

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

October 21, 2024
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Singh

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Donna Adair, Asma Ahmed, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hiltz, Andrew Ndayambaje, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Zahn

POLICE LIAISON: Major Ellen Inman

GUEST SPEAKERS: Veronica Rojas-Valdez, Coordinated Care Agency King County; Nasir Mohammad, International Red Cross; Marhta Lucas, WSCACL; Gabriela Lopez, RPUMC

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m. by Vice Chair White who presided.

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Singh.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

September 9, 2024

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

3. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Ikira Sharma, Youth Link board member, extended an invitation for the Commissioners to attend the annual Youth Link Gumbo Night event on October 23 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Crossroads Community Center. The event has been put on by Youth Link for the past 25 years, providing an opportunity for Youth Link members to dialog with elected and community leaders about important topics affecting the city's youth.

Tina Morales, Latin Youth and Family support specialist, a substance use counsellor, and program manager for community-based programs for Youth Eastside Services, said the agency is committed to providing vital behavioral health programs and services to children and youth from birth to age 22 and their families. Clients are met where they are by removing barriers to services through the agency-based counseling programs, school-based services, and community-based programs. Culturally and linguistically appropriate services are offered with intakes, assessments and ongoing counseling available in multiple languages. The needs of youth and families for mental health and substance use treatments continue to increase, and the agency remains steadfast in its commitment to meet the demand regardless of the ability of clients to pay. The open access walk-in hours have been expanded to provide same-day services three days per week. The menu of services has been broadened to provide a wide range of group programs and evidence-based therapy options. The trauma-informed approaches integrate diversity, equity and belonging practices, ensuring the provision of a combination of drop-in services and long-term behavioral health treatment for young people in crisis. Creating welcoming, safe and belonging spaces in community centers and schools develops trust and rapport with youth and families and allows young people from BIPOC communities to engage with needed services. YES also builds systems to support young people in giving voice to their issues. The ongoing support from the city of Bellevue is appreciated.

Vice Chair White welcomed new ex-officio member of the Commission Major Ellen Inman.

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

Councilmember Zahn reported that since the Commission's previous meeting the Council issued a Welcome Week proclamation, as well as a proclamation highlighting Domestic Violence Action Month. A proclamation will be issued on October 22 regarding Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Councilmember Zahn noted that the recruitment period for the empty Commission seat has closed and a new appointment will be made soon.

The Council recently entertained a presentation on the Great Neighborhoods program. The next two neighborhoods to be addressed are Crossroads and Newport.

The Council will on October 22 receive a presentation on human services as part of its budget deliberations. The Council will be continuing the Safe Parking program, which to date has helped 31 families with 72 children. Twelve families have already transitioned into stable housing. The city manager was successful in providing some additional one-time funding for human services, with two-thirds of the \$2.5 million focused on youth programs and one-third on the ARPA gap.

There are also additional funds for community engagement in recognition that more tools for reaching the community are needed.

Councilmember Zahn said the public hearing on the budget is set for November 12, and the adoption date for the budget has tentatively been set for November 19.

5. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioners reported on activities attended in lieu of a second meeting.

Commissioner Gonzalez noted not having been able to attend any activities.

Commissioner Phan reported having two activities scheduled for next week.

Commissioner Rashid indicated having not attended any activities.

Commissioner Imfura noted having attended with Human Services Planner Saada Hilts an activity the previous week involving behavioral health to children and youth.

Vice Chair White reported having visited Catholic Community Services with Saada Hilts on September 23 to learn about their programs.

6. OLD BUSINESS – None

7. NEW BUSINESS

A. Public Hearing: 2025-2029 CDBG Consolidated Plan and 2025 Action Plan

Community Development Block Grant Administrator/Housing Repair Specialist Donna Adair explained that the Consolidated Plan is updated every five years. It outlines the overarching priorities and goals for the Human Services Division, and how the city will spend its entitlement funds. The Annual Action Plan spells out the specific projects that will carry out the priorities and the goals of the Consolidated Plan. The Annual Action Plan is revised annually.

A 30-day public comment period was open for the draft Consolidated Plan September 16 to October 17. Following the public hearing and action by the Commission to approve the Consolidated Plan and the Annual Action Plan, both will be submitted to HUD for approval. Notification of the city's 2025 entitlement funds can happen any time between February and July.

A motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner Rashid. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Phan and the motion carried unanimously.

Tina Morales noted having already provided comment earlier in the meeting.

Absent additional persons wanting to address the Commission hearing, a motion to close the public hearing was made Commissioner Imfura. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Phan and the motion carried unanimously.

Donna Adair reiterated that the five-year Consolidated Plan outlines the goals and priorities for the next five years. It also includes funding recommendations for 2025, which is part of the Annual Action Plan. The Commission was asked to approve the draft Consolidated Plan.

A motion to approve the 2025-2029 CDBG Consolidated Plan was made by Commissioner Rashid. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Imfura and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Panel Conversation: Trends and Challenges with Services to Asylum Seekers

Human Services Planner Andrew Ndayambaje shared with the Commission a video regarding the journey of a refugee and asylum seeker then went on to highlight terms society often uses interchangeably to mean the same thing even though they mean different things. By definition, according to the United Nations, an asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and who is seeking protection from prosecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who has not yet been legally recognized as a refugee and who is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. A refugee is a person who was forced to flee due to conflicts or persecution in their home country and who crosses an international border to see safety. “Migrant” does not have an international definition, but it is commonly understood as those who move from one country to another voluntarily, and who can return to their home countries without fear of risking their lives or freedoms.

Continuing, Andrew Ndayambaje said according to the American Immigration Council, asylum is a protection granted to foreign nationals already in the United States or arriving at the border who meet the international law definition of a refugee. The United States has legal obligations to provide protections for those who qualify as refugees. To be eligible to apply for asylum, one must be in the United States, having crossed a border from any entry port, and must be able to demonstrate a past and present fear of persecution in their home country. Persecution can be defined as due to race, religious beliefs, nationality, membership in a social group being targeted or persecuted, or personally held political opinions.

Asylum seekers have up to one year to apply for asylum once arriving in the United States. Once an immigration officer receives an application for asylum, they have 150 days to receive a work permit, and 180 days in which to present their case before an asylum officer, though many applicants wait much longer.

Amnesty International emphasizes that seeking asylum is a human right, which means that no one should be denied entry when seeking asylum. According to UNHCR, by the end of 2023, 5.4 million asylum seekers had pending cases, with a third of them in the United States. That number grew to 6.1 million by mid-2023.

Nassir Mohammad with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) stated that the organization has been active in Washington for nearly 50 years, supporting displaced populations, including refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers, and recently Ukrainian parolees. IRC’s work spans five key areas: youth and education, safety and protection, economic well-being, and welcoming individuals into their new communities. The IRC is one of five organizations in Washington working with the federal government to resettle refugees and assisting asylum seekers.

Gabriela Lopez, noted working for the Department of Health and with KCP, and also as a member of the legal team at Riverton Park United Methodist Church which has been in the news relative to the pastor opening the church's doors to asylum seekers. The legal team assists in filing asylum claims.

Martha Lucas, Executive Director of the Washington State Coalition of African Community Leaders, pointed out that many of the founding members of the organizations are based in Bellevue, including the Rwandan Community of Washington, the Zanzibar Community, and the Malawi Seattle Association. The coalition now has over 170 members, including nonprofits, businesses, and organizations led by the African diaspora. The focus is on advocacy and services for migrants and asylum seekers. Through the partnerships, regional data is gathered on asylum seekers from local communities.

Veronica Rojas-Valdez with Catholic Community Services stated that in 2024 the organization restructured its shelters and day centers under what is now called the Coordinated Care Agency. As Division Director, the panelist noted having the responsibility of overseeing the family shelters, the day centers, and the housing programs, including veteran housing. The shelters welcome families, assist them with placement, and connect them with resources. The organization collaborates with case managers to ensure families access the necessary services and maintain compliance with funding requirements.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked the panelists to comment regarding common misconceptions about asylum seekers.

Veronica Rohas-Valdez said one of the biggest misconceptions is that asylum seekers lack skills and as such cannot contribute to the community. While some may not speak fluent English, they are eager to learn and integrate. It is important to meet them where they are, rather than rushing them through processes for the sake of paperwork. Another misconception is that asylum seekers drain local resources. The reality is that accessing those resources is often difficult. Many applications are rejected due to incomplete sections, making it necessary to start over with the families to get it right. Patience is needed to navigate the system with clients.

Martha Lucas said the two primary misconceptions are first, that some people believe asylum seekers do not contribute financially, even though they do through taxes and by purchasing goods and services, something that holds true even before they gain legal status. Second there is a belief that asylum seekers do not want to work. In truth, most are incredibly resilient, evident by the fact that they have endured long, dangerous journeys, and they are eager to work once given the opportunity. One clear challenge is the lack of understanding between the terms refugee and asylum seeker. Many people assume asylum seekers can do certain things that they actually cannot. The lengthy wait times for their cases, often years, make it even harder for them to access the help they need to navigate the legal process.

Gabriela Lopez noted having observed a general lack of awareness as to why asylum seekers are here. Many asylum seekers flee their home countries to escape violence and trauma. They were people working in their communities, providing for their families, when something unimaginable

happened, forcing them to leave everything behind to seek safety. Asylum seekers are not asking for handouts; they want to work and contribute, but they face many legal barriers, starting with a system they do not understand, often in a language they do not speak. They are often handed documents that even those fluent in English struggle to read and understand. They face rejection by parts of society that simply do not understand their struggles. The desire of the Commission to learn and understand is very important. If asylum seekers can be offered support and assistance in opening the doors that currently block them, they will thrive. They just want to work and care for their families like everyone else.

Nasir Mohammad added that there is so much human suffering in the world currently. Everything done to alleviate that suffering, whether on an individual or collective level, is truly meaningful. Misconceptions start with definitions that often serve to categorize people. Many, including politicians, often repeat terms like "migrants" without understanding the specific reasons people are fleeing their homes. They unfortunately tend to lump everyone under one label, which makes it easy to overlook the distinct challenges that asylum seekers face. There are also misconceptions around thinking that seeking asylum is a straightforward process, which it is not. Some people at the IRC have been waiting for asylum for 10 years, not being able to see their families all that time.

As a refugee, Nasir Mohammad noted having asked his daughter, who is also a refugee, what is missed the most from the home country. The answer given was, "The weekends and afternoons, when I'd visit my grandparents." That small, ordinary joy has been lost. Such losses deeply affect children and vulnerable individuals. The biggest misconception is that seeking asylum is easy. It is not, and it takes years. The process is filled with challenges.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked the panelists to comment, based on their experiences in working with the asylum seeking community, what the most significant human services needs and barriers are that asylum seekers face.

Nasir Mohammad said one of the biggest challenges across the United States is housing; it is particularly difficult for asylum seekers. Refugees with legal status can start working right away, but asylum seekers face many barriers, such as the need to have a rental history, a credit score, and a letter from an organization promising six months of rent. But even then, funding does not always cover the full six months. In Washington, especially King County, affordable housing is increasingly rare. Many properties that used to be affordable are no longer available. A local major affordable housing provider recently announced they will be raising rents by 20 percent. In some cases, commercial properties are now more affordable than so-called affordable housing intended for refugees and asylum seekers.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked what needs to happen to address these challenges? Nasir Mohammad said first of all asylum seekers need to be seen as individuals with holistic needs, not just numbers or cases to manage. It is a complex issue, and addressing it will require several things, beginning with dignity: asylum seekers deserve to be treated with respect. Second is the need for sustainable funding, long-term solutions, not just stopgaps. Third is shared responsibility and collaboration between the federal and state governments instead of passing the burden on to small nonprofits. Too often the federal government assumes it is a state issue, and the state

pushes it back to the federal level. In the end, it is the small organizations that are left scrambling to provide support. Also needed is fairness in the system. The current asylum process is outdated: the Refugee Act dates back to 1980. It is now 2024, and it is time for reforms that reflect modern realities. The issues are complex and they cannot be solved in just one conversation.

Gabriela Lopez said needs being discussed are not unknown to the Commission. There have been many discussions about shelter, food, basic health services, transportation, and enrolling children in schools. A wide range of services is needed. On the legal side, seeking asylum is a complicated and time-sensitive process. One critical thing to emphasize is that people have only one year from the time they enter the United States to apply for asylum. Unfortunately, most asylum seekers are not aware of the time limit. They arrive in the United States and are assigned to immigration courts across the country. A person may enter through Seattle but be assigned a court hearing in Kentucky or New York. Many cannot afford to travel to attend their hearings, which complicates their cases. One key challenge is that asylum seekers need an address to receive court correspondence. Without stable housing, they lack a fixed address, making it difficult to receive crucial case updates. Something as seemingly small as not having a mailing address can have huge implications because if they miss court notifications, they risk missing important hearings.

Continuing, Gabriela Lopez said the process of filing an asylum application is itself challenging. It is a 12-page document in English, and most applicants do not speak English. Even interpreters often must ask lawyers to clarify questions on the form. Using Google Translate helps, but it is not enough for such a complex form. Staff at Riverton Park try to help by providing versions of the application in Spanish, French, Lingala, and Portuguese so applicants can understand the questions in their native language. Once completed, the forms are translated into English and are then reviewed with volunteer lawyers in asylum clinics. Each family member needs a separate application, even infants. A family of five means five applications, including one for a baby. A major barrier is the lack of legal support. Organizations are overwhelmed and there are not enough lawyers to help. Riverton Park staff can assist with the applications, but cannot provide legal representation in court. Lawyers who provide assistance are volunteers and they usually do not have the capacity to accompany applicants to court. Being in court can be intimidating, especially where the proceedings take place in a language the client does not speak. Most asylum seekers cannot afford the \$10,000 or more needed to hire an immigration lawyer, leaving them at a significant disadvantage.

Martha Lucas said shelter is a big need, but what is missing is culturally appropriate case management. There is not enough outreach or support for community members who understand their own communities. For example, leaders from the Angolan community in Washington are not always supported or trained to assist asylum seekers effectively. With the bottlenecks in the system, asylum seekers often turn to scammers who charge \$600 for applications. Such exploitation adds to their anxiety. They are already one of the most vulnerable groups, and a lack of clear, timely information worsens their situation, leading to denials and unnecessary issues. There is a need to invest in building infrastructure for case management, systems that connect agencies and prevent fragmentation. The Healthier Here advisory group works to create service

hubs, similar to what the IRC is doing. These hubs help agencies coordinate care and refer clients across services more effectively. There is a clear need to focus on collaboration, not competition between agencies. Currently, the fragmented nature of services means asylum seekers do not always receive what they need.

Veronica Rojas-Valdez it is difficult for agencies to know when to pass the baton and who to pass it to. Shelter and food can be provided, but even providing food is not as simple as it sounds. Cultural differences matter in making sure the right types of food are available. Funding is needed to provide appropriate meals for the families. Beyond that, there is a need to educate both volunteers and residents about cultural differences. The children in the shelters are incredibly resilient, but they face their own struggles. Some sit in school quietly, unable to understand the lessons. Before they can even be enrolled in school, it is necessary to determine their grade level, but that requires documentation that is often missing. When volunteers help the children with schoolwork, it is not just about making sure they read, it is also about ensuring that they can read and understand the words rather than just memorizing words. Case managers work hard, but they have limited time to dive deeply into both the parents' needs, like getting documentation to apply for jobs, and the children's education. Parents are encouraged to attend ESL classes, and the agency uses its van to drive them to classes at Lake Washington or Bellevue Community College. Connecting families with resources is crucial, but it takes coordination.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked the panelists to share the specific challenges their agencies are facing, and how the Commission can better prepare to support the asylum community.

Nasir Mohammad said one of the biggest challenges is limited funding. Non-profits are often given \$5,000 and expected to accomplish what would realistically require \$100,000. Nonprofit workers barely earn more than minimum wage, which makes it tough to retain staff. There are also challenges with coordination between agencies. Often, federal and state governments pass responsibilities back and forth, leaving small nonprofits to fill the gaps. The IRC has partnered with the Department of Human and Social Services to implement the Washington State Migrant and Asylum Seekers Support Project, which is a generous public investment to help asylum seekers across the state. The IRC serves as the reception and navigation hub for the project, providing both virtual and in-person services throughout Washington state, not just in King or Pierce counties. The program is built on a hub-and-spoke model, with the IRC at the center, referring asylum seekers to partners offering housing, legal, and case management services. The IRC is heavily invested in data, creating a statewide asylum seeker database to track where people are and what services they need. The approach will improve coordination and the provision of the support needed by the individuals.

Gabriela Lopez said there is a need for resources, including financial resources. Space is also a need. Riverton is always looking for places to support asylum seekers. No city has stepped up offering space so it has been necessary to rely on churches and other organizations that have opened their doors. Organizations volunteer to provide childcare while services are provided, along with snacks and water. Some even provide printers, though most do not, and a lot of printing is needed. The bottom line is that resources and awareness are needed. Asylum seekers are part of the community; they are neighbors and their success is tied to the success of the whole community.

Martha Lucas noted having a heart in nonprofits but a mind in business. It is to recognize that while program funding is essential, administrative support is also needed. If funds are not allocated to cover administrative costs, the programs cannot be run effectively. A million dollars can be poured into a program, but without the resources to manage it well, the same challenges will be faced again next year. Collaboration needs to be incentivized. Organizations need to be encouraged to work to their strengths. Funders are starting to lean towards requiring collaboration, and that is a good thing. If required to attend meetings regarding coordination, the organizations will show up. There is a need to learn how to collaborate effectively. In Bellevue, there is a need to build partnerships and work across organizations. There would be benefit from having retired nonprofit leaders coming in to share their experiences about how they successfully raised millions and built sustainable models. Too often, organizations are thrown into the mix without any clear guidance for how to make it work. Sustainability is key. Agencies should not just burn out trying to serve others. They must take care of their own needs, their staff, and their partnerships to create long-term solutions.

Veronica Rojas-Valdez highlighted the need for more staff. Currently there are only six full-time staff members running a 24/7 shelter, and two of them will be leaving soon. Staffing always feels like a losing battle; just as staff are trained, they leave. They have built trust with the parents and children at the shelter, and when they leave the process has to start all over again. The volunteers and donors do not always understand how hard it is to maintain staffing. Some staff members are themselves struggling and come asking for support because their families are in crisis. Beyond that is the housing issue. Every time a housing unit becomes available, some 45 families stand ready to apply. There is just not enough housing to go around. Even when housing is available, the paperwork becomes a barrier. If the documentation is not submitted on time, families lose their chance and the housing goes to the next person on the list.

The floor was opened to questions from the Commissioners.

Vice Chair White thanked the panelists for participating and sharing their insights. The points made about collaboration were on target. Coordination is certainly something that needs to be worked to pool resources and communicate better so that agencies can work together rather than in silos.

Commissioner Phan also thanked the panelists for sharing their perspectives. What stood out was the need for transparency in funding conversations. Such conversations rarely happen publicly, but they need to. Also appreciated was the emphasis on coalitions over competition.

Commissioner Phan asked how the organizations incorporate culturally and linguistically relevant programs, and if there are navigators or specific programs in place to meet the needs.

Nasir Mohammad said IRC is a client-centered organization. It ensures that all information is provided in the client's preferred language. In 2023, the IRC resettled 887 individuals from 26 different countries, speaking 26 different languages. Most were from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, along with Ukrainians and Moldovans. For asylum seekers, the IRC follows the same approach. Many of the staff members are multilingual, but they also use language services for

remote interpretation, whether by phone or video. It takes about 30 seconds to connect with an interpreter, and from there, staff can have real-time conversations with clients in their native language. IRC has been using the services since the pandemic, and they have become integral across all programs. Additionally, the agency trains staff in trauma-informed care to ensure they interact with clients with compassion and understanding. The staff receive specific training tailored to the needs of different populations, such as asylum seekers, survivors of trafficking, or refugees from conflict zones.

Gabriela Lopez said the cultural aspect is crucial; it is the foundation for building trust. Asylum seekers often carry deep trauma, and being able to communicate in their language makes a huge difference. They need to tell their stories as part of the asylum process, which can be incredibly difficult. Having someone who shares their language and culture allows them to feel understood and safe. Riverton has built its capacity gradually. Pastor Jan opened the doors to asylum seekers without waiting for permission, not just as a pilot but as a fighter. The team now works in four languages. Most of the people worked with come from Latin America and being able to speak with them in their language helps them feel comfortable and supported. It takes time and compassion to make them feel safe enough to share their stories.

Martha Lucas said one core service of the coalition is the provision of audio and video translation. The interpreters and outreach specialists are the bridge to their communities and they know how to reach people effectively. The specialists do not just provide translation; they offer multiple services because they understand what their communities need. More importantly, they know how to provide those services in a way that resonates culturally.

Veronica Rojas-Valdez noted feeling lucky to have a small pool of go-to individuals, whether they be volunteers, other organizations, or just community members, who provide connections to resources. The language lines and translation services are also vitally important. Some of the staff members are multilingual. The staff walk families through the processes, but sometimes language barriers do slow things down. It is important for families to know that the staff will not give up supporting them in reaching their goals. Care must be taken when children offer to interpret because there are sometimes topics where it is just not appropriate to use a child as an interpreter.

C. Overview of King County Crisis Care Centers Levy

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza reminded the Commissioners that behavioral health needs include behavioral health and substance use disorders. The recent Needs Update showed that Bellevue's demographics are changing, and that services need to be culturally relevant. Across human service needs, and particularly in behavioral health, there is a disproportionate impact by race and language when it comes to accessing services. People need more knowledge about available resources, and providers are facing growing challenges relative to the cost of living, the availability of housing, and the general availability of services. Behavioral health stood out, however, as one of the top three areas facing a shortage of services. There are increasing needs across the board affecting youth, adults, families, and individuals. Behavioral health issues are not tied to any one population. For

example, among youth, diverse identities report higher levels of bullying, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts.

Toni Esparza said the Crisis Care Centers Initiative, which was approved through a levy in 2023, will run for nine years. It is focused on three priorities: a countywide network of crisis care centers; stabilization of mental health residential treatment, ensuring sustainable funding; and support for the behavioral health workforce, including addressing staffing challenges.

A crisis care center functions like a healthcare facility. Just as one might visit an urgent care center or an emergency room for physical health issues, crisis care centers provide similar tiers of care for behavioral health needs. Each facility will offer three levels of care: behavioral health urgent care for quick, same-day needs like medication refills; 23-hour observation units for individuals who need more intensive support and 13-day crisis stabilization units for those requiring longer-term care.

The Connections Center in Kirkland, though not officially part of the county's initiative, operates on a similar model offering behavioral health urgent care, observation units, and stabilization beds. Bellevue residents are already benefiting from the services through partnerships with first responders. The County plans to open five crisis care centers, one each in the north, south, east, and central regions, plus a youth-focused facility that could be located anywhere. The Kirkland facility is not counted as part of the effort, though it could apply to be one of the facilities.

The County released a Request for Proposals in September, inviting providers to apply to operate the centers. Providers can specify the region they want to serve and whether they are applying to run a youth facility or one of the regional centers. However, the county does not expect to fill all five spots right away. The hope is that three centers will initially be launched in the first round. Additional funding rounds may be needed to complete all five. Some providers, like the Kirkland facility, might already be operational and could apply to become part of the initiative. Others might need to secure a building before opening. Cities in each zone will also be asked to provide letters of support for providers applying in their areas.

Toni Esparza said Bellevue staff will continue to monitor the county-led initiative as it develops.

Commissioner Phan voiced the assumption that all of the centers will serve youth, but asked what age range the youth-specific center will serve. Toni Esparza said all the centers will offer urgent care services to youth. However, not all of them will have 23-hour observation units or 13-day stabilization beds available for youth. The designated youth center will cover ages four to 17. Acting independently of the initiative, Seattle Children's Hospital just opened its first psychiatric urgent care for children, the only such facility on the entire West Coast offering behavioral health urgent care for youth. It is a great example of providers identifying gaps and stepping in to address them.

Vice Chair White asked if someone under the age of 18 can check themselves in without a parent or guardian. Toni Esparza voiced the understanding that youth age 12 or 13 can seek out certain healthcare services on their own, including behavioral health services in Washington state. There are also other specific forms of healthcare that minors can access independently.

Police Liaison Ellen Inman confirmed that the age is 13.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair White adjourned the meeting at 7:54 p.m.