

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on November 18, 2014

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

October 21, 2014
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Perelman, Commissioners Bruels, Kline, McEachran, Villar

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Beighle, Plaskon

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Leslie, Alex O'Reilly, Joseph Adriano, Mary-Jane Walker, Kevin Henry, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Rae Levine, Sophia Way

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:39 p.m. by Commissioner McEachran who presided until the arrival of Chair Perelman.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Perelman, who arrived at 6:41 p.m., and Commissioners Beighle and Plaskon, both of whom were excused.

3. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Sandra Wallace, address not given, said she does the Talk Time at the Bellevue library. She said she was present to hear the presentation on the Diversity Initiative.

4. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner McEachran said he attended the breakfast fundraiser for Imagine Housing along with some 250 people. The event raised over \$69,000.

Commissioner Bruels shared with the Commission that a person he has been working with came to the emergency room in crisis and needed to be sent to a program for his health and safety. Arrangements were made for him to take along a

supply of his medications, and transportation was arranged as well. The person is insured, but the medications and transportation was not covered and those two items alone came to over \$300. The hospital picked up those costs, something it often does. A clinic or smaller organization, however, would not be able to do the same on a regular basis. That is one reason it is important for the Commission to keep healthcare on its radar screen in terms of assisting clinics and other organizations in the community.

Chair Perelman arrived and reported that on October 20 she presented the Commission's recommendations to the City Council. She said the Council was very thankful for the work of the Commission and the staff.

Human Services Manager Emily Leslie said she attended the Hopelink luncheon on October 20. She said the event was well attended. She added that she had not yet heard the total amount they raised.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly said earlier in the day she and Ms. Leslie attended the meeting of the King County Alliance of Human Services. She said she learned there the word "churn" and discovered that it is frequently used by some providers. The word refers to the fact that there are some people on Medicaid who lose their eligibility from month to month because they make a little more money, then need to be re-eligiblized when their income drops again. Representatives from Asian Counseling and Referral Service and Sound Mental Health indicated that they lose thousands of dollars every month by continuing to see those clients. The clients could potentially sign up for something through the Healthcare Exchange, but they do not have the money for either the premiums or the co-pays.

Commissioner Bruels commented that no one yet knows what the total impact of the Affordable Care Act is going to be.

Intern Mary-Jayne Walker reported that earlier in the day she attended a meeting of the Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness. She said a number of advocates were present to talk about the different ways in which homeless persons get charged with crimes for the act of being homeless. The keynote speaker framed the discussion around ways in which the business community can partner with social services given the common goal of not wanting to see people living on the streets.

Chair Perelman said the city of Seattle is third only to Los Angeles and New York in the amount of money spent annually to combat homelessness. Even so there continue to be thousands of homeless persons.

Ms. Leslie added that the Family Housing Connection, the coordinated entry for housing, reported earlier in the day that their waiting list is down to a thousand families County-wide.

5. DISCUSSION

A. Reserve Fund Application

Ms. Leslie noted that Sophia Way will be subcontracting with Catholic Community Services for the winter shelter for women and children. The funders met with staff from both agencies recently to talk about the contracting logistics. In the course of that the budget was reviewed and Catholic Community Services discovered it would need additional resources to operate the shelter for a variety of reasons. As of June the cities contract for the women's shelter had already been expended, though there still were some other funds coming in, and there are additional funds that can be used in 2015.

Ms. Leslie said the cities met to discuss the budget situation. Redmond identified some funds it could commit, and Kirkland is considering a request from Catholic Community Services. Bellevue has the Reserve Fund option and Catholic Community Services was invited to submit a request to help fill in the 2014 gap.

Commissioner Bruels asked if Sophia Way had anticipated some additional funding to operate in November and December. Rae Levine, Sophia Way Interim Executive Director, said she did not have a good answer to that question. She said there likely was a misunderstanding about the pooled cities money and the period of time it was intended for. There was some additional funding that came in, including a one-time award from United Way, that was intended to cover some of the extra time. Clearly the decisions made were not right in terms of managing the funds and being fiscally responsible.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Leslie, Ms. Levine said in reviewing the budget for the winter shelter she discovered the costs were higher than anticipated. Operation of the shelter last year was about \$25,000 per month. The total pooled cities contract was \$54,000, an amount that would not stretch to cover the months the shelter is open.

Chair Perelman asked about the \$2300 line item in the budget for travel and training. Ms. Leslie said it appears to be for bus tickets because there is a reduced bus fare grant that matches up perfectly on the expense and revenue sides.

Commissioner Kline asked Ms. Levine if after digging through the budget she concluded the budget was simply inadequate in the first place, or if the program grew beyond its original expectations. Ms. Levine said as the season advanced there were more people using the shelter. However, staffing, which is the major cost, did not change. She said she did not know what went into the budgeting proposal for 2014. Operational costs may have been somewhat higher than budgeted, but the main issue was that the season was extended. She added that it appears to her the shelter was run in a responsible way to take care of those who used the shelter.

Ms. Leslie said an internal staff team has been working on the winter shelters, particularly the men's shelter. The idea of community engagement and outreach has come up with that group. She said she has talked with both Sophia Way and Catholic Community Services about that, and she noted there is some of it going on with St. Peter's United Methodist Church. It would be helpful, however, to attach some general conditions to the Reserve Fund request that would require Catholic Community Services to make sure there is adequate outreach to the surrounding neighborhood where the shelter in Bellevue will be located. Redmond likely will have a similar interest. The church has scheduled a meeting with the neighborhood on November 1, and Steve Roberts with Congregations for the Homeless is planning to meet with some key neighbors who expressed concerns the last time the shelter was housed in the church. There needs to be more outreach, however, and not just before the shelter opens; a process needs to be in place while the shelter is operational to respond to any concerns.

Commissioner McEachran noted that the new pastor at St. Peter's has been on board for only a short time. He has a good community sense from Skyway and is a resident of Kent. What is needed is a strong key player with the necessary authority from the congregation to speak directly to issues as they arise. Some language regarding the need for monitoring should be attached to any allocated funds. Ms. Levine said she has been meeting with representatives from St. Peter's for a couple of months. They have talked about working with the neighborhood. The feeling of the church is that it will set better with the neighborhood that women and children will be using the shelter rather than men. Catholic Community Services operates shelters all over King County and has a great deal of experience working with neighborhoods. The issues will all be addressed openly at the November 1 meeting with the neighborhood.

Commissioner Bruels pointed out that the winter shelter for women will only be at St. Peter's from mid-November through the end of January. That should help to ameliorate the concerns of the neighborhood. Some community organizing around the shelter could result in having the majority of the residents in the neighborhood welcome the needed community service.

Grant Coordinator Joseph Adriano commented that two years ago a Commissioner asserted that one of the big lapses in the process with Congregations for the Homeless was that they were putting the neighborhoods into a position of not being heard. That likely contributed to the level of frustration. Chair Perelman said that is the very reason why it is so important to go the extra mile in making sure the concerns of the neighborhood are heard.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Kline, Mr. Adriano suggested that any award should include a provision for specific outreach steps be taken by St. Peter's, Sophia Way or Catholic Community Services. Development Services staff have suggested requiring public notification within a certain radius of where the shelter will be, and that the communication come either from the church or the shelter operator.

Contact names and numbers should be part of the notice, and there should be periodic meetings with the neighbors to address issues.

Commissioner McEachran observed that congregations often have a wonderful sense of the vision they believe they are called to do. The Commission, however has in the past experienced the opposite response from neighborhoods.

A motion to approve the Reserve Fund request for \$10,000, with specific conditions related to community outreach, was made by Commissioner Bruels. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Villar and it carried unanimously.

Ms. O'Reilly said she serves as part of the outreach component of the city's One City team along with Mike McCormick-Huentelman, program manager for Neighborhood Outreach, and Andrew Kidde, manager of the City's Mediation Program. A meeting of the group is slated for October 22 and Ms. Levine will participate along with a representative of Catholic Community Services. The group will offer assistance with the public outreach, particularly with regard to the mailing labels for the public notice.

6. DISCUSSION

A. Diversity Initiative

Kevin Henry, Cultural Diversity Program Director, shared with the Commission a copy of the original Cultural Diversity Plan from 1993. He said he was hired in 1994 in fulfillment of the recommendation in the plan to create a new position in response to demographic changes that had occurred and projections for how they would continue. The original plan included a number of recommendations regarding working with the communities and with agencies and non-profits to make them more culturally efficient and confident. At the time Bellevue was 14 percent non-white; currently it is 42 percent. Caucasian children in the Bellevue School District make up only 48 percent of the total and children of color make up the other 52 percent.

The Bellevue diversity initiative began in 2011 and stemmed from a Council meeting at which it was recognized that the 1993 draft needed updating to better understand the diversity and viewpoints of those who live in Bellevue. Another key point involves defining the city's leadership role in bringing the community together in terms of individuals, organizations, agencies and businesses. Many in the community for various reasons do not understand their value to the city, possibly for cultural reasons and possibly because the city has not made complete connections.

Mr. Henry explained that Bellevue Essentials, an eight-week program, involves bringing diverse groups of people together and getting them familiar with the city and how it runs, and encouraging them to share their newfound information with their individual neighborhoods.

Many in the city are not aware of all the services the city offers, and improving the reach and effectiveness of public services is an important part of updating the Cultural Diversity Plan. The City does a great job in many areas, but it could do so much better. Leveraging the diversity advantage is another element. Until there are good connections and relationships formed, it will not be possible to leverage the talent, skill and knowledge a diverse community offers.

"The journey" is a phrase used a lot in recognition that what is involved is an ongoing learning experience. Every week, and every month of the year brings a new set of challenges and issues, so the work is really never done.

Mr. Henry said diversity is really about everyone. No two people have the same DNA; each person is different and brings something unique to the community. Cultural competence can only be achieved on a personal level by understanding oneself first. Organizationally, cultural competence requires an inward analysis of the organization.

Mr. Henry told the Commissioners that Eastside Pathways is an active organization focused on erasing some of the evident disparities. Persons with limited English skills face more of a challenge when it comes to academic success.

There is less diversity overall in the older population, but more in the younger generation. That is an opportunity the community can capitalize on in that the younger generation has a lot to offer; they are the future leaders, the future board members, the future Councilmembers. Going forward it will continue to be important to pay attention to new immigrants as they come to the area, with a particular eye on reducing the amount of isolation that goes on as immigrants keep to themselves and fail to integrate with the main stream.

The demographics of Bellevue employees is not reflective of the city's demographics. Eighty-six percent of city employees are not persons of color.

Mr. Henry shared with the Commissioners the story of a Bellevue woman named Jane who by her own admission was racist, particularly in the months following 9/11. She had a very intense dislike and distrust of Middle Easterners and a big fear of terrorism. In time she started participating in Cultural Conversations, a monthly program run by the Planning Department, and came to realize she had prejudices she had to address. She now is best friends with a woman who is from the Middle East. When people ask why the city is focused on cultural issues and doing outcome measurements, it must be admitted that program effectiveness can be hard to show in a pie chart or part of a statistic. The outcome of the Cultural Conversations program in light of what happened to those two women, however, is significant. Had Jane not joined the program and had a change of heart, her racism could have crept into other areas of her life and could have negatively affected decisions about who to employ and who to rent to; subtle psychological things going on beneath the surface tend to play out in a variety of unconscious ways.

In order to inform the initiative, an attempt has been made to meet with as many people as possible. There have been meetings, there have been focus groups, and there was a big meeting at City Hall to which providers who work with diverse populations were invited to share their stories. The amount of feedback received has been substantial and the work is continuing. The themes that have emerged from the public outreach include shared leadership, collaboration, equitable access, responsive public services, outreach, communication, cross-cultural interaction, and sustainability. The latter includes keeping the momentum going as things change over time.

Support from the top of the organization is and will continue to be critical. The leadership team participated in an eight-hour cultural competence training course, and to date more than 100 city staffers have received training in cultural competence. It is hoped that all city employees will receive the training.

The identified themes overlap in many respects. There is an overlap between public safety and civic engagement, and between public safety and education. There are things happening in the schools that can be a detriment to the students being successful academically, including gang, drug, bullying and isolation problems. Bellevue has a reputation of being a safe community with a low crime rate, but that is not necessarily what everyone thinks; persons of different cultures may have different perceptions of what is safe. At the bottom of it all is cultural competence and the skills needed to be able to address the issues.

Mr. Henry noted that many ethnic groups rent or otherwise use rooms and spaces at City Hall without the city actually interacting with them beyond scheduling. The idea of taking advantage of opportunities and leveraging diversity is critical. The city does a good job of expressing diversity through arts and culture. Arts Specialist Mary Pat Byrne and the Arts Commission are directly involved in those activities, and he said he is engaged at the community centers. People may not want to go listen to a panel discuss diversity, but they will go see a group at Crossroads or attend the Strawberry Festival.

Making sure community businesses offer culturally specific goods is something that regularly pops up in focus groups. That is something that goes toward making a city culturally welcoming. The Commissioners were challenged to visit an ethnic market to see if all they want can be found there as a way of better understanding how someone from another culture might feel in looking for what they want at a Safeway or QFC.

Diversity has been weaved into the language of the city's budget proposals, and it has been a key theme in the Comprehensive Plan Update. Diversity is in fact seeping into all aspects of the city's work and programs. The Police Department has been very active in making diversity and connecting with the community a priority.

Mr. Henry said there are 60 recommended actions. They are not arranged in any particular order. Some things are already being addressed, such as investing in more public gathering spaces, though the focus needs to be expanded. Some issues have been identified as being on the front burner, such as developing citywide standards on translation. Other issues will be addressed down the road. The strength of the program will be measured in part by how many partners the city will have.

Commissioner Bruels commented that during his tenure on the Commission and in reviewing applications he has seen some progress toward the understanding of cultural competence. There still, however, is a lot of work to do. There is a general lack of understanding the difference between nondiscrimination and the ideas and concepts of cultural competence. Mr. Henry said it has been his experience that providers fit into two general categories: either they are members of the choir and regularly attend events and meetings and really get it on a deeper level, or they are just looking for a quick fix without understanding why they need to do something. The latter groups do not spend much time conducting self analysis. He stressed that progress is being made.

Commissioner McEachran observed that over the years experiencing a different culture has grown from visiting an ethnic grocery store or Chinatown to talking about equity. Bellevue College is currently in talks to develop an equity plan. He stressed the need to engage faith communities in becoming more culturally sensitive and aware; a large part of the conversation should take place in those communities given that primarily white congregations are disappearing.

From the audience, Ms. Wallace said the Bellevue Public Library offers a number of programs that are focused on cultural competence. Mr. Henry said he has been very active in partnering with the library.

Mr. Henry said the members of a group called English Language Learners Alliance, most of whom are female spouses of high-tech workers, are not able to work and want to volunteer and be involved in the community. They are warm and welcoming and they want to help people, but they do suffer from some degree of isolationism. There are similar groups in existence in the area, most of which desire to meet Americans and learn more about the local culture.

Commissioner Villar commented that since the city is moving toward a time when Caucasians will not have a majority in Bellevue, it might be time to cease using the word "minorities." At the very least, it should be clearly defined. She called attention to page 6 of the report and the statement "Racial and ethnic diversity within Bellevue's minority population is to some extent less diverse with Asians accounting for over two-thirds of Bellevue's non-white population" She noted the section goes on to give the percentage splits within the Asian category. She said as an immigration attorney she was able to say with certainty that each of the individual cultures listed are different. She recommended either rewording the section or deleting it entirely.

Additionally, she pointed out that on page 8 the top language is listed as Chinese without indicating a specific Cantonese, Mandarin, or any other dialect.

Commissioner McEachran pointed out the need to include the South Bellevue Community Center listed on page 24 along with the North Bellevue Community Center and Highland Community Center.

Chair Perelman suggested the document should be carefully reviewed to make sure terms used are up to date. She also noted that reference is made in the document to specific organizations and suggested it would be better to make them more general.

Answering a question asked by Chair Perelman, Mr. Henry said the schedule calls for coming before the Council for adoption on December 8. He encouraged the Commissioners to feel free to email him with additional thoughts and suggestions.

7. OLD BUSINESS - None

8. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Leslie briefly reviewed with the Commission the items to be addressed in upcoming meetings.

Ms. Leslie reported that the city's charitable giving campaign involving employees is currently under way. She noted that employees and indeed the general public can choose to donate to the Human Services Fund along with a list of other charities. Contributions to the fund average about \$10,000 annually.

9. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS - None

10. ADJOURNMENT

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

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date