

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

February 2, 2026
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Phan, Commissioners Hays, Gonzalez, Singh
COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Perelman
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Rashid
STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hilts, Andrew Ndayambaje, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services
COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present
POLICE LIAISON: Not Present
GUEST SPEAKERS: None
RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Phan who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Perelman, who joined online at 6:06 p.m., and Commissioner Rashid.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 5, 2026

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Vice Chair Hays. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Singh and the motion carried unanimously.

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Chair Phan provided a report from the most recent City Council meeting which included participation from Commission representatives and staff. The meeting traditionally occurs before the funding cycle begins and serves as an opportunity for the Commission to submit its recommendations. The Council was generally supportive of the Commission's recommendations

and expressed no substantive objections to the overall funding allocations. However, questions were raised regarding the slight reduction in the behavioral health funding category from 18.21 percent to 18 percent. It was clarified for the Council that the Commission had prioritized three critical areas: housing, shelter, and food and financial assistance. With housing and shelter set at 35 percent, minor adjustments in other areas was required. The Council acknowledged that the decreases were relatively small in comparison to significant federal funding reductions faced by many organizations.

Continuing, Chair Phan said a Councilmember asked about the contingency plan which limits funding fluctuations to no more than two percent if application patterns differ from the projections. A Councilmember inquired about increasing the flexibility to five percent, but the Council ultimately did not vote on the change, though it did indicate a need for additional information from staff. The two-percent limit remains in effect, though the possibility of revisiting the issue in the future was noted. Despite the questions raised, the Council fully agreed with the Commission's funding recommendations.

Chair Phan said a Councilmember raised an issue with regard to the term "culturally and linguistically specific services" and suggested changing it to something broader in scope that refers to organizations serving historically marginalized communities. The importance of maintaining language that reflects the intent of the Human Needs Update Assessment, and which preserves a targeted safety net for culturally and linguistically specific programs, was emphasized. The Council ultimately tabled the issue and directed staff to return with alternative language at a subsequent meeting. It was clarified that any language change would not disrupt the approved funding framework or the Commission's strategic plan.

Commissioner Perelman sought clarification regarding the previously referenced five-percent contingency proposal. It was stated by Chair Phan that the suggestion was made by a Councilmembers to increase the current two percent to five percent. The Council approved the Commission's overall recommendations but deferred any language change to the contingency threshold to its next meeting.

Vice Chair Hays commented that during the discussion regarding use of the term "culturally and linguistically specific services" staff cautioned against broadening the category too far, voiding the purpose of the category. The question asked was if it would be appropriate for the Commission to make a motion indicating its preference for language that honors the intent and spirit of the original language regarding culturally and linguistically specific services.

Chair Phan added that the language in question was a direct ask from the Human Services Needs Update; it is specifically what the community had asked for.

A motion to direct staff to add the Commission's preference for language in the report to the Council that maintains the spirit of the "culturally and linguistically specific services" category.

Commissioner Singh asked what language was preferred by the Council and Chair Phan said the Council language was "historically marginalized communities."

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw said the Council has asked staff to come to the next Council meeting with some alternative language to “culturally and linguistically specific services.”

The motion on the floor was seconded by Commissioner Singh.

Commissioner Perelman asked what language the staff would take back to the Council. Ruth Blaw said there was a meeting earlier in the day to prepare for the next Council meeting. The proposed definition that came out of that meeting was “culturally and linguistically specific programs and services that are designed for a particular linguistic or cultural community to meet the diverse and evolving needs of Bellevue’s communities, and delivered through approaches that are shaped by the culture, language and lived experiences of those receiving the services.”

Vice Chair Hays clarified that the motion on the table was not to stick with the original language per se but rather to retain the original intent of the language which focuses on a sector that delivers direct services in ways that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the community. Broadening the language too much might void the intent of targeting specific organizations and their culturally and linguistically relevant programs.

Vice Chair Hays recalled that the Councilmember wanted the category to align more with the Diversity Advantage Plan. Ruth Blaw agreed that was one suggestion made but allowed not knowing that suggestion was still being considered as a possibility.

Chair Phan clarified that the motion under consideration was to direct staff to report to the City Council that the Commission supports maintaining the spirit of the original language in the human services recommendations.

Commissioner Perelman said absent knowing what alternative language to be considered, it seems odd to vote on the motion on the table. Commissioner Singh agreed.

Vice Chair Hays reiterated that the motion on the table was to give staff direction to add to their report to the Council the Commission’s stance on the language that will be discussed. It is unfortunate that the issue will be decided before the Commission has another opportunity to gather and further discuss. The language of the motion only directs the staff to inform the Council of the Commission’s preference for the language of the category.

Commissioner Singh indicated a desire to hear the Council’s thinking and as such would not vote on the motion recommending any specific language.

The motion carried 5-2, with Commissioners Singh and Perelman voting no.

Ruth Blaw said Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza will be consulted in regard to how to represent the Commission’s position during the upcoming City Council meeting. The Commissioners were encouraged to attend the Council session scheduled for February 10 at 6:00 p.m.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Ruth Blaw reported that there is a vacancy on the Commission due to the resignation of Commissioner White. Councilmember Robinson is set to continue in the role of liaison to the Commission and as such will work to fill the vacancy.

Ruth Blaw announced that Big Picture School, a Bellevue School District middle high school, is conducting classes that have included learning about the Human Services Needs Update. The students are preparing short advocacy presentations on community needs and potential agency funding priorities. The presentations are scheduled for March 9 from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The Commissioners were reminded that attendance by more than four members would constitute a quorum and require the gathering to be designated as a special meeting. The participating students are primarily in seventh and eighth grade.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Monitoring of City-Funded Human Services Agencies

Human Services Planner Saada Hilts described the preliminary document review process, including examination of agency policies such as whistleblower protections, conflicts of interest, internal controls, record retention, non-discrimination, grievance procedures, and audits. Through role playing, staff demonstrated going through a monitoring visit with a focus on program performance, successful outcomes, challenges related to rising operational costs, staffing gaps, limited funding streams, and increasing service demand. Timely reporting, achieving the contracted service units, and communicating challenges in narrative reports was highlighted. The role-play addressed collaboration between jurisdictions, and it was noted that shared monitoring efforts among neighboring cities are intended to reduce the administrative burden on the agencies. The discussion covered data verification practices, including the use of a regional homeless management information system to track client intake, residency, income verification, and service participation.

Vice Chair Hays asked how many monitoring visits are conducted annually for a single organization. Saada Hilts explained that all funded agencies are subject to monitoring which involves comprehensive on-site compliance reviews conducted every other year. Lighter check-in visits are conducted during the alternating years and the Commissioners were invited to participate in on-site visits during the lighter monitoring years to gain firsthand exposure to agency operations.

Chair Phan shared having had positive experiences from participating in site visits. The staff are always collaborative and supportive in their interactions with agencies. The question asked was what procedures are followed when required documentation is incomplete. Andrew Ndayambaje answered that agencies are given advance notice of site visits, which gives them the time to

gather and submit. Where there are missing materials, additional time is typically given to allow for gathering the documents. Saada Hilts added that the monitoring visits give staff the opportunity to provide technical assistance. It was emphasized that the staff document all follow-up actions and work collaboratively with agencies to address any gaps in compliance.

Commissioner Singh underscored the importance of accountability, noting that monitoring ensures responsible stewardship of taxpayer funds and the equitable distribution of limited resources. In response, Saada Hilts described the layered accountability framework that includes contract requirements, reimbursement-based payment models, quarterly or monthly reporting, and submission of supporting financial documentation prior to payment. Monitoring visits are not full financial audits but rather are focused on verifying compliance with the funded program requirements and ensuring that expenditures align with the approved scopes of work. Service units and cost structures are negotiated at the outset of contracts and tracked throughout the year, and most agencies consistently meet their contractual goals.

Vice Chair Hays asked how frequently nonprofit organizations seek logistical or operational assistance from the city, and what challenges are most commonly reported. Andrew Ndayambaje said agencies consistently cite funding uncertainty as a primary concern, along with rising staffing costs that make employee retention difficult, resulting in service delivery gaps. Additional operational pressures include increased facility maintenance costs, broader operational expenses, and the effects of recent federal funding reductions. Saada Hilts added that agencies often request assistance with reporting requirements, particularly when staff turnover disrupts institutional knowledge and reporting capacity, which leads agencies to rely on city staff for ongoing technical training and support. Andrew Ndayambaje emphasized the high cost of office and community space in Bellevue poses a significant barrier to service expansion, limiting the ability of agencies to secure affordable locations for operations and community engagement.

Andrew Ndayambaje said the monitoring process is designed to be transparent and supportive rather than punitive. Monitoring includes both pre-visit technical assistance and on-site reviews conducted in partnership with other cities to reduce the administrative burden. The monitoring process begins with advance notification to agencies and the distribution of document checklists several weeks prior to visits. Site visits typically last between one and three hours, depending on the number of programs operated by an agency, and they focus on performance review, policy compliance, and the provision of support. Following each visit, staff prepares a summary letter outlining the findings, required actions, and closure of the monitoring process.

Saada Hilts outlined the primary criteria considered during monitoring visits, which includes determining whether agencies are serving Bellevue residents: whether clients meet the low- to moderate-income eligibility requirements; whether service unit costs are reasonable: the level of support agencies require from city staff; and whether agencies maintain adequate systems for accurate data collection and reporting. During the most recent monitoring cycle, 70 agencies delivering more than 130 programs were reviewed.

Andrew Ndayambaje said the key themes identified across agencies includes growing community needs combined with limited funding rising staffing and operational costs that threaten program sustainability: a lack of affordable office and community space; increased fear

among immigrant and refugee communities affecting service access; housing instability; shelter capacity constraints; and heightened demand for basic needs assistance. Saada Hilts added that many service providers share the same vulnerabilities as the populations they serve, particularly within immigrant and refugee communities, and that intensifies the impact of the challenges on both staff and clients.

Ruth Blaw explained how the monitoring findings are communicated internally and used to inform broader organizational awareness and policy considerations. The themes identified through the monitoring visits are shared with management and are subsequently brought forward to the Commission. The Commissioners were encouraged to participate in site visits in 2026, which will be a year for soft-touch visits focused on facility tours and relationship-building.

B. Review of 2027-2028 Funding Cycle

Ruth Blaw reminded the Commissioners that the previous funding cycle received over 150 applications. A similar or greater volume is expected going forward. The Commissioners will be asked to decide if they would prefer to review printed applications in physical binders, or through an online system.

Ruth Blaw announced that the teen after-school and the convening funding request RFPs opened earlier in the day and will close at the end of February. The funds, totaling \$86,000 per year for teen programming and \$200,000 per year for two years for convening activities, will be reviewed by the Commission, and recommendations will be forwarded to the Parks Department in early April. The allocation of the funds, whether as single awards or divided among multiple applicants, will be determined by the Commission.

With regard to the timeline for the main funding cycle, Ruth Blaw said the request for proposals will open in early March and close in early April. Once the application period closed, all of the cities that use the same application will spend about a week downloading them and distributing them to the appropriate cities. Funders workshops will be held in early March to assist prospective applicants. The Commissioners will be charged with reading through all of the applications. The Commissioners will be divided into group targeting specific focus areas. The staff will read through the applications and create a summary for each, and once completed they will be provided to the Commission. A public hearing is scheduled for May 4 and a number of agencies are members of the public are expected to attend and speak. Special meetings will be held on May 18, June 1 and June 15 in which the Commissioners will work in groups to conduct in-depth reviews and develop funding recommendations. Those meetings will not be recorded. Each group will include a staff member. On July 6 and July 20 the Commission will meet to publicly deliberate. Each group will present their findings and recommendations to the full Commission. Those meetings may run long due to an expected high level of public participation and discussion. The Commission's deliberations will continue in September if necessary.

Ruth Blaw explained that once the Commission recommendations are finalized, staff will begin preparing scopes of work with the funded agencies in advance of final approval in November. That will allow the contracts to be ready for implementation by the start of the new budget year in January.

Vice Chair Hays asked what pressures and challenges might be faced by agencies who have not previously prepared grant proposals. Ruth Blaw highlighted the upcoming funders workshops scheduled for March, both of which will be held virtually.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland said the workshops will provide detailed guidance on the application requirements, outcome measures, service units, and the overall structure of the funding process. The workshops are a valuable opportunity for Commissioners to observe the application framework from the perspective of nonprofit applicants. There are also resources available online through the regional application portal, including training materials and submission tools.

Vice Chair Hays asked if there is opportunity for organizations to seek direct assistance during the application period to address things like language barriers or technical challenges. Saada Hilts said there are staff who will be essentially on call while the application is live to technical assistance, to answer questions, and to provide ongoing support from the initial application phase through contract negotiation and the subsequent reporting requirements. Ruth Blaw added that the applications are available and accepted in any language, which ensures accessibility for a broad range of organizations.

Several commissioners expressed interest in receiving the applications in printed format, while others indicated a preference for a combination of digital and physical formats. Ruth Blaw agreed to revisit the decision once the total number of applications is known, noting that the volume will determine the size and number of binders required.

Commissioner Perelman raised a concern about the Commission extending the deliberations into September given that that would delay staff in developing the scopes of work. Ruth Blaw clarified that the schedule as outlined starts significantly earlier than in previous years. Even if deliberations extend into September, there will be sufficient time to prepare the scopes of work prior to the new budget cycle.

Vice Chair Hays requested a comparison between the current funding process and prior cycles. Ruth Blaw explained that in earlier years, the Commission's specific funding recommendations and contract amounts for individual agencies were forwarded to the City Council for review and potential modification. Under the new approach, the Commission establishes percentage allocations by service area, which the Council approves. The detailed agency-level allocations are finalized by the Commission and incorporated into the overall city budget as a consolidated funding amount. The change aligns the human services process more closely with the practices of other municipalities.

Prior to adjourning, Chair Phan reminded the Commissioners that the city will observe Presidents Day on February 16. Accordingly, the next meeting of the Commission has been moved to February 23.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Phan adjourned the meeting at 7:22 p.m.