

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

August 16, 2011
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Habib

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

GUEST SPEAKERS: Councilmember Chelminiak

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 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 Yantis, who arrived at 6:34 p.m., Commissioner Plaskon, who arrived at 6:35 p.m., and Commissioner Habib, who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. July 19, 2011

Commissioner Perelman called attention to the last paragraph on page 4 and noted that in fact she had not suggested any revisions to the contingency plan and that she had only pointed out something that was missing.

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

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly informed the Commission that on August 15 the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative conducted an all-day strategic planning activity. She distributed some written information from King County Metro and said she would have more information about the action plan at the next Commission meeting. She noted that the Rapid Ride program will be going from Bellevue to Redmond as of October 1. Staff from transportation is planning an event for September 28 to highlight the new service.

Ms. O'Reilly also shared with the Commission a map of east King County that outlined alternatives to King County Metro. She said the map came about as a result of the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative. The maps are being distributed at community centers along with information about how to use Metro services.

Ms. O'Reilly informed the Commissioners that the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative has developed a website using Federal Transit Administration funding. She said the website, eastsideeasyrider.org, was launched two weeks ago and includes information regarding alternative transportation options. The website was developed by a group that works with accessible formats.

The Commissioners were invited to attend the Lake Hills Blueberry Festival on August 27 at Lake Hills Elementary School. The event will include a number of fun events, including a free blueberry waffle breakfast and games for the kids. Information about community resources will be handed out at the event.

Human Services Manager Emily Leslie said that if the Veterans and Human Services Levy is approved by the voters, the draft plan for how the funds will be spent will be unveiled the afternoon of August 17 at Mercer View Community Center.

Councilmember Chelminiak acknowledged the importance of public transportation to the human services arena. He noted that on a 7-2 vote the King County Council approved a \$20 vehicle license tab fee. Councilmembers Hague and Lambert joined with the majority of the Council in passing the measure. The revenues will be used to preserve bus services. Each person paying the increased fee will be given eight free bus passes or be permitted to allow the passes to go to a pool from which human service agencies will be allowed to draw. The free ride in downtown Seattle will be eliminated.

7. DISCUSSION

A. Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness – Mid-Plan Review

Gretchen Bruce, program manager for the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, said the focus has been on developing the mid-plan review. She said the Ten-Year Plan was kicked off in 2005 after a lot of community advocates came together to discuss

the homelessness issue. In the early 2000s several tent cities were forming and many communities were saying they did not want the tent cities in their backyards. The dean of St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle agreed that people should not have to be sleeping in tents in backyards and that something should be done about it. He invited the homeless to pitch their tents in the parking lot of his church, and invited community members to join together to talk about how to end the problem of homelessness. The federal government learned that other communities were developing ten-year plans as well and they determined that all cities receiving federal funds to address homelessness must have a ten-year plan of their own to address how to end homelessness among the chronically homeless single adults. In King County, the focus has been broader and includes families, young adults and single adults. There is a state mandate as well for counties to have ten-year plans.

The King County program has a governing board composed of high-placed leaders, including Councilmember Chelminiak, King County Executive Dow Constantine, Blake Nordstrom, King County Sheriff Sue Rahr, and several from the faith community; the board members have provided the high-level oversight and accountability needed to measure progress. The work is also guided by the Interagency Council which is comprised of those who actually are doing the work, including Ms. Leslie, Colleen Kelly from Redmond, Marilyn Mason-Pluckett from Hopelink, and Barbara Langdon from Eastside Domestic Violence Program. Additionally, the Consumer Advisory Council is made up of persons who either are or who have been homeless; their task is to provide a reality check. Lately, a Funders Group has been formed to make sure all of the grand plans are aligned with federal and local guidelines for what is allowable.

Ms. Bruce said during its first five years, the King County program has become nationally and internationally recognized for some practices. Representatives from the states of California, Texas and Hawaii have visited to learn more, as have representatives from New Zealand and Denmark.

At the mid-plan mark, the economy is entirely different from what it was when the plan was initiated. The review has focused on where gains have been made, where things have fallen short, how the economy has impacted implementation of the plan, and what areas will need more effort if the goals are to be accomplished by 2015. The full details of the scorecard are available on the program's website.

The system for chronically homeless single adults has been transformed using the Housing First model. In the past, employment, taking prescribed medications regularly, and other particulars were required before allowing a homeless person to move into an apartment; under the new approach, people are moved into apartments first and then they work on their personal issues and become more stable. The approach, most of which was piloted in King County, has become the national model. To date, some 4500 housing units have been funded through the plan, which is close to halfway to the 2015 goal of 9500. Production has slowed owing to the economy, but more progress has been made per capita than any other Ten-Year Plan in the

nation. The Landlord Liaison Project works to break down barriers with landlords and helps get them to yes where previously they would have said no, especially concerning persons with previous convictions and poor credit histories. The project utilizes case managers and brings to the table eviction deposit funds, move-in funds, and damage deposits. The project's first-year goal was to place 250 persons, but twice that number were placed. Congregations for the Homeless was the partner that helped pilot the model.

Diversion programs have been created that have kept people out of jails and emergency rooms and have created linkages with the social workers in those places. By getting those clients into housing, their recycling through the expensive systems has been reduced.

The Funders Group is serving to bring together whole packages of funding. It used to be that when a good program like Hopelink wanted to do more in a specific area, grants would be written and a program would be put together over the course of time. The funders group model makes it possible for them to say they want to buy a specific service and ask who wants to provide it. The Funders Group includes representatives from ARCH, United Way and the King County Housing Authority. The process has cut capital development time by about two years and has facilitated coordinated reporting.

Much of the funding comes from the document recording fees approved by the legislature in support of the Ten-Year Plan.

Commissioner Stout asked if some of the smaller counties in the state are working collaboratively with their neighboring jurisdictions on their Ten-Year Plans. Ms. Bruce said many counties want to own their own Ten-Year Plans, but others have recognized that they have so few homeless than it is not a good use of their time to go it alone; in those cases, the state stepped in with an offer to create coordinated plans for them.

Ms. Bruce commented that over the course of the past six years implementation of the Ten-Year Plan has prevented homelessness for over 18,500 persons. Much of the credit belongs to the Veterans and Human Services Levy revenues. The number of homeless persons on the streets has been reduced by four percent in each of the last two years; most large cities nationwide saw increases in their homeless populations during those years. On the Eastside, however, the One Night Count tally has remained the same. Factoring in the winter shelter, the number is actually up.

The Client Care Coordination program is focused on identifying the highest utilizers of jails, emergency rooms and sobering centers, and then getting them into stable housing. Because the clients are known, it is possible to track their use of expensive systems both before and after they are placed in housing. In the first six months of the program, the number of jail bookings fell from 3307 to 1139. The sobering center saw a drop from 1471 to 55. Community psychiatric hospitalizations fell from 242 to

35, and psychiatric emergency services were reduced from 72 to 16. During the first six months, there was a cost offset of about \$1.2 million.

Ms. Bruce said a charrette process was coordinated to bring together national and local experts. Panels discussed what should be done about immigrant and refugee homelessness, about young adult homelessness, and other topics.

Councilmember Chelminiak said he attended the panel discussion on political will and caught the end of the one on emergency shelter. He said it was remarkable to see so many people sitting down together to work on innovative ideas. It was noted that in Denver the commitment was made to move the homeless into housing, which will take a great deal of political will. He pointed out that Seattle has a significant homelessness issue and that by comparison the issue on the Eastside pales. However, the solution cannot be Seattle-centered because one size does not fit all communities. Accordingly, it is of paramount importance for the individual communities to step up and take ownership. Obviously each will do so in different ways.

Ms. Bruce said three things came out of the charrette: the overarching priorities that must be embedded in everything going forward; maintaining performance measures and being accountable; and the need for political will. The federal opportunities with which the local plans must align include the National Strategic Plan developed by HUD; the Veterans Five-Year Plan; and the Affordable Healthcare Act. Locally there is a Families Homelessness Initiative being funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; the initiative will have implications for the Eastside in that it will deal with some of the basic issues of affordable housing. Creating better linkages between the immigrant and refugee communities is an important element, as is working more seamlessly with the jails and emergency rooms.

There was one issue that could not be addressed through the mid-plan charrette due to timing, and that was senior homelessness. The issue will become significant in the years to come both for people who are becoming older and do not have a safety net for their retirement years, and those who are currently homeless and are aging.

Commissioner Perelman asked if housing that has been or is about to be foreclosed is being tapped as sources of more affordable housing. Ms. Bruce said there have been some steps taken toward exploring foreclosed properties, but working with the banks has proven to be too difficult. It is better to spend time with landlords and getting them to say yes. More case management is needed for the Landlord Liaison Program.

Commissioner Perelman asked if talks have begun yet concerning the next Ten-Year Plan. Ms. Bruce said the board came up with a finely nuanced phrase at its last meeting, which was to identify what can be realistically achieved by 2015 when the current plan wraps up. While homelessness may not be ended by then, there will be a continued commitment toward that ultimate goal.

Councilmember Chelminiak added that he is often asked whether or not homelessness ever truly can be ended. He said unless bold goals are set, communities will always fall short. King County would not have gotten as far as it has in the last five years without having had bold goals. He allowed that he was at first skeptical about the concept of providing the roof first, but has been forced to change his view because of how well it is working.

Ms. Leslie said it has been very helpful on the Eastside to have the Eastside Homelessness Advisory Committee. The group enjoys representation from literally all of the homeless providers as well as from local governments and other funders. The group works collaboratively in making system changes and in applying for funding in a noncompetitive environment.

Allison Eisinger with the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness said it is absolutely possible to end homelessness. It has been done in communities and countries in other parts of the world. What it all comes down to is resources and political will.

Commissioner Stout commented that in addition to resources it will be necessary to have all of the supportive systems working together. She suggested that that goal has not yet been reached. Ms. Bruce concurred. She said changes are built on relationships, so one role of the Committee to End Homelessness is sharing tidbits of best practices that will excite people and organizations and urge them toward working together to make it all happen. Those changes have not and will not happen overnight.

6. DISCUSSION

A. One Night Count of Homeless Presentation

Ms. Eisinger said the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness was founded in 1979 to address the emerging crisis of homelessness. At the time the nation was seeing a dramatic and steady increase in the number of persons living on the streets. There were a number of small groups, including people from the faith community, people who lived and worked in downtown Seattle, staff from the city's human services department, and social workers, who got together to compare notes on homelessness. They were seeing itinerant workers and persons with mental illnesses who had been deinstitutionalized living on the streets. The disaster that is homelessness was primarily created by public policies and the willingness of people to permit millions to sleep on sidewalks or under a bridge.

Ms. Eisinger said the Coalition is in it for the long haul and is excited to see opportunities created by making housing available that will work for the homeless, keeping them safe and sheltered. Nothing will move the issue forward absent the political will to do so. Political will is needed to adopt policies that will affect systems

change and to make the kinds of investment that are needed to house the roughly 9000 persons who nightly are homeless in King County. Political will comes solely from the wealth of the public.

The Coalition is made up of the people who do the work of providing survival services, transitional housing, and permanent housing to people who are homeless. Individual shelters can only do so much; they need behind them organizations that are focused on the big picture and bold enough to move forward.

The One Night Count of homeless persons started 32 years ago with Operation Nightwatch. The program began with persons who were themselves homeless, with some service providers, and with some members of the police force. Their count occurred over the course of three nights in a fairly concentrated area of downtown Seattle. Their efforts have since grown to include between 800 and 1000 volunteers working out of ten locations in King County. The count is now made in 13 different cities in King County and in some unincorporated areas. The counts include those riding the night owl buses, those in the sobering center, and those treated in the emergency rooms of more than ten local hospitals, yet not all of the homeless are counted. The count is made in order to have a good sense of how many homeless there are. The street counts are now combined with those in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs.

Ms. Eisinger said counting the homeless does nothing to make them less homeless. The One Night Count does, however, serve as an opportunity for advocacy. All who volunteer to participate in the count are invited to sign postcards and send them to the Democratic and Republican leadership in Olympia urging them to give high priority to homelessness and affordable housing during the legislative session. Every effort is put into making sure the press addresses the complexity of the One Night Count story and follows it throughout the year. The One Night Count is one part of what enables the area to qualify for some \$24 million in federal funding for housing, services, and the prevention of evictions and homelessness.

The count conducted in January 2011 found 2442 persons outdoors, and 6380 persons indoors throughout King County. While the latter number is an indicator of the work done to date to address homelessness, the former number makes it clear that there is still a great deal of work to be done. On the Eastside, the number of homeless persons counted in 2011 mirrored the number of persons counted in 2010; in addition, on the night of the count some 54 persons were in the severe weather shelter, and those persons are in addition to the numbers of persons on the street. The shelter was operated safely and efficiently in a community center, which is evidence that the homeless can be sheltered without creating problems for the local community. The homeless in the community are from the community; they are not traveling great distances in order to sleep in a bus shelter or under a bridge. The fears of residents with regard to the homeless can often be addressed with thoughtfulness and good planning.

Commissioner Stout asked what is being done to keep the local news media from making sensational stories about single incidents or single individuals. Ms. Eisinger said one of the things the Coalition does annually is participate in the program to provide backpacks for about 2000 homeless students in King County. The program is conducted entirely by volunteers and all of the supplies are donated. Even so, some donors have had warm and fuzzy visions of homeless kids and have complained that in addition to backpacks their funds have been used to purchase and give away toothbrushes and toothpaste. The media are encouraged to focus on more than just the One Night Count in Seattle; the reporters who have been willing to look outside the city have found and reported on some amazing stories. It will, however, be an ongoing challenge to get positive stories in print and on the air.

Ms. Eisinger said it is too bad it takes such great effort to collect school supplies for homeless children, especially in light of the fact that under the federal McKinney-Vento Act school districts are required to provide them to homeless students. The fact is, however, the schools are under-resourced and the McKinney-Vento Act is an unfunded mandate. Every child is entitled to a full and free public education regardless of where they do their homework; the schools, the providers and the community organizations all want to see that happen, but it takes a real push. An annual know your rights McKinney-Vento workshop is conducted for service providers that work with families, youth and children who are homeless, and school personnel are invited to participate.

The Committee to End Homelessness has used some of its resources to fund an organization called Faith, which stands for Faithful Action in Transforming Homelessness. Faith and the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness partner very closely. Faith has three upcoming events, one of which will be in Kirkland on October 8. The volunteer fairs bring together local social service agencies and the faith communities and give people a sense of what is possible.

Chair Beighle asked if steps are going to be taken to modify the One Night Count boundaries. Ms. Eisinger said what is really needed is on-the-ground information that is consistent. Megan Altimore, the area lead along with Steve Roberts for the Eastside count areas, has great information about areas to add. Areas that have zero counts for three years in a row are dropped from the boundaries, as are areas that see substantial development changes. Count areas are added based on informed leads.

Chair Beighle asked how sweeps are dealt with by the organization. Ms. Eisinger said sweeps are a fact of life for people who are homeless all over the country. Washington state has at times had overzealous road work crews, Department of Corrections crews, and subcontractors. The Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness has worked with attorneys for the past four years and has won some important victories with Seattle and others with the state, but still has a ways to go with King County and local municipalities. In some suburban cities there is very close collaboration between the police departments and the area One Night Count leads; in

other jurisdictions it is not a good idea at all to have the police involved. Consideration has been given to asking local municipalities to pledge not to sweep 30 days before and after the One Night Count.

Commissioner Yantis noted that back in 2006 there were some 8000 homeless persons counted. The 2011 count was higher even though 4500 housing units have been added. He said it would seem that the count numbers should be much lower and asked why they are not. Ms. Eisinger pointed out that the range between 5808 and 6382 of persons in emergency shelters and transitional housing represents capacity; permanent housing units are not included. The homeless figures are not static; the players change over time for a variety of reasons. It costs more than most people can afford to rent a place to live, even if they have jobs or have veterans or social security benefits. There is a tremendous need to respond to both those who are becoming homeless and those who are currently homeless; it is not a zero sum game. Housing units have been brought on line, but it takes a long time to do that.

Ms. Bruce said people will over time continue to become homeless. Under the Ten-Year Plan, however, systems are being created whereby those who do find themselves homeless can land on a springboard or trampoline rather than simply in a black hole. She pointed out that the street numbers have changed in part because new count areas have been added, making year-by-year comparisons tricky.

Ms. Eisinger clarified that the offset savings that result from having fewer homeless persons in the jails and sobering center do not flow to the organizations that are providing the outreach social workers and case managers and do not get invested in housing. The budget for the Department of Corrections dwarfs the budget of the homeless service providers, and yet attempts to convince the Department of Corrections to enact policies that ensure against discharging people to homelessness have been very slow to catch on. It costs the Department of Corrections nothing to discharge someone to live under a bridge, so the system just continues the cycle of homelessness.

Answering a question asked by Chair Beighle, Ms. Leslie said there is a new pilot program under way with the Lake Washington United Methodist church in conjunction with Hopelink to allow homeless persons to sleep in their cars overnight in the church parking lot. Portable toilets are provided, and volunteers from the church provide monitoring. The program is being carried out by referral only from Hopelink and Sophia Way.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. O'Reilly promised to send the Commissioners a link to the King County Mobility Coalition website posting of a video outlining different ways for persons with disabilities, older adults and low-income residents to get around.

Ms. Leslie reminded the Commissioners that the next Commission meeting would be on Thursday, September 8, because of the Labor Day holiday weekend.

Commissioner Stout said she recently heard from a reputable source that the Bellevue School District is not happy with the Wraparound Services Program because they are not getting test results from it. She pointed out that the purpose of the program is not to increase test scores.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Beighle adjourned the meeting at 8:34 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date