

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

March 21, 2023
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Singh, Commissioners Amirfaiz Halsted, Jain, Piper, White

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Mansfield

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Leslie Miller, Saada Hilts, Andrew Ndayambaje, Department of Parks and Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis

POLICE LIAISON: Major Mark Tarantino

GUEST SPEAKERS:

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Mansfield.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. March 7, 2023

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Mike Hatada with Hopelink stated that their application is intended to support Bellevue residents in a different way. The traditional approach to hunger response nationwide and at the state level is archaic in the sense that assumptions have been made that have lasted for decades in terms of how food is distributed. Hopelink emphasizes choice, given that people come from different cultural backgrounds and have different needs and preferences. That certainly is true in Bellevue and Hopelink wants to give people choices

that apply to their cultures rather than just having the staples. In 2022 the food bank served more than 15,000 unique individuals from Bellevue who were food insecure.

Sharmila Rathinam with Eat Happy, an organization run solely by BIPOC women that launched in October 2022 stated their mission is to recover food from restaurants and mom and pop stores and give it to people who are food insecure in King County, many of whom are in Bellevue. Technology in the form of an application is used; the donated food is picked up within an hour. The program has grown rapidly and has recovered more than 11,500 pounds of food. All of the workers are volunteers.

Sunita Shastri, also with Eat Happy, noted having joined the organization after serving as a member of the board for Sophia Way and Hopelink. Food insecurity is real in the community. The greatest need many non-profits have is around food. The large food recovery companies are not tapping into the market for fresh foods from restaurants and small stores. The organization serves non-profit shelters and food banks in the Bellevue area.

Travis Thompson with Bellevue LifeSpring said the proven program uses Safeway vouchers. The numbers are ugly with more than one in five students in the Bellevue School District on the free and reduced lunch program, totaling 3942 students, 452 of which are also experiencing homelessness. The program provides the students with vouchers during school breaks when they do not receive the food they normally would be getting at school. The program provides dignity for the families by allowing the families to do their own shopping and to buy the foods appropriate for them. The city has funded the program in recent years. The program annually spends upwards of \$1.1 million on the food program alone. Since March 2020, more than \$3.2 million has been spent, and it all goes right into the hands of the students and families. Some 82 percent of the recipients are people of color, and 50 percent are from homes where English is not the primary language spoken.

Irene Muller with Essentials First, an organization founded in 2017 and based in Bellevue since then, has the goal of empowering dignity daily and strengthen community wellness by providing equitable access to vital personal and household hygiene products. The hygiene kits are customized as much as possible through the distribution center to meet family and individual needs and cultural backgrounds. Bellevue clients represent the largest segment of the walk-in clients that come to the Bellevue office. More than 2000 kits were provided to 300 distinct households in 2022. For 2023, the number of clients from Bellevue is expected to increase. A pantry accessible 24/7 will be added to the walk-in location during the year. The goal is to prioritize increasing access for everyone; increasing awareness of the existing gap in services around essential hygiene products given that there is no state or national infrastructure in place to provide the products, and increasing awareness of the resource.

Alex Tsimerman said there is a problem with the schools but having been barred from speaking to the school board, the issues were shared with the Commission and previously with the City Council. The Council says it has nothing to do with the schools, yet five

Councilmembers are members of the school board. Mercer Island has a forum for people who go for elections, as does Redmond and Kirkland. Bellevue does not. Bellevue's approach is to elect people who serve for 10, 20 or 30 years and the Commission should do something about it.

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis reported that the Council held a retreat on March 17 at the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS – None

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS

A. Creating a Culture of Equity for the Commission's Work – Part IV

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland said it is clear from the 2021 Needs Update that basic needs, food insecurity and child care are significant needs in the community. Covid impacts have decreased for some, but for a number of low-income community residents their pre-pandemic safety nets were eliminated as the households had to use the resources to meet basic needs. Many households are continuing to work to overcome obstacles encountered during the pandemic. Affordable quality child care is critical so families can work and provide for their families. Early education has a direct impact on the future success of children, but many struggle to find accessible and affordable child care. Many providers accept only a few, or no families, using Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) subsidies from DSHS because of the low reimbursement rates. As of June 2021, 51 percent of the East King County child care centers, family child care homes and after-school programs accepted WCCC subsidies, a decrease from 61 percent in June 2019. Only one application aimed at the funding area was received. That is not a reflection of a decrease in the need, rather it reflects a lack of capacity by providers.

The \$1.4 million in requests for funding food insecurity highlights the significant need in the community. Several requests were focused on specific dietary and related cultural needs. The zip code area 98007 has a significantly higher rate of residents receiving basic food benefits. That also happens to be Bellevue's most racially diverse area with more than half of the residents identifying a Black, Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native and/or Hispanic/Latino. A statewide study aimed at the impacts of Covid found that respondents of color were more than 1.5 times more likely to be food insecure as white respondents. That is why in the staff framework a higher percentage of funding was prioritized for Indian American Community Services, and why a recommendation was included to use child care funds to fully fund the Indian American Community Services application, and to fund Eat Happy with the balance of child care funds.

Basic needs in the application were defined as services that provide equitable access to essential supplies for the survival and wellbeing of low- or moderate-income households facing the economic fallout from the pandemic. The staff framework prioritizes programs requesting to provide additional basic needs supplies, including baby and hygiene items.

Commissioner Halsted asked if the amount allocated to each area is preset. Human Services Manager Leslie Miller said they were preset based on the amount of funding requested but not fully funded with 2023-2024 dollars.

Commissioner Piper noted that the only organization checked in the BIPOC column was Indian American Community Services. Leslie Miller explained the column is specific to BIPOC By and For. Other organizations were created by people of color, but they were not created to specifically serve culture-specific and language-specific populations.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Commission Discussion of ARPA Applicants (Session 2 of 3)

Leslie Miller called attention to the staff framework matrix and pointed out that two organizations, Hopelink and Bellevue LifeSpring, each submitted two applications in the categories of food insecurity and fostering wellbeing. The proposal of the staff was to move the applications from fostering wellbeing to food insecurity given that the focus of each application is on food. In its Human Services Fund application, Bellevue LifeSpring had requested \$180,000 and received \$100,000; Hopelink requested more than \$200,000 and received just over \$130,000.

Boys & Girls Clubs of Bellevue – Project LEARN

Commissioner Amirfaiz supported fully funding the application. Commissioners Halsted, Jain, Piper and White agreed, as did Vice Chair Singh.

There was agreement among the Commissioners with the recommendation to move the two applications from Fostering Well Being to Food Insecurity.

Hopelink – Bellevue Market Wellness

Commissioner Piper recommended the staff framework amount of \$30,000. The other Commissioners and Vice Chair Singh concurred.

The Commission next addressed the applications not proposed to be funded by the staff framework.

AmPowering – Feed the Need

Leslie Miller said several factors led staff to recommend not funding the agency, including the fact that over 30 percent of their budget was spent on fundraising. There also was a

concern regarding not having received all of the documentation from the agency.

Commissioner White commented that the answers given to questions 18 and 19 were weak.

Commissioner Halsted agreed with the staff recommendation except possibly the Eat Happy application. It appears the agency has a good program on the ground.

Commissioner Piper recommended funding AmPowering based on the number of Bellevue residents served. Indian American Community Services could be funded with the staff-recommended \$50,000, leaving the balance for AmPowering. The side recommendation of staff to use the unspent child care dollars totaling \$30,000 for Eat Happy should be approved.

Commissioner Jain noted the agency's feed the need program feeds 2500 people, and the agency projects feeding even more next year. The application should be funded at some level. The program is focused on DEI and serves refugees.

Commissioner Amirfaiz noted the budget in the application lists \$60,000 for equipment and asked what that is for. Human Services Planner Saada Hilts said that was one question that went unanswered.

Leslie Miller pointed out that the agency provided the exact same demographics for its homelessness request as for the food request, leaving the staff unclear as to the exact numbers for the distinct programs.

Commissioner Amirfaiz agreed with the staff recommendation not to fund the application.

Commissioner Jain proposed funding at 15 percent of the ask. Leslie Miller pointed out that the minimum is \$30,000.

Commissioner Piper agreed with funding at \$30,000, the amount sought for direct aid.

Commissioner White concurred with the staff recommendation, as did Commissioner Halsted and Vice Chair Singh.

Bellevue Boys & Girls Club of Bellevue – Wholesome Meals and Snacks for Kids

Vice Chair Singh and all the other Commissioners agreed with the staff recommendation.

Eat Happy – Food Recovery Funds

Commissioner White highlighted the line item in the application listing \$3000 for postage and shipping as something curious.

Commissioner Jain voiced support for the program and recommended the staff

recommendation of \$30,000.

Leslie Miller said the agency is seeking funding from Bellevue for the first time. Where staff has asked questions, the agency has been immediate with its responses.

Commissioner Jain asked if the numbers relative to food supplies and residents served are verified to be accurate. Leslie Miller said agencies are always asked to submit their previous year numbers relative to services rendered and clients served. Future projections are always a bit of a guess. Staff expects the numbers in terms of the number of people served to be accurate. As agencies invoice the city for contract payments, they must submit actual numbers in regard to services offered.

Commissioner Halsted agreed with the staff recommendation, but also noted that a significant portion of the ask is for salaries.

Commissioner Piper agreed with the staff recommendation but wanted to see the application flagged for additional funding if there is money available.

Commissioner White agreed with the \$30,000 recommendation.

Commissioner Amirfaiz expressed a willingness to fund the application at \$40,000.

Vice Chair Singh agreed with the staff recommendation and also agreed to flag the application for additional funding if available.

Imagine Housing – Food Security Program

Commissioners Piper and White agreed with the staff recommendation.

Commissioner Amirfaiz noted from reading the application that the program includes bringing food to their housing residents, a valuable service. Commissioner Amirfaiz recommended \$25,000. Leslie Miller reiterated that \$30,000 is the minimum. Commissioner Amirfaiz proposed funding at \$30,000 for the application.

Vice Chair Singh agreed.

Commissioner Halsted asked what is meant by “limited eligibility” as stated in the application. Leslie Miller said the program is solely for Imagine Housing residents. The net is cast much wider for programs like the one offered by Hopelink in which anyone making four times the federal poverty wage is eligible. For Bellevue LifeSpring access is through the schools for those on the free and reduced lunch program. The staff framework favored those programs open to more of the community. Commissioner Halsted agreed with the staff recommendation.

Commissioner Jain recommended funding at \$30,000 before noting that according to the application the number of residents served exactly matches the previous year, even though

the agency is projecting a significant increase. Leslie Miller said the projection is predicated on receiving the requested funding. There clearly is a need.

Backpack Meals for Kids – Preschool Snack Pack

Vice Chair Singh and all the other Commissioners agreed with the staff framework.

The Commission turned to a review of the applications proposed to be funded by the staff framework.

Hopelink – Bellevue Market Wellness

Leslie Miller explained that the Bellevue LifeSpring program seeks additional funding for the Safeway vouchers, while the Hopelink application that was moved from Fostering Wellbeing seeks to purchase gift cards from small BIPOC or immigrant grocery stores and also buy some produce from BIPOC farmers.

Commissioner White asked if the gift cards are for food only. Leslie Miller said the program is new and the Commission could elect to discuss with the agency the policy around how the cards can be used.

Vice Chair Singh and the Commissioners all agreed with the staff framework.

Hopelink – Bellevue Market Food

Leslie Miller acknowledged the interest in supporting on-site programs and programs that have not been funded previously. The Commissioners were invited to address whether or not adjustments should be made to the Hopelink Market Food and LifeSpring Food Assistance for Children programs.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Halsted, Leslie Miller noted that three of the programs asked for food funding in the Bellevue Human Services Fund application process. The Backpack Meals for Kids program was fully funded by that allocation. The Hopelink Market Food and LifeSpring Food Assistance for Children applications were both partially funded. The staff framework essentially outlines the amounts not funded by the Human Services Fund process.

There was consensus in favor of the staff framework.

Bellevue LifeSpring – Food Assistance for Children

Vice Chair Singh and all the Commissioners agreed with the staff framework. Commissioner Amirfaiz added that if funding is available, the application should be funded at the \$89,000 level.

Bellevue LifeSpring – Food Assistance for Children (moved from Fostering Well

Being)

There was consensus in favor of the staff recommendation.

Indian American Community Services – Services for Food Assistance

By way of clarification, Leslie Miller said the staff recommendation was to add an additional \$50,000 of unused child care dollars to bring the allocation up to the application's full ask. The program serves a specific community.

Commissioner Halsted agreed with the staff recommendation to include the additional \$50,000. Commissioner Jain agreed.

Commissioner Piper voiced concerns about including the additional \$50,000, beginning with the fact that the number of residents served is quite small at 150. The recommendation made was to go with the \$60,000 in the staff framework and use the \$50,000 from unused child care dollars to bring up other applications, including Imagine Housing and Eat Happy. Commissioner Amirfaiz concurred, as did Vice Chair Singh.

Commissioner White agreed with the \$60,000 and proposed revisiting the application if there is money left to allocate.

Leslie Miller said there is \$137,000 of unspent child care dollars. The Commission previously expressed an interest in using some of the dollars to expand funding for civil legal aid, leaving just over \$80,000.

With regard to the AmPowering application, Commissioner Jain commented that if the staff had concerns about not getting answers to questions, and where documentation was not provided, that should be taken into account.

Commissioner Piper agreed and offered support for the staff framework.

Leslie Miller added that the funds to be allocated are federal dollars. It is a big ask to expect an agency that has not previously asked for funding to get quickly up to speed on all the federal requirements. The agency will be encouraged to consider making application for 2025-2026 funding.

Leslie Miller stated that after allocating an additional \$30,000 to Eat Happy, there was still \$65,000 from unused child care funds left.

Vice Chair Singh proposed giving \$30,000 of that amount to AmPowering and the balance to Indian American Community Services.

Commissioner Piper proposed giving an additional \$20,000 to Eat Happy, \$30,000 to Imagine Housing, and \$15,000 to LifeSpring. There was consensus to go in that direction.

Turning to the Basic Needs category, Leslie Miller noted that Essential First is a grassroots organization and Hopelink is a large well-established organization. Both offer programs that serve the low-income community. KidVantage is a program that supplies basic needs supplies to other agencies, which complete the actual deliveries. The total funds available in the category were simply divided equally for the staff framework.

Essentials First – First Community Kits

The Commissioners all agreed with the staff recommendation.

Commissioner Jain recommended considering increased funding for the application if there are additional funds. The program specifically serves refugees and low-income residents where there is a growing need. Commissioner Halsted concurred.

Hopelink – Bellevue Basic Needs

There was consensus in favor of the staff framework.

KidVantage

The Commissioners all agreed with the staff framework.

Boys & Girls Club of Bellevue – Providing Essentials for Children

Commissioner Jain asked why staff did not recommend funding for the program. Leslie Miller explained that the intent is to set up a new program, and much of the ask was for staff costs. The focus of the staff framework is on getting the most basic needs supplies into the community.

Commissioner Jain voiced some concern with the \$30,000 minimum, commenting that having a lower threshold could allow for spreading the available funding more widely. Leslie Miller pointed out that the Human Services Fund allocation process has a minimum allocation of \$5000 per year. The contracts for the funds under consideration run for 19 months and there is a considerable investment on the part of the agencies to administer federal dollars.

Commissioner Jain asked if in fact some agencies may allocate their entire funding amount in less than 19 months. Leslie Miller agreed, especially given the urgency relative to food and basic needs. Each agency will utilize different strategies.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza pointed out that the city gets audited for all federal dollars accepted. There is a much higher documentation standard that must be met. In making allocation recommendations, the staff must make sure the city will not have to end up reimbursing the federal government should the proper documentation not be provided.

There was consensus in favor of the staff framework for the application.

Imagine Housing – Basic Needs Program

The Commissioners voiced support for the staff framework.

Crisis Connections – Supporting Bellevue Residents Through King County 211

There was agreement in favor of the staff framework.

Catholic Community Services – Volunteer Services

The Commission elected to go with the staff framework.

Commissioner Piper asked for clarification about the RFP referring to supplies not services. Leslie Miller explained that the program links volunteers with clients in need of help with chores and transportation. The program is funded through the Human Services Fund.

Commissioner Jain observed that there are multiple applications from some applications and asked how to prioritize the individual programs. Leslie Miller said the focus is on the needs as well as on the ability of the agencies to get services delivered to the community. Also taken into consideration is whether a program serves the community broadly or just the clientele of the specific agency.

B. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely

Commissioner White stated a need to be excused from both the April 4 and April 18 meetings.

Commissioner Piper noted the need to be excused from the April 18 meeting.

No Commissioners requested permission for remote participation.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Khizer Shariff with Essentials First commented that for 42,000 households in King County, and for over two million Washington state residents, hygiene items such as soap, shampoo and laundry detergent are luxuries they cannot afford. Just like food insecurity, hygiene insecurity disproportionately impacts low-income families, people of color and the unhoused. Unlike food insecurity, which is addressed by several federal and state programs, there are no programs for hygiene insecurity. People cannot use SNAP dollars to purchase feminine hygiene items, dish soap and shampoo. Essentials First is the only organization that is systematically and holistically trying to address the issue. The program is based in Bellevue and most of the clients are Bellevue residents. The agency works closely with the Bellevue School District which says that some girls do not want to go to

school because they lack feminine hygiene products, and boys get bullied because they come to school not smelling good. The Commission was asked to consider granting funding for the application.

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Piper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner White and the motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chair Singh adjourned the meeting at 7:44 p.m.