

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Date, 2025
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Gonzalez, Imfura, Phan, Rashid, Vice Chair White

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Asma Ahmed, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hiltz, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services; Patrick Babbitt, Sarah Phillips, Department of Community Development

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

POLICE LIAISON: Major Ellen Inman

GUEST SPEAKERS: Janine Meyers, Stacy Morrison, Brightspark; Enrica Hampton, Gaylene Vaden, Kindering; Kristi Murphy, Bellevue Boys & Girls Club;

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Chair Singh who presided.

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

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. December 2, 2024

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Imfura. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gonzalez and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi fascist cockroaches mafia bandits. Bellevue's mayor is absolutely idiotic. The city attorney is a pure criminal. The city manager is totally criminal. Noting that only one man was present on the commission and as staff in the room, it was stated that it was idiotic that there were no White persons or men. It was also noted that two cases have been opened with statements by two

policemen against the speaker. There have been no honest policemen in Bellevue for more than 30 years. The case is unique and it involves 18 tickets totaling \$3000. In court one pays only 15 percent of the ticket cost. The judges do not offer the same chance in Bellevue. What they have done is stupid and the next case will be heard in ten months, preventing running for election to City Council. Bellevue police are absolutely Gestapo. Mayor Robinson is a pure Nazi pig, totally sick. Seattle has a commission for hearing complaints but Bellevue does not.

4. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Major Inman shared that as of the end of the year overall crime was down in the city. There is a public-facing dashboard accessible through the City of Bellevue website that includes breakdowns per crime and per area. Crime in 2024 was down by well over 10 percent compared to 2023.

Vice Chair White reported having attended a Hopelink webinar where it was noted that the organization has nine program arms, specifically adult education, financial capabilities, employment, housing, family development, energy, financial assistance, food programs, and transportation. They also currently operate five food markets that are like regular grocery stores but without cost, and a mobile market, which is like a pop-up farmers market for their guests. They are looking for volunteers for their food markets, adult education, employment services, housing, and financial capabilities programs.

Chair Singh noted having visited and volunteered at the Renewal Food site. It was a good experience. A lot of people were served. Support for the program should be continued.

6. NEW BUSINESS

A. Election of Officers

A motion to open nominations for Chair was made by Vice Chair White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rashid and the motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chair White nominated Commissioner Phan.

Chair Singh nominated himself.

Commissioners Gonzalez, Imfura, Rashid and Chair Singh voted in favor of Chair Singh.

Commissioner Phan and Vice Chair White voted in favor of Commissioner Phan.

Chair Singh was re-elected to serve as Chair.

A motion to open nominations for Vice Chair was made by Commissioner White. The motion

was seconded by Commissioner Imfura and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Singh nominated Vice Chair White.

Vice Chair White nominated Commissioner Phan.

Commissioners Phan, Gonzalez, Imfura and Chair Singh voted in favor of Commissioner White.

Commissioner Rashid and Vice Chair White voted for Commissioner Phan.

Vice Chair White was elected Vice Chair.

B. 2026-2030 Sustainable Bellevue Environmental Stewardship Plan Update

Sarah Phillips, Program Manager for Energy Smart Eastside and a member of the Environmental Sustainability Team, noted being the manager of the program on behalf of six Eastside cities, including Bellevue. Pat Babbitt, Climate and Energy Program Manager, also commented on being a member of the Environmental Sustainability Team within the department of Community Development.

By way of background, Pat Babbitt explained that the Environmental Stewardship Plan is a five-year strategic or implementation plan. The current plan, which concludes at the end of 2025, was adopted in 2020. It has high-level targets or goals for 2030 and 2050. Within the goals, there are strategies and smaller actions. There are five focus areas: climate change, buildings and energy, mobility and land use, materials management, and natural systems. The plan includes both community-wide goals and actions, plus guidance for municipal operations.

The City Council initiated the process in late October. There are three phases to the update, lasting about a year. Phase One is under way and includes a major engagement period that will involve visiting with various boards and commissions, re-engaging stakeholders, and reaching out to the general public. Phase Two will begin in approximately February and will focus on developing strategies and actions. Phase Three, expected to begin in the third quarter of 2025, will involve the creation of a draft plan to forward to the City Council for adoption toward the end of the calendar year.

Pat Babbitt said the outreach process will aim to reach all community members through surveys, in-person or virtual meetings, and tabling events. There will also be targeted outreach to boards and commissions, and to underrepresented community members through partnering with community-based organizations like Bellevue Little Masters Club and Eastside for All.

The main target of the Environmental Stewardship Plan is to achieve a reduction in greenhouse gases emissions of 50 percent by 2030 as measured against the 2011 baseline. There was an eight percent reduction from 2011 to 2022, even though the population grew by 25 percent during that period.

There are a couple of goals that are more relevant to the Human Services Commission: proximity

of jobs and housing to transit, and energy usage. The city tracks both community-wide and municipal operations goals. The city is on track for renewable energy adoption citywide, though there is more work to do in terms of energy use reduction.

Overall, the city has made substantial progress, with 87 percent of the 78 actions either complete, ongoing, or significantly underway. Recent successes include a heat-and-smoke safety program that was piloted in the summer of 2024, and a climate vulnerability assessment that was completed in late 2023.

Pat Babbitt focused on the ways equity is brought into planning and implementation. It was noted that resources are leveraged and amplified in various ways, including through grants such as the recent Community Change grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It has been recognized that more resources will need to be brought in in order to expand services and value to community members. Various analytical tools are used, like the EPA's Environmental Justice Screen, and the policies are tailored to meet the needs of the community. One example is the partnership with the Bellevue School District to support vulnerable communities during extreme heat or smoke events. Another example is Energy Smart Eastside.

The Climate Vulnerability Assessment that was completed in 2023 looks at how climate impacts such as extreme heat, wildfire smoke, and flooding might affect different Bellevue neighborhoods differently. Consideration is given to demographics, health, socioeconomic factors, and more in determining how to best inform and address the impacts.

One way to operationalize climate resilience is the concept called Resilience Hubs. The approach involves high-performing buildings or community spaces that can serve everyday community needs while also providing critical services during emergencies such as extreme heat or smoke. Centro de la Raza in Seattle is a good example. Consideration is being given to how the city can support or invest in retrofitting valued community spaces facilities to serve the role.

Sarah Phillips explained that Energy Smart Eastside is a partnership among the cities of Bellevue, Issaquah, Kirkland, Redmond, Mercer Island, and Sammamish, all of which have similar climate goals. Each of the cities carefully monitor their greenhouse gases inventories and are familiar with the key causes. If nothing is done by 2050, there will be a lot of natural gas usage that will need to be addressed. About 25 percent of the greenhouse gases emissions are from residential energy use in the homes. Currently, 90 percent of single-family homes, and about nine percent of multifamily homes, use natural gas for heat and hot water. Heat pumps are a great technology to transition away from gas. They can reduce emissions by about 91 percent over the appliance life, plus they provide cooling and improved air filtration in summer. They are the most efficient space-heating technology.

In order to hit the 2050 goal, it will be necessary to transform the market in terms of how people heat and cool their homes. One goal would be to have 99 percent of residential HVAC systems be heat pumps by 2032. The thinking is that a furnace lasts for about 20 years, thus the last of the current furnaces will rotate out by 2050. Currently, 59 percent of households have a heat pump, which is up from previous years. The goal is a big lift that will need to be addressed by driving awareness in the community by offering tools and support such as energy coaching and

discounts, and by focusing on affordability.

Affordability is a huge element. The unfortunate truth is that a heat pump can cost up to three times more than a gas furnace. One approach would be to set up a program that provides a hundred percent cost coverage for households under 80 percent of area median income. By working with the local utility, the state, utilizing manufacturer rebates, and providing a city rebate, it is possible to get to about 50 percent cost coverage for more moderate income households defined as being under 150 percent of area median income. For all income levels, tools like outreach, community discounts, and workshops will need to be launched.

Sarah Phillips said one of the ways the program overlaps with human services work done by the city is through the low-income program called BOOST, which is conducted in partnership with Hopelink. Heat pumps are installed at zero cost for those under 80 percent of area median income, with priority given to seniors and those in areas with degraded air quality. Last year, about 100 installations were completed, 45 of them in Bellevue, in addition to a 25-unit affordable housing complex. Some participants have had no heat for years other than space heaters. The program has been life changing for them; it helps people stay safe and secure in their homes.

The methods used for connecting with the community include everything from tabling at farmers markets, running transit ads, using direct mailers, and running digital campaigns in English and Chinese. Governor Inslee and Representative DelBene were hosted at a heat pump install to see the program firsthand. All six cities have contributed municipal funds to the program and those totals have been greatly amplified through grants from Puget Sound Energy and the State Department of Commerce, much of which comes from the Climate Commitment Act.

Pat Babbitt reiterated that Phase One is focused on garnering community input in regard to the goals. Phase Two will focus on strategies and actions to advance those goals. The Commission will be provided with updates and be asked for input before drafting the plan for City Council adoption.

Chair Singh commented on the recent bomb cyclone during which many people were protected because their furnaces used natural gas, and that was lifesaving for them. People all over the country are still using gas, so the proposed approach represents a very big change. It only makes sense to use technology and innovation to ensure sustainability, but adapting will be a slow process. Sarah Phillips said the bomb cyclone is a good example of a real emergency. Resilience hubs would have been useful for charging phones and staying warm. The proposal does indeed represent a big change. Electricity is typically needed to run any furnace. One can use a small generator to supply enough electricity for the starter, so that a gas furnace can function. In the workshops, taking baby steps is discussed. For those living in areas where there are many trees, power outages are common. In those areas, hybrid heat pumps that use gas as a backup can reduce greenhouse gas emissions overall by running on heat pump mode for most of the time, switching to gas only during very cold temperatures. For those living in Seattle who might almost never lose power, a full heat pump might be ideal.

Chair Singh asked where the data came from and was told by Pat Babbitt that it comes from

various sources, primarily from Puget Sound Energy, since they are the city's gas and electricity utility. They group usage into industrial, commercial, and residential categories, and the data was used as the foundation. The analysis in regard to solid waste and wastewater relies on other inputs.

Chair Singh pointed out that during the Covid years of 2020 and 2021 there were fewer people were driving. What is needed is data from 2023 and 2024. Sarah Phillips agreed and said the 2023 inventory is almost ready for publication, after which it will be shared with the Commission.

With regard to where electricity is generated, Pat Babbitt shared with Chair Singh and the Commission that Puget Sound Energy has multiple sources, including dams near Snoqualmie Falls in King County and additional generation sites across the state and the Pacific Northwest. They also have natural gas operations. It can be complex given that the grid goes beyond Bellevue and extends to a regional exchange covering much of the western United States. It is a collective effort. Puget Sound Energy is operating under state policy and requirements to reduce natural gas use, and within their service area natural gas use is down. Electricity use is increasing and is expected to rise. Demand control will need to be pursued through things like energy efficiency.

Chair Singh pointed out that a recent story in the *Seattle Times* relayed the potential of removing Snake River dams, which adds to the conversation about costs and energy sources. A new heat pump can cost three thousand dollars or more, plus installation, and that is significant. Some argue in favor of nuclear as a future resource, and there is ongoing research into small nuclear plants, though concerns remain about safety and regulation.

Vice Chair White asked for some clarification in regard to the city's tree canopy goal and where things stand. Pat Babbitt said the City's environmental performance dashboard includes an overview of each sector, including natural systems and tree coverage. Bellevue's 2050 target for tree canopy is 40 percent. That target was reached in 2022, so a slightly more ambitious target may be warranted.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza asked if there has been any analysis done on the current state of each of the goals on the race, income basis and other demographic levels, and if targets could be set based on such an analysis. Pat Babbitt said there are no climate resiliency goals in the current plan. The goals under consideration remain only concepts and draft frameworks. The focus will be on thinking about specific impacts and who in the community is most impacted. That could be young children, seniors, pregnant people, low-income residents, those who live far from resources, or people with certain health or financial limitations. Consideration will be given to establishing goals with more precision, and that might include focusing on heat-related illnesses, or making sure certain populations have access to resilience measures by 2030, the five-year mark. It could also involve reducing heat-related illnesses or ensuring a certain level of access to resilience infrastructure.

Toni Esparza suggested a subtle shift might be going from focusing on who is vulnerable to who is harmed the most and re-centering the language around that, because labeling people as

vulnerable sometimes implies something about their personal state rather than the system causing the vulnerability. Many who are most in need of help are in that position due to the harms inflicted by larger structures. Pat Babbitt said the climate vulnerability assessment does consider vulnerability in terms of how the impacts or risks harm individuals, communities, or neighborhoods, geographically and demographically, along with the ability of a group to adapt. For instance, during extremely hot days, a person who already owns a heat pump has air conditioning and thus has adapted. Someone with no cooling system, like many people encountered in the heat and smoke safety pilot, has no option but to wait until the sun goes down and it cools a bit. If it is smoky as well, they face a tough choice: open the window or suffer from the heat. Those are the realities that need to be captured in the plan.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Phan, Pat Babbitt shared that according to the 2023 American Community Survey data, Bellevue's median household income is about \$158,000, so 80 percent of area median income would calculate out to an income of around \$126,000.

Pat Babbitt said the team has a few initial concepts for climate resilience goals addressing extreme heat, wildfire, wildfire smoke, flooding, and so on. There are many ways to measure what needs to be done and define success. One idea is to look at the extreme events already being experienced, including heat waves and wildfire smoke, and set targets for reducing injuries and deaths, or lowering heat-related illness rates by a certain percentage. A baseline would be needed which could be worked out with Public Health Seattle and King County and local hospitals. King County and Bellevue's own emergency management departments deliver emergency information and messaging; timely information is another metric, as is access to key infrastructure like resilience hubs.

Chair Singh raised the notion of advertising and encouraging carpooling to reduce gasoline consumption. Conserving resources is something seldom called for in the United States, and there might be a chance for more messaging about saving resources.

With regard to resilience hubs, Vice Chair White commented that at the moment Bellevue does not have any. Pat Babbitt said Bellevue has four community centers and the Bellevue Arts Center that can serve as emergency service sites in the event of a major earthquake or other natural disaster. There are plans in place and resources available to help people for up to two weeks. The overall idea of a resilience hub is to upgrade more locally valued spaces to withstand climate impacts and serve as welcoming community centers. People might be reluctant to visit a city site in an emergency but might trust a community-run center in their neighborhood. There are some elements in place, but the desire is to strengthen them so that people know they can seek help.

Pat Babbitt said one part of the plan is to ensure the city incorporates equity into all it does. The question asked was how Bellevue can keep equity at the center of the Environmental Stewardship Plan in order to serve underrepresented communities and share the benefits of climate and sustainability work with them.

Vice Chair White voiced support for proving people with options so that they will not be rushed into making decisions. Letting furnaces live out their lifespans is a huge help for planning, and

the hybrid model is ideal.

Commissioner Phan asked how the city is working with individuals who are not associated with organizations like Eastside for All and Hopelink, adding that it can be a challenge for the city to hold listening sessions given that the same participants tend to show up every time. A strategy is needed to make sure the people who truly need to be heard can participate in the discussions. Sarah Phillips said the city has been very fortunate in terms of its partnership with Hopelink. One thing Hopelink does is provide energy assistance. Hopelink is the provider for Puget Sound Energy, and they guide individuals in need of assistance in paying their power bill through the application process. That has allowed for reaching anyone who is energy-burdened, because they already have a preexisting relationship with Hopelink. There has been no trouble spending the funding available through the partnership. It is possible a boundary might be reached at some point beyond which not everyone is being reached. One strategy being looking at involves trying to recruit volunteers from the community to do the outreach, especially volunteers who reflect the diversity of the community. It will take people who are motivated about climate work to join the team and help spread the message. The city is open to any ideas on how to do that.

Pat Babbitt said the best the city can do is to rely on multiple methods and partnerships. The team is working with Eastside for All, the Little Masters Club, and others, and is also reaching out to the boards and commissions and is leaning on the diversity and broad representation among the stakeholder groups or through their partnerships to make connections in social networks that otherwise are not easily reached.

That is when I would love to circle back, over the next two phases of the plan process, and share a survey with you that you can complete with your own input and possibly forward to relatives or colleagues. We rely on a networked approach to reach further into Bellevue communities that we do not always hear from. Virtual activities can be convenient and accessible for some, though not everyone. For those caring for children or attending night classes, virtual meetings or online surveys might be easier. Some intercept activities are being planned that will involve going out to community-organized events instead, including big, all-encompassing gatherings where a diverse group of Bellevue residents will be present to provide information and to seek input.

C. Panel Conversation: Childcare Service Trends and Provider Challenges

Grant Coordinator Asma Ahmed stated that access to affordable quality child care is a major issue affecting families in Bellevue, as indicated in the 2023-2024 Human Services Needs Update. Childcare is essential for economic stability, workforce participation, and child development. However, many families in the community continue to face significant obstacles to finding culturally appropriate, affordable services that align with their schedules. From the needs assessment, key data points show that 38 percent of families who want affordable childcare have trouble locating it in Bellevue. Almost half of Bellevue residents speak a language other than English at home, and about 15.6 percent experience limited English proficiency. Many parents, especially immigrants or those on low incomes, rely on informal networks or leave the workforce entirely due to a lack of accessible childcare options. Even though the providers in the community are dedicated, they face funding shortages, staffing gaps, and limited physical space. It is clear that more investments, partnerships and inventive solutions are needed to close the

gaps and ensure all families have the childcare they require to succeed.

Janine Myers, one of the directors of Early Learning at BrightSpark Early Learning Services, noted serving in the role of overseeing and collaborating with the coaching teams, infant early childhood mental health consultants, infant and toddler specialists, and the professional development teams that work directly with childcare providers to help them access the training they need to strengthen their quality of care and build their own professional skills.

Stacy Morrison, department manager of coaching at BrightSpark Early Learning Services, formerly Child Care Resources, noted that while the name has changed the work remains the same. In addition to working with the coaches who work with providers and with suburban cities, support is provided to potential licensed providers or newly licensed providers.

Gaylene Vaden, director of grants at Kindering, thanked the city for funding three of the organization's 20 programs. Kindering is a nonprofit working with children who experience developmental delays or disabilities, plus those with adverse risk factors such as homelessness, recent immigrant or refugee status, and foster care. The organization is committed to equity, wanting every child to succeed regardless of background. Since 95 percent of brain growth occurs in the first five years of life, it is a critical time. Indeed, most children served no longer need special education by the time they age out at around three, underscoring the significance of early learning.

Enrica Hampton explained that the Childcare and Preschool Consultation Program provides on-site assistance in childcare settings. The program is focused on supporting and empowering those who are caring for children, from caregivers to early learning professionals, and also families. For example, a provider or a parent might have questions regarding a child's development or behavior and they can reach out to the consultation program for assistance. A variety of services are offered, including on-site observation of individual children and assessment of the overall environment in a classroom. Also offered are resource referrals that involve convening meetings with providers and families as a team, generating strategies to help a child succeed and connecting families with services, often walking them through the process. The program also offers professional development and training opportunities for providers. A key goal of the consultation work is to help children remain in the childcare program of the family's choice. Research shows, unfortunately, that Black preschool-age boys and children with disabilities have the highest expulsion rates, so diligent work is done to keep them in care. All kinds of caregivers are welcomed, from part-time to full-time, cooperative, licensed or license-exempt. No one is turned away, and the program is free of charge for families.

Christine Murphy, director of grant services for the Boys and Girls Club of Bellevue, said the organization offers enrichment programming after school, during the summer, and on days when school is out for all children ages five through nineteen years old. The enrichment programming centers on workforce development, social-emotional learning, homework help, and mentoring for all of the youth, along with athletics. When the school district removed middle school athletics several years ago, the Boys and Girls Club stepped in and became the largest provider in the community offering athletics. The organization serves 16,000 youth each year. There are about 20,000 youth in the Bellevue School District. There are 3,800 youth registered in the after-

school programs. About half of them receive scholarships to make the program affordable for their families. Some pay as little as ten percent of the cost, some pay nothing, particularly if they live in King County public housing. There are 18 clubhouses in Bellevue; three are located on King County public housing properties, and ten are at after-school locations. There is also one athletic facility downtown along with a downtown clubhouse, and one in a community center. Since 2019 the organization has awarded about \$900,000 in scholarships to families. By 2024, that total will be \$2.5 million and it continues to increase, evidence of the need in Bellevue. Over 66 percent of the youth identify as a person of color.

Asma Ahmed asked the panelists about the biggest misconceptions or overlooked realities regarding childcare access and availability in Bellevue.

Kristi Murphy said one misperception is that many people who live in Bellevue do not realize there is a high need among lower-income households. People on the west side of Bellevue might not go over to the Lake Hills and Crossroads areas and do not see that there is a significant need. Even some of the board members did not understand or notice it until they joined the organization and saw the data. They did not realize the amount of poverty there is in the city. There are 19 King County Housing Authority properties in Bellevue alone, clear evidence of need.

Janine Meyers said families are struggling to find providers that do not have wait lists, especially if they prefer child care centers, multiple children in different age groups, and child care for school-aged children. Parents report not being able to find on-site care and places that will accept subsidy payments. The cost of care in Bellevue is also a major issue. Infant care in Bellevue can run anywhere from \$2500 to \$3000 per month. Many parents have jobs and are making decent wages, but not quite enough to be able to afford child care, or just too much over the threshold to qualify for subsidies. Transportation is also a barrier for families seeking child care.

Stacy Morrison called attention to the fact that there are language barriers faced by providers. Translation services and interpreters are used, however, it is a misconception that such services are easily available when they are needed.

Enrica Hampton pointed out that there is a tendency to overlook the challenges faced by families with children that have developmental delays, disabilities or special healthcare needs.

Asma Ahmed asked what the most pressing child care needs are in Bellevue and what barriers stand in the way for families and providers alike.

Enrica Hampton said the three top pressing needs are requests for more professional development and support to meet the needs of children who are engaged in behaviors that providers find challenging to manage in terms of supporting the social/emotional needs of children in care along with their associated sensory and self-regulation needs; requests for support when families are encountering delays in the system that are primarily driven by a lack of capacity in the healthcare system; and families experiencing difficulties in finding providers that accept child care subsidies.

Enrica Hampton shared about having been contacted by a director who described having staff under considerable stress due to several children in the program displaying behaviors that their teachers found very challenging. It reached a point where staff were leaving work in tears, and one did not return for a period of time. When children have challenging behaviors, it causes not only distress for the provider, but also presents a significant risk that a child might be asked to leave the program. There is the possibility of losing providers, which means the loss of a service and the possible need to close an entire classroom, reducing access to childcare.

Gaylene Vaden referred to a study done by James Heckman that shows for every dollar put into early learning programs there is a 13 percent return. Accordingly, such expenditures are actually investments. The CCPCR consulting program helps identify children with disabilities and delays and gets them into services, after which most of them do not require special education later on. The Kinderling center alone saves the Eastside \$59 million per year in special education costs. The investments yield returns and cost savings. While funding often goes toward human services that address mental health, substance abuse, or homelessness, other services, such as early childhood programs, are equally important because they help prevent some of those issues in the future. Research over many decades has shown that children receiving high-quality early learning have stronger outcomes in terms of school readiness, higher educational achievement, higher lifetime earnings, better health outcomes, reduced criminal involvement, and higher earnings for the parents as well. Investing in early learning can mitigate some of the problems seen in the community.

Kristi Murphy said the pressing concern faced by the Boys & Girls Club organization and its partners is capacity. With more capacity, however, comes the need to hire more staff. Given the strict safety requirements, each staff member can only manage a certain number of children. The Department of Community and Human Services wants the organization to have most of the sites be licensed, which further restricts group sizes, thus requiring more staff. It is challenging to pay staff competitive wages while still making care affordable for families. Transportation is also a major gap. The Bellevue School District is understaffed with bus drivers, and they have reduced services. The Boys & Girls Club organization does not have enough vans to pick up all the children, limiting the overall capacity. Quality care costs money. In order to have staff members who can mentor the children and help them become future leaders, it is necessary to match regional wage standards. Seattle recently raised its minimum wage to \$20.75 per hour, a level that is hard for nonprofits to match. About 80 percent of the organization's revenues go directly into services. Recruiting quality staff at a living wage is extremely difficult. It can be easier for someone to take a different job that pays more for less responsibility. Some find living in Bellevue too expensive, so they move to Seattle where they can find work with higher wages.

Janine Meyers allowed that each of the organizations face similar experiences and challenges. The barriers seen most frequently by Brightspark relate to the availability and accessibility of care. It is expensive to open and maintain a program, whether at a home or in a center. When one accepts subsidies to serve more children, the margins become even tighter. Additionally, extended hours or shift work care is increasingly in demand, and that is very difficult to provide. Most care in Bellevue is Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. or 6:30 p.m., but more options are needed. That is another aspect of the broader health care workforce shortage. Shift workers need reliable childcare at different times.

Stacy Morrison agreed with the previous statements in regard to the cost of staffing and what it takes to maintain staff. Brightspark receives many calls from providers trying to hire staff, but when the pay is insufficient, it makes it tough to keep employees. That is a serious obstacle in the overall childcare community in Bellevue.

Asma Ahmed asked about the most significant challenges being faced by the agencies in regard to expanding or sustaining childcare services, and how the city we support them.

Janine Meyers said expanding and sustaining services involves finding subsidies and making them more accessible to more families. Also needed is more family, friend, and neighbor care resources to generate more opportunities and offer extended hours. Unfortunately it comes down to dollars, funding to support children, families, and providers in an expensive region where quality definitely matters.

Stacy Morrison said another challenge is ensuring immigrants and refugees can find providers who speak the same language to provide the same care and warmth. Parents want their child to be in a place that feels comfortable. Subsidies often play a part, especially where providers do not accept them. Quality care should be available to everyone, not only those who can afford it. The agency has tried offering customized training at a reduced rate, sometimes focusing on a single topic for a program's staff.

Answering a question asked by Ruth Blaw, Stacy Morrison said Brightspark operates a statewide call center. Parents who call and provide the zip code for their desired location are given a list of all the providers in that area who accept subsidies. If they do not already have a subsidy, the agency shares information about subsidies, including Best Starts for Kids subsidies, BrightSpark subsidies, or Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) subsidies. The staff work to find providers willing to accept those subsidy programs. For families lacking funds or who are unsure about the process, they are provided with help in navigating the system. The subsidy money goes to the provider, but the parents are assisted in getting matched with the right resources, all for no charge.

Enrica Hampton thanked the city for its past support but stressed that funding continues to be the primary concern. The Childcare and Preschool Consultation Program serves a larger area than Bellevue alone and the current funding levels do not cover the total program costs. Consultation is offered free to the families and providers where possible to avoid any barriers. However, Kinderling struggles with financial sustainability, complicated by the high demand for services and the limited staff.

Gaylene Vaden said Kinderling would love to offer more professional development but lacks the staff capacity to do so. Some training is provided currently, but the demand is huge, and more staff is needed to meet it, and hiring additional staff is not feasible with the current funding. Kinderling would love to partner with the to spread the word about the agency's services, and the City could help host some provider training.

Kristi Murphy agreed that funding is the biggest challenge. Absent funding, the Boys & Girls

Club cannot expand to serve more children. The organization would love to be at every single after-school site from elementary to middle school and high school, but there is limited funding for that and limited space in those schools because the school districts have had to close several schools due to funding issues and decreased enrollment.

Chair Singh thanked the panelists for all they are doing in the community and agreed that people do not always grasp the need in Bellevue. There are many families that need support.

Commissioner Gonzalez also thanked the panelists for all they do in the city, and commented that her grandson, who is eight, did not qualify daycare because he was in school. There are others in the same situation who need someone to speak up for them.

Ellen Inman pointed out that her daughter attended the Boys and Girls Club after-school care program in South Bellevue throughout elementary school and it was a wonderful experience.

Commissioner Gonzalez said all four of her children went to Boys and Girls Club.

Toni Esparza asked for comments on how the needs of children in care have changed over the past few years, noting that many children were socially isolated due to recent circumstances. The panelists were asked to comment on how it has all influenced the training providers need, and how it shows up in the actual child care offered.

Gaylen Vaden said 81 percent of the pre-pandemic kids who came to Kinderling for evaluations were found to be in need of support services. That number has risen to 89 percent. There is ample data showing that the children are struggling.

Janine Meyers also voiced having seen a great increase in need post-pandemic. The number one request for professional development is behavior guidance, because many children missed out on social opportunities. That has also increased the need for mental health consultation, and there has been a tremendous rise in requests for mental health consultant services. Brightspark has been fortunate in being able to add ten more positions, bringing to 12 the total number of mental health consultants. That, however, still only allows for covering about five percent of the need.

Enrica Hampton said as of 2020, Kinderling launched a mental health initiative within the organization. A behavioral health specialist was brought in to support all of the after-school program site staff who are dealing with children who are struggling with social-emotional skill-building. With funding from the city, an additional contracted MSW staff could be hired to support children in school who are also Boys and Girls Club members at Clyde Hill Elementary. There is a significant need there in terms of children with behavioral and mental health challenges. The RISE program at Highland serves students who are too anxious to attend school regularly. The MSW meets with them at least once a week for about fifteen one-hour sessions, then decides whether another intervention is necessary, referring them if so. All of the staff have been trained through the PAX Institute, which focuses on group management for children with social-emotional challenges. A lot of the youth are anxious about meeting high expectations and the program provides strategies to help them decompress after school.

Ruth Blaw asked if there have been any successful efforts to bring more people into the profession.

Kristi Murphy said mental health is a huge issue and recently several funders have expressed a particular interest in mental health. The Boys & Girls Club has applied for government grants related to mental health, but it is limited because of Bellevue's image. It is necessary to clearly present the data to show the need. Many family foundations have shifted to supporting mental health over academics, though some support both.

Ruth Blaw asked about successes in bringing people into the child care field.

Stacy Morrison said Brightspark works with the Bellevue licensing office and frequently receives calls seeking help in getting providers get started. The agency guides them from the start until they become licensed. There are indeed providers hoping to enter the field, and the agency has worked with many family childcare businesses that want to transition to a child care center model. Some people have left the business for financial or retirement reasons, or due to staffing shortages, but there are others who are trying to enter the field.

Vice Chair White thanked the panelists for their work in the community and for being able to share information with the Commission before asking if low-barrier funding would help. The panelists all indicated that having less restrictions in regard to what funds can be used for would be helpful.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Singh adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.