men and women. Many are coming back with traumatic brain injuries and with chronic pain. Many are self medicating leading to substance abuse and chemical dependency. They experience a high incidence of domestic violence, have high divorce rates, and high rates of unemployment, and they help with each of those issues as well as legal help.

Commissioner Bruels asked what makes the veteran population vulnerable. Dennis Brown with the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs said the country is currently involved in the longest war of its entire history. Furthermore, with medical advances the wounds that would have killed soldiers in Vietnam are being survived, though those with the wounds are finding their lives will be compromised for the rest of their lives. The stress of war certainly is a contributing factor.

Commissioner Stout asked what is being done to support the children of returning veterans. Ms. Gay said they certainly face difficulties, especially for the children of National Guard or reservists who are not living on a military base with other families facing the same circumstances. The levy does pay for a curriculum to be used in public schools to try and explain the experience of military families to non-military kids; it is intended to provide a means by which the children can talk about their experiences. Mr. Brown added that the state is in the forefront of getting educators around the state informed about what is going on with the children of National Guard and reservists. In some cases both parents are called to serve at the same time and the children find themselves living with grandparents.

Kathy Gerard with Veterans Affairs Puget Sound said those who join the military literally leave their families and their support systems, sometimes for many years. While gone, friendships change, relationships change, and when they come home they do not always receive a warm and supportive welcome. Until recently it was not always easy for veterans to use their GI bill, but the new bill is much more user friendly. Additionally, veterans are starting to advocate for themselves and other veterans, and they are joining support groups and generally working together more.

Ms. Gerard said the nice thing about the Seattle/King County community is that more than just the VA is out there trying to identify the veterans. The levy has put money into the system, and the state itself does a lot of advocacy at community colleges where many of them are trying to reintegrate. In addition, service providers are asking the right questions and in the right way, and they ask because they know there are resources available for veterans. The state is providing services, veterans service organizations are doing amazing work, and King County is actively providing outreach.

The economy is just not as forgiving as it used to be. Many are coming to the VA for help because they have lost their jobs. Many do not have good rental histories because they have moved around a lot. The VA has set up a toll-free homeless hotline any veteran can call. A social worker takes the calls and assesses the caller's needs. There has for several years been a suicide prevention campaign in place, and close to half of the veterans calling in were found to be at risk for homelessness; that was the stimulus for developing the homelessness call center. King County and the state also have hot lines veterans can call to get assistance and find out about resources. When calls are received, one of the first things done is to determine the county in which the caller lives, because the available assistance varies by county. Callers are often at risk of homelessness and they usually need services and case management.

Ms. Gerard said the first year of the Five-Year Plan was focused on the HUD-VASH program. The funds flowed from the national office to the local office, and the vouchers were used to house veterans quickly. During the second year the focus was more on the homeless grants and per diem program. When planning for the Andrews Glen project began, it was clear they really had a handle on the homeless population and they were conducting active outreach. There were funding hurdles but eventually everything came together. The VA was happy to contribute to the project and to gain an official stake in it. The VA can therefore provide support officially and it can provide subsidies for the services. Congregations for the Homeless had about 20 veterans lined up as candidates for the veterans housing units long before the facility even opened. The VA is hoping to be able to help out with the Francis Village project. The levy money helps the VA get into apartments through move-in expenses and first month rent, and the state helps with furniture vouchers. The landlord liaison project provides support for landlords and helps to subsidize the risk.

The next phase of the Five-Year Plan will focus on prevention, and VA resources are available locally to do the work. Contracting is under way to provide some prevention work. The VA's prevention program will cover the entire Puget Sound area. The need is very big, as evidenced by the fact that some 200 referrals for the program have already been received, though only 60 have been served to date. A big ad campaign will kick off soon in an attempt to get the younger veterans to call in for assistance, including case management.

Ms. Gay commented that statewide housing support is very vulnerable to budget cuts. Mr. Brown pointed out that the Veterans Plan to End Homelessness encompasses the entire state. The director John Lee serves on an advisory board in Washington, D.C. for Eric Shinseki and has provided testimony at that level. He said King County is not just the best in the state, it is the best in the nation. At the National Housing Summit in August King County was highlighted as a leader in the nation. At the state level an advocacy effort is under way to get all of the other counties to get together and follow a similar course to end homelessness, and several are coming around.

Commissioner Stout asked if the percentage of the population that are veterans is equal county by county. Mr. Brown said the percentages are lower in the rural counties. Even so, those populations are in need of help but they do not have the necessary resources.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Bruels, Ms. Gay said Seattle Municipal Court just recently started the first Veterans Court in King County. It will largely handle DUI offences; it will not handle domestic violence cases. In exchange for not being charged with a criminal offense, the veteran signs a contract under which they agree to be in the program. All benefits and support systems will come through the health benefits side of the VA. The Veterans Incarcerated Program, which is implemented by the state, works with veterans who are in the county jails. In January 2012, a King County District Court will begin a veterans docket.

Ms. Gerard said the VA was approved in 2010 to hire a Veteran's Justice Outreach Coordinator who has since built some very good relationships. Approval to fund a second coordinator was recently received. The focus is on getting veterans out of the criminal system and into a treatment system.

7. DISCUSSION

A. Update on Eastside Winter Shelter

Ms. Leslie reminded the Commissioners that the severe weather shelter was begun three years ago and was operated by Bellevue; the shelter was open on nights that met certain weather criteria. During the winter of 2010-2011 the program evolved into the regional Eastside Winter Shelter and it was open nightly.

Mr. Adriano explained that back in 2008 members of the Eastside Homelessness Advisory Committee and Police Chief Linda Pillo identified the need to have a shelter available on freezing nights. Human services staff from Bellevue, along with members of the Eastside Homelessness Advisory Committee, worked to develop the concept. No private organization stepped forward willing to lead the effort, so the city started the project and managed it with support from Catholic Community Services and Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council via a contract arrangement. The contract model continued into 2010 and the Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council became the prime contractor. The shelter was sited at Crossroads Community Center and was activated on nights forecast to reach 32 degrees F or lower.

The change to the Eastside Weather Shelter in the fall of 2010 was predicated on a number of factors. Homeless advocates and service providers reported that the intermittent activation of the shelter confused a lot of homeless people. Opening announcements made via the internet and radio and television were not reaching their target audiences. Many who did find out the shelter would be open faced difficulties in obtaining transportation to the facility. It was also learned that many homeless persons were reluctant to leave their established camps just for one or two nights. Even with air temperatures above the freezing mark, there are adverse health impacts. Furthermore, ground temperatures can be freezing even when the air temperature is not.

The Eastside Weather Shelter was operated during the winter of 2010-2011 by Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council in conjunction with their programs, Congregations for the Homeless and The Sophia Way. The new format was funded by the cities of Bellevue, Issaquah, Kirkland and Redmond, as well as by various faith groups. The original Severe Weather Shelter operated at the Crossroads Community Center between November 20, 2010 and January 15, 2011; activated by weather criteria, the shelter was open a total of 32 nights during that time. Between January 15, 2011 and February 20, 2011, the shelter was housed at the Old Redmond Schoolhouse and was open nightly.

During the 2009-2010 winter season, the Severe Weather Shelter was activated only for 18 nights; that figure rose to 68 nights during the 2010-2011 winter season. The number of bednights rose in concert with the number of activated nights, increasing from 316 to 2670. The average nightly count in 2009-2010 was 18, whereas in 2010-2011 it was 39. There were 226 unduplicated individuals served in the most recent winter season, as opposed to only 59 the year before. There were more women served in 2010-2011, as well as more folks whose last permanent address was not on the Eastside. Sixteen percent of those served in 2010-2011 had served in the military; the question was not asked prior to that winter season.

Ms. Leslie pointed out that the move to Redmond made it possible for homeless persons from that area to access the shelter; those persons likely would not have

made the trip to Crossroads, and a few from Bellevue did not make the trip to Redmond.

Mr. Adriano said dual-use facilities, such as multi-program community centers, are not ideal when used as weather shelters for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the disruption of other programs that occurs and the resulting loss of revenues. High shelter utilization rates can have a noticeable impact on the area surrounding the shelter; that suggests a need for more dialogue with community members, local police, and local businesses as early as possible, though at the same time the shelters bring out the good in some neighbors. Having the shelter open on consecutive nights rather than only when an arbitrary weather threshold is triggered equates to a predictable resource, the result of which is higher numbers of homeless persons utilizing the shelter on a nightly basis.

The Eastside Weather Shelter workgroup was formed earlier in the year. Led by the Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council, the partners include the Eastside cities and various faith-based groups. Some private business sites have been approached to inquire about renting a facility to house the shelter. Most of the Eastside cities are not willing to entertain the prospect; the Crossroads Community Center is the exception and is talking with Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council about working out a rental agreement. To date, more than 250 faith groups have been approached, but only the Salvation Army facility in the Crossroads area currently holds some potential.

Ms. Leslie said the Salvation Army location is only big enough to house the men. The Crossroads Community Center likely will be used to house the women and children. Of course having to operate two sites will cost more in terms of staffing, though having the two facilities close geographically could facilitate the sharing of supplies. The Old Redmond Schoolhouse has been removed from consideration by the mayor of Redmond.

Mr. Adriano said Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council has secured close to \$51,000 to fund the shelter for the upcoming winter season. Depending on whether two sites are needed or just a single site, the funding shortfall is predicted to be between \$87,000 and \$156,000. Grant proposals have been drafted and submitted, and the Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council is waiting to hear from King County; United Way turned them down.

Commissioner Yantis asked if consideration has been given to mounting a public relations campaign to make the need known. Organizations that have declined to fund the program may rethink their position if they were to receive pressure from their constituents. Mr. Adriano said the workgroup has not yet had that conversation but is likely to, especially if the Salvation Army does not come through. One group that is involved with the workgroup is the Interfaith Taskforce on Homelessness, which is a group that is vocal and active at the legislature level as well as with King County and Seattle. The group also knows how to get its message out through the media.

Commissioner Habib said if necessary, someone from the Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council could attend and make an announcement at a Bellevue Rotary meeting, which is always attended by Councilmembers, business representatives, and members of various congregations.

Commissioner Stout asked if the Council has been updated on the topic. Ms. Leslie allowed that they have not received an update yet given how full the Council agenda is. She said staff will be keeping Council liaison Councilmember Chelminiak and key city leaders informed.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Leslie reminded the Commissioners that there would be three meetings in November on the first, second and third Tuesdays, and no meetings in December.

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Beighle adjourned the meeting at 8:24 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date