

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

November 3, 2009
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Stout, Commissioners Beighle, Bruels, Hoople, Huenefeld Gese, Plaskon, Yantis

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

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

GUEST SPEAKERS: Sadikifu Akina-James, King County Department of Executive Services; Kathy Brash, Regional Human Services Levy Oversight Board, Joel Estey, Regional Veterans Services

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. by Chair Stout who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

Human Services Manager Emily Leslie took a moment to introduce new Commissioner John Bruels. She noted that Commissioner Bruels has an extensive background professionally in human services and obtained his masters in social work in the summer of 2008 from the University of Washington School of Social Work.

Commissioner Bruels said prior to obtaining his masters in social work he had a masters degree in psychology from Seattle University and has been working professionally as a clinician for the past 20 years, primarily in mental health and crisis intervention. He said he is employed by Swedish Medical Center as a social worker in the emergency department.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. October 6, 2009

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Beighle. Second was by Commissioner Yantis and the motion carried unanimously.

B. October 20, 2009

Chair Stout referred to the last paragraph on page 3 and noted that "Chair Stout said she attended the subcommittee meeting..." should be changed to read "Chair Stout said she attended the King County Council budget hearing...."

Commissioner Beighle referred to the first paragraph under staff and commission reports on page 3 and noted that "Paul Wintersteen" should be corrected spelled "Paul Winterstein."

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Huenefeld Gese. Second was by Commissioner Hoople and the motion carried unanimously.

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Helen Leuzzi, executive director of Sophia Way, said the homeless women's center, which opened in December 2008, was the first shelter in East King County to serve homeless women not currently involved in domestic violence situations. Many of the clients have been victims in the past, but because they are not currently experiencing domestic violence they do not need a confidential shelter. The clients are provided life skills training and then are provided with subsidized housing for between three and six months, depending on the available funding. Over the past year the program has touched the lives of 50 women. The shelter is currently full and has a waiting list. A dozen women will be in housing by the end of the year. The support of the city is needed and appreciated. Sophia's Home, the program that places clients in residences, is well funded for the next two years. Sophia's Place, the shelter program, is not as exciting for many funders; it relies on funding from cities, counties and private individuals. The shelter program has enough funds to continue operating halfway through 2010 and will need additional funds. It costs about \$15,000 per month to keep the shelter running and to provide supported services to the clients. She asked the Commission to consider funding the shelter for one month. The Commissioners were invited to attend a program at the Harbor Club on December 9 called "Give a Home for the Holidays."

Commissioner Hoople asked how many of the more than 50 women served during the past year were Bellevue residents. Ms. Leuzzi said she did not have the exact figure with her but allowed that the vast majority of the women were Bellevue residents. For a variety of reasons, the women who come to Sophia's Place do not want to seek shelter in Seattle.

Commissioner Bruels asked if the housing options are transitional or permanent. Ms. Leuzzi said the term can be defined a number of different ways. She said she considers the housing to be permanent because when a woman enters the program their housing is subsidized 70 percent. During the two years their housing is subsidized, the goal is to move them into either state-funded housing or market-rate housing they pay for themselves.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Yantis, Ms. Leuzzi said in 2009 the program received funding from Bellevue, Redmond and King County. The balance of funding comes from foundations, faith organizations, and private individuals. The organization has qualified for United Way funding but has not received any funds from them to date.

Commissioner Yantis commented that the United Way East Community Council, which has since disbanded, used to do bridge funding for agencies in need of a short-term budget fix. He asked if there is a similar option under the New Solutions agency. Ms. Leslie said the criteria for grants is different under New Solutions, and the grant process for 2009 has concluded. Ms. Leuzzi said Sophia's Place will not be able to apply for United Way funding until 2010.

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Hoople said on October 20 he participated in making a presentation to the Kirkland City Council on the Veterans and Human Services Levy.

Commissioner Beighle said she attended a "Communities Matter" dialog sponsored by City Club and its partners. She noted that the group is currently focused on education and economic opportunities. Some 35 dialog sessions will be conducted throughout King County and then a report will be compiled and released to policy makers, the public and the media.

Ms. Leslie shared with the Commissioners copies of a joint letter that was initiated by the city of Redmond and sent to the King County Council encouraging them not to cut human services funding out of the general fund. The number of mayors who signed the letter was unprecedented.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly announced that there will be a community conversation sponsored by the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative on November 19. The event will include a panel discussion. The target audience will be human services providers. The information will be fed into the plan each municipality is required to compile and submit annually to the Federal Transit Administration. She invited the Commissioners to attend.

Ms. O'Reilly informed the Commission that the Bellevue School District has a blog that includes some excellent demographics information. She distributed to the

Commissioners copies of printouts focused on the increase of homeless families within the school district and the number of students eligible for free or the reduced lunch program.

Ms. Leslie noted that the Commission packets included copies of a management brief regarding the Recession Response Task Force. The document included a listing of the indicators that are being tracked. The response of the Council was very positive.

6. DISCUSSION

A. Veterans and Human Services Levy

Sadikifu Akina-James, government relations officer from the King County Department of Executive Services, introduced Kathy Brash, chair of the Regional Human Services Levy Oversight Board, Joel Estey, Regional Veterans Services staff liaison, and Commissioner Hoople, chair of the Veterans Levy Oversight Board.

Ms. Akina-James said the members of the two citizen oversight boards are appointed by the King County Council. Each board has twelve members, nine of whom are appointed by the King County Council and three of whom are appointed by the King County Executive. The District 6 positions, which includes Bellevue, are currently vacant for both boards.

In 2005 the citizens of King County voted to tax themselves to create a fund that would provide services for veterans, other military personnel and their families, and regional human services for others in need. The levy takes in around \$13.5 million annually and was approved for six years; the levy will end in 2011. Half of the levy goes to services for veterans and their families, and half goes for a range of regional human services. A citizen oversight board was established by the King County Council to watch over each portion of the levy, and the Department of Executive Services was tasked with developing a plan for how the dollars were to be spent; the plan came to be titled the Service Improvement Plan (SIP).

The Department of Executive Services recommended to the King County Council four target populations and five strategies for expending the dollars. Every dollar collected from the levy is funneled into one of the five strategies: 1) enhancing services for veterans; 2) ending homelessness; 3) increasing access to behavioral health services; 4) strengthening families, with a particular focus on reuniting parents who are coming out of the justice system with their children; and 5) administration and evaluation of the levy.

Ms. Akina-James said there are sub-strategies for each strategy. Staff was tasked with writing procurement plans for each strategy and sub-strategy, and each plan had to be approved by the respective oversight boards. The process included a public review element. Once the plans were approved, agencies to carry out the specific activities were selected. The Commissioners were provided with spreadsheets

outlining every strategy and how the funds were allocated. One of the spreadsheets was specific to the Eastside.

Ms. Brash said her lack of background in human services uniquely qualifies her to represent the public. She said the Regional Human Services Levy Oversight Board spent the first couple of years of its existence reviewing the plans and sitting in on the requests for proposals. With that process completed, it has been easier to follow how the funds are actually being used.

Commissioner Hoople explained that the three at-large positions on each of the oversight boards must be filled by executive appointment. On the veterans side, the appointments were required by the language of the levy to be appointed from the existing King County Veterans Program. The first strategy was aimed at putting funds into linking existing programs with the new levy. He said his appointment to the oversight board resulted from that approach. He said the existing dollars were not able to be allocated to services to anyone beyond the five major branches of the armed forces; National Guard Reserves and their families were not necessarily included. The levy funds specifically identifies and includes them. Since the passage of the levy, work has been under way with the legislature to change the definition of "veteran" to be more broadly construed. Providers now ask clients if they have served in the United States military rather than asking if they are veterans; that is an important change because often those who have served in noncombatant roles do not believe they qualify as veterans.

Commissioner Hoople said the passage of the levy has allowed for the gathering of a great deal more information about veterans in King County. The King County website includes a report that has excellent details about the veterans situation in the county.

Commissioner Hoople said the money that went into the St. Andrew's Housing Group project at St. Margaret's Church represents the first dollars spent for veterans housing on the Eastside. The Veterans Conservation Corp is also being funded with levy dollars.

The levy dollars have initially been geared toward existing programs that have been proven to be successful. The infusion has helped assure that veterans and human service gaps are being addressed; the dollars have not been aimed at generating new programs. However, the levy initially brought in more money than was forecast so there were undesignated funds available. On the veterans side, the extra dollars were earmarked for the Veterans Conservation Corps, a program that works with junior colleges on green technologies and creating green jobs. Dollars were also designated for retraining veterans whose jobs have been lost while they were serving, and for the Veterans Incarceration Program.

Mr. Estey said he has been with the veterans program for the past 23 years. He said he personally served in Vietnam and when he got out moved to Bellevue. He said one of the primary requirements of the SIP is to take services to parts of King County where services do not exist. Staff goes into about 22 different locations each month to provide an array of services. One of the focuses is on helping older veterans connect with services that for one reason or another they have disconnected from. The services include access to the Veterans Administration healthcare system for medications and treatment. Passage of the levy has facilitated the opening of a new office in Renton and another in Auburn.

Mr. Estey said the veterans program is mandated by state law; it is one of only three dedicated stability programs. The law has been in existence since the 1890s. In 2005, the collaborative efforts of a number of different counties were able to effect a change in state law to the end that counties are now able to implement programs or services; up to that point, most counties were limited to direct financial aid. The door is now open to counties with the financial wherewithal to fund case management, mental health services, transitional housing, and a range of other things.

The change in the state law allowed for a change in the definition of a veteran. Previously, personnel in the National Guard or the Reserves did not qualify as veterans unless and until discharged. Personnel from those branches who returned from deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan but who were still active did not qualify.

Mr. Estey said through a contract with the Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs, the organization visits about eight different locations throughout the county to locate and identify homeless veterans and connect them with jobs and housing. Phase I works with seniors, and Phase II works with a younger population that has families and children and who need access to living stability or financial aid in order to get by.

The Veterans Incarceration Program was implemented in 1995. The Veterans Levy Oversight Board went to the King County Executive and explained the degree to which the program had been underfunded for many years. The county concurred and additional funding was found. In partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs, the jail project has been very successful in reducing recidivism rates. The project seeks out eligible veterans in the justice system. Those who qualify are connected with housing, case management services, and often the courts release them from serving any additional jail days. In a single year, the reduced number of jail days served, at \$110 per day, saved close to \$1 million.

Mr. Estey explained that the trauma project implemented by the Department of Veterans Affairs is geared toward providing services to wives, significant others and children who have grown up with fathers who have post traumatic stress. The program is having a positive impact on the family members, especially children, by helping them understand that what the veteran parent is going through is not normal.

Commissioner Hoople said the next two objectives will be to communicate with the public about the levy and its various benefits.

Commissioner Yantis asked if any of the other counties in the state have similar programs. Mr. Estey said every county is required by state law to have a program similar to the King County Veterans Program. However, the funding base for many counties is significantly smaller. Ms. Akina-James said no other county have passed a similar levy. Commissioner Hoople added that Pierce County has asked for and been provided with information about the levy. Ms. Brash commented that the concept of taxing to meet the need is innovative.

Ms. Leslie said because of the impending devastating cuts to human services being considered by King County, a couple of King County Councilmembers have raised the possibility of expanding the Veterans and Human Services Levy, either when it comes up for renewal or sooner. On the human services side, the King County Alliance for Human Services, the countywide provider coalition, is looking at significantly expanding the levy as one option for helping to fill the looming enormous gap in funding. She asked if the veterans side is also looking to expand the levy. Commissioner Hoople suggested that there are many areas that are not being addressed, so expanding the veterans side would be beneficial. Expansions on the human services side will trickle over to veterans; one-third of the permanently homeless on the streets are in fact veterans. In any action to make changes to the levy, it will be necessary to sell the public on how successful it has been so far and what good it could do in the future.

Chair Stout thanked the presenters for all of their work and said the Commission will look forward to additional updates.

7. DISCUSSION

A. Parks and Open Space System Plan

Senior Planner Camron Parker said the Department of Parks and Community Services is in the process of updating the Parks and Open Space System Plan that was last updated in 2003. The current focus is on collecting information from people in the community about how they use the park system and what their priorities are for expanding the park system in the future.

Mr. Parker said the Parks and Open Space System Plan is one of three foundational documents the Department of Parks and Community Services has; the other two are the Recreation Plan and the Human Services Needs Update. Everything undertaken by the department can draw a line to one of those three documents. The Parks Plan is generally updated every six or seven years. The plan is required by a key granting agency at the state level tapped for acquisition of future parks and development, and is a key component of the department's accreditation, which is updated every five years.

There are public health implications associated with the Parks Plan. Recently there has been a lot of work and publications touting the fact that exposure to nature in parks, gardens and natural areas can improve psychological and social health. In addition, studies have shown that that surgical patients recover faster if they have rooms with windows that look out on trees. Horticultural therapy has evolved as a form of mental health treatment based on the therapeutic effects of gardening. Children who suffer from attention deficit disorder concentrate on school better after taking part in activities in green settings. Residents in housing projects having views of trees or grass experience reduced mental fatigue and report they are better able to cope with life's problems. The current Parks Plan does not include much discussion of those issues, but the updated plan will.

Mr. Parker said the Parks Plan also has a focus on capital facilities such as buildings and structures. Historically the city has entered into partnerships that has allowed non-profit organizations to provide services from city-owned buildings. The number of partnerships has grown and diversified substantially since 2003 when the Parks Plan was last adopted; they include the overnight emergency shelter at Crossroads Community Center, the wrap-around services partnership with the school district, and the partnership with the Bellevue Boys & Girls Club located at the South Bellevue Community Center. The current document does not fully capture the depth of the department's partnerships and what could be done in the future.

Commissioner Plaskon asked how far along the department's development plans are for the Bel-Red corridor. Mr. Parker said the Bel-Red Subarea Plan has been adopted as part of the city's Comprehensive Plan; it contains geographic generalities rather than specifics when it comes to park elements. The parks and open space element of that specific plan needs to be incorporated into the overall parks system plan.

Commissioner Hoople commented that the current Ped-Bike Plan includes a focus on commuter biking and does not adequately address the needs of families and children who want to ride recreationally. Additionally, the plan outlines a wonderful system of trails but includes few that loop so that walkers start and end in the same place without backtracking. Furthermore, there is no trail link between the South Bellevue Community Center and the North Bellevue Community Center.

Commissioner Huenefeld Gese pointed out that her neighborhood of Surrey Downs does not even have sidewalks. Commissioner Hoople commented that some neighborhoods do not want sidewalks at all; he said his neighborhood of Enatai is one that does not want them.

Chair Stout observed that the Bel-Red corridor offers some excellent opportunities for human service facilities partnerships. Every opportunity to bring service providers together in the Bel-Red area should be explored. The Commission has a longstanding interest in seeing affordable housing developed in the corridor, and as

the area develops there should be a clear focus on providing families access to play areas for children.

Commissioner Beighle noted that the report talks about using renovated schools for community events and asked if there are any such examples in the city. Mr. Parker said the old Ivanhoe school is one such example. Additionally, the Wraparound Services Project ties into that model. The city also schedules activities at school sports fields during non-school hours. The city has a partnership with Tyee Middle School under which the city supported the expansion of gym facilities.

Commissioner Beighle asked if there has been any discussion of community gardens. Mr. Parker said the Pea Patch at Crossroads Community Center was expanded recently, and the Crossroads Shopping Center added its own.

Ms. O'Reilly said one thing she encounters in talking with non-profit agencies is the need for space for ongoing groups. Often the rooms in community centers are completely booked. While there is a need for the city to rent its facilities to help pay the bills, there should be some room made for non-profit groups as well.

Commissioner Bruels highlighted the need to make city facilities available in the event of natural disasters.

Mr. Parker informed the Commissioners that a web survey has been posted to the city's webpage; it will be up through the end of November. He also said an invitation will be sent out to all city boards and commissions seeking interested persons to participate in a web-based dialog the week of November 16. The dialog will focus on philosophical questions such as how park services should be provided in the coming years, and what a disconnect with nature would mean for the next generation of youth and how it should be addressed.

Commissioner Beighle said in her role on the Meydenbauer Bay Park Steering Committee she participated in interviews with members of Youth Link to determine what they would like to see in the park. The top request was for wireless internet connections.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Hoople asked how the request from Sophia's Way will be handled. Ms. Leslie said when the agency initially approached staff they were told that the reserve fund is one-time only. The two-year funding cycle is at its mid-point and new requests for regular funding will be not accepted for another year. There are no additional funds to allocate currently, and to change the criteria for the emergency fund would set a precedent.

Chair Stout announced that the annual holiday event is planned for December 8 at Crossroads Community Center. She said the event will be a potluck dinner. Commissioners will be asked to sign up for food items at the next meeting.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Stout adjourned the meeting at 8:31 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date