

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION  
MINUTES

February 7, 2023  
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Piper, Commissioners Halsted, Jain, Mansfield, Singh, White

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Amirfaiz

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Leslie Miller, Donna Adair, Asma Ahmed, Saada Hiltz, Andrew Ndayambaje, Department of Parks and Community Services

POLICE LIAISON: Major Mark Tarantino

GUEST SPEAKERS: Nicolas Quijano, Bianca Siegl, Dr. Linda Whitehead, Justin Chan, Sara Boyle, City Manager’s Office

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Vice Chair Amirfaiz.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 4, 2023

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Alex Tsimerman said that parking for the homeless is a joke and crime has gone through the roof as Sound Transit brings light rail to Bellevue, and Amazon increases staff. Bellevue is a big city with rich people and that means crime. Bellevue needs a police commissioner like Seattle and San Francisco. Councilmembers are elected and serve 20 or 30 years and they are idiots. The Commissioners come to meetings and eat government food paid for with the public’s money and then they do nothing.

5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Manager Leslie Miller informed the Commissioners that an RFP was put out for \$3.1 million in ARPA funding for critical need areas, including child care, behavioral health, homelessness and basic needs. There will be applications for the Commission to review in March and April. Agencies will be meeting with staff ahead of time to assist them in understanding the federal guidelines.

Youth Link's gumbo night at Crossroads Community Center is planned for the evening of February 15 starting at 5:00 p.m. The event serves as an opportunity for the Youth Link members to meet with community leaders, elected officials, and the members of boards and commissions.

Black History Month is celebrated in Bellevue during February. Living Voices, the Right to Dream will be in Council chambers from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on February 15.

## 7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

### A. Safe Parking Program for Homelessness Response

Homelessness Outreach Program Manager Nico Quijano said one of the key hallmarks of the program has been its development by the community and not just city staff. A concerted effort has been put into getting feedback from the community. There have been conversations with other safe parking providers, both locally and nationally. There are community members who are concerned for one reason or another; many have observed people sleeping in their vehicles and have asked the city to do something about it. There have been discussions with the owners of properties that neighbor the areas where safe parking will be hosted; with non-profits that might end up facilitating the program; and with folks with lived experience with homelessness.

A total of 15 persons were asked specifically if they would choose to reside in a safe parking program. Only one said no, and that person had previously been part of a successful safe parking program and was on the path toward a new housing opportunity. The same folks were asked what services they need from a safe parking program and their responses highlighted basic needs: bathrooms, running water, safety and security, garbage receptacles and facilities for charging electronic devices. After a review of sites around the city, the Lincoln Center site on 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE was selected given that it offers daily living facilities, ample parking space, and relative seclusion. Lincoln Center currently is hosting the Congregations for the Homeless men's shelter. Local business owners are aware of how the site is currently being used and most are supportive of the city looking to help people with more than just a handout.

Nico Quijano said the purpose of the safe parking program is to help people living in their vehicles find stable housing. The population to be served is residents living in any vehicle that they own. Whoever is selected to operate the program will be required to develop a safety plan and a code of conduct for all participants. Referrals for the program will come from city staff. There will be a process established for moving people into the program and for knowing who is on the site at any given time.

The effort affords the city the opportunity to launch a project that has been under development for some time in conjunction with the University of Washington. The city has heard from a lot of religious organizations an interest in facilitating safe parking as a part of their mission to the community. What they have indicated, however, is that doing so without some guidance or additional resources would be difficult given the array of support needed. There is a clear interest but a gap in terms of their ability to execute on the interest. Many have indicated that having providers on site could enable them to launch programs. Accordingly, the selected program operator will be asked to be that source of expertise in offering guidelines to satellite

sites willing to host safe parking on their religious properties. That could include offering the same array of services and support available to participants at the Lincoln Center site. One benefit of having satellite sites could be tailoring sites to the specific needs of certain populations, such as vulnerable populations like families with children.

Nico Quijano said an RFP seeking a program operator was released in mid-January and will close on February 10. An environmental and land use review is underway and will be completed during the first quarter of the year. Once a program operator is selected, and once Congregations for the Homeless moves to its new location at Eastgate, the safe parking program will be launched at Lincoln Center. The city will work with the program operator on collecting data aimed at determining how successful the program is and what additional steps, if any, will need to be taken. The pilot program is expected to run for about a year and a half.

Since the presentation on the program to the City Council on January 9, there has been a fair amount of publicity about the program. That has opened the opportunity to engage more with the community. Some from the community have voiced concerns and objections, but others have voiced support for the program. It is being stressed that the program will be operated by a professional with the capacity to mitigate a lot of the concerns.

Commissioner White asked if the strict rules would govern safety, length of stays and illegal activities. Nico Quijano said there will be clear guidelines about the kinds of conduct expected by the participants. It will be stressed that illegal activities are to be avoided along with anything incompatible with the operation of the program. Given the focus on helping people move toward stable housing, having clear goals for how long people can be in the program will be important. The need for flexibility, however, has been stressed by many.

Commissioner Mansfield asked what types of organizations are being sought to serve as program operators, and what requirements they will have in terms of reporting to the city. Nico Quijano said the focus has been on local non-profits that have experience in working with individuals experiencing homelessness. It will be important for the city to avoid designing the program and handing it off to the operator. The experts, those serving the focus population and those with lived experience should be the ones designing the program.

Chair Piper asked what the estimated program capacity is. Nico Quijano said the capacity is 20 vehicles at a time and the estimation is while there may be only a few vehicles at first, the program will quickly reach its capacity.

Chair Piper asked if there is a plan in concert with the safe parking program to enforce the city's ordinances against living in vehicles on city streets. Assistant Director of Citywide Policy and Programs Bianca Siegl said staff have been working with partners in the police departments and others on steps that will allow for enforcement of vehicle residents when it becomes necessary. Programs are also being developed that will provide support and outreach specifically targeted to vehicle residents and their needs, including help with getting vehicles operatable to avoid violating parking codes.

Commissioner Halsted asked if there are known models of successful safe parking programs. Nico Quijano allowed that such programs are quite new. One program staff have leaned on for guidance and support is operated by Lake Washington United Methodist Church in Kirkland. Their program is different in that it runs primarily on a volunteer basis. There are a few municipalities that have started safe parking programs, including Vancouver and San Diego, and their input has been sought as well.

Commissioner Jain asked if families or single women with children will be offered shelter options funded by the city. Nico Quijano said there are a number of shelters and services

available to that specific population, but not enough to meet the total need. The safe parking program could be considered as a first-landing spot. Once their specific needs are identified, they can be matched with what might be available.

Major Tarantino asked if the safety plan will include records or background checks on those participating in the safe parking program, adding that the last thing the city would want to see is a registered sex offender in a car adjacent to a family with children. Nico Quijano said having some means of knowing who the participants are will certainly be part of the security plan. The benefit of having satellite sites will be the ability to serve vulnerable populations. The methods for screening participants will be determined in concert with the program operator.

Commissioner Jain asked what considerations go into environmental and land use reviews. Bianca Siegl said the reviews are standard practice for most new projects. The safe parking program is unusual in that it does not involve construction on the parking lot. An approval is not needed for the administrative review beyond the staff level.

Commissioner White asked if as part of the safety plan the program operator will be checking to make sure the cars used actually belong to the persons staying in them, and also asked who currently owns the Lincoln Center property. Nico Quijano said the property is owned by the city, as are all of the other properties that were considered in line with the Council's direction. There is a desire to resolve vehicle ownership questions before allowing participants on the lot. At the same time, there is also a desire to refrain from creating too high a barrier for potential participants.

Commissioner Jain asked if the city has any other safe parking program sites currently and Nico Quijano allowed that there is a small program operated at Newport Presbyterian Church. That program is only open seasonally, but the organization has indicated that with more support it believes it could do more.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Creating a Culture of Equity for Commission's Work

Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer Dr. Linda Whitehead urged the Commissioners to join in the Living Voices production celebrating the civil rights movement before introducing Equity Coordinator Sara Boyle and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Community Outreach and Engagement Administrator Justin Chan.

On behalf of the city of Bellevue, Dr. Linda Whitehead acknowledged the land the city is on as the ancestral homelands of the Coast Salish people, the traditional home of all tribes and bands, including the Duwamish, the Suquamish, Muckleshoot and Snoqualmie tribes. The opportunity was taken to honor and express the deepest respect to the original caretakers of the land, a people who are still present.

Justin Chan asked the Commissioners to listen closely with curiosity and respect; to take a pause and a breath in uncomfortable situations; to not be afraid to ask questions; to provide everyone a chance to speak and engage; to embrace moments of discomfort; and to consider how their own experiences and social status (race, gender, ability, class, sexuality, age) may influence their perspectives and responses to the facilitator, peers, and others.

Justin Chan said the main Diversity Advantage Initiative was approved in 2014. It was a 60-

point action plan aimed at integrating all aspects of the city's equity, inclusion and cultural competency initiatives and trainings into a single comprehensive plan. It was meant to promote understanding and practice of equity, inclusion and cultural competency as a duty and responsibility for all staff and for all stakeholders and partners in the work. The initiative is incorporated into the city's mission statement with the phrase "Our diversity is our strength." Council Priority 15 is to continue to implement the Diversity Advantage Plan, including determining the availability of and need for multicultural programming in the city and completing the cross-cultural study already underway.

Centering diversity, equity and inclusion is a vital component when it comes to operationalizing core values. It is vital in terms of the city's diversity and changing demographics, and it leads to better outcomes and services for city residents. A diverse perspective leads to more creative ideas and innovations. The approach helps to build trust and values all residents and employees.

Justin Chan asked the Commissioners to take a few minutes to chat about what diversity, equity and inclusion means to them, and how the individual elements of diversity, equity and inclusion are distinct from each other.

*\*\* Off record chat from 6:45 p.m. to 6:49 p.m. \*\**

Chair Piper reported having discussed the questions with Commissioner White. There was agreement in regard to what diversity, equity and inclusion means, as well as the importance of people's diversity in terms of lived experiences, thought and perspectives. Commissioner White reported working for a company that adds belonging to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Commissioner Singh reported having had a conversation in which it was noted that everyone has their own diversity and brings to the table their own experiences.

Sara Boyle allowed that diversity, equity and inclusion are three separate words, each with their own distinct meanings. It was explained that the way the city uses the word "diversity" to represent people of differing identities and with diverse thoughts and experiences, including cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, disabilities, ages, faiths, gender and sexual orientation. Diversity is inclusive of who is in the room.

Bellevue is known for being a very diverse city. According to the most recent data, 50 percent identify as a race other than white. Forty-four percent over the age of five speak a language other than English in the home, and 42 percent of Bellevue residents were born outside the United States.

While diversity is the concept of who is in the room, equity refers to who has access to the things people know they need to thrive. It is defined as everyone in society can access, participate in and benefit from services, resources and opportunities that contribute to a high quality of life, regardless of an individual's identities. Equity means each person has the resources and services to thrive, such that racial and socioeconomic disparities are eliminated, and outcomes improve for all. Simply put, in an equitable society, one's identities are not accurate predictors of an individual's future outcomes.

Using wealth as a datapoint, Sara Boyle shared that Black resident of Bellevue experience poverty at approximately 2.7 times the rate of white residents. The median household income of Black households in Bellevue is 21 percent lower than white households. Hispanic/Latino residents of Bellevue experience poverty at approximately four times the rate of white residents., and the median household income of Hispanic/Latino households is 47 percent lower than white households.

Inclusion is creating an environment where people feel valued and psychologically safe to represent themselves authentically. They don't have to be afraid to show their real personality, their talents, and aspirations, but also their insecurities, doubts, and worries. It is a place where everybody can bring their whole self and freely express opinions and traditions that do not harm others. The most recent Human Services Needs Update indicates that 35 percent of surveyed Bellevue residents identified racial and ethnic discrimination as a major community issue. In 2022 the Bellevue police department reported 27 hate crimes and bias incidents. Such incidents are known to be severely underreported, particularly to police departments. The 2021 Human Services Needs Assessment indicates that in 2020 community-based organizations documented more than 200 reports of hate and bias incidents in East King County.

Sara Boyle said belonging is where people hope to end up once accomplishing diversity, equity and inclusion. Belonging is defined as everyone feeling like a full thriving member of the larger community; feeling that they belong and can fully leverage their distinct traits, traditions, and cultures while experiencing ownership and empowerment; and feeling included and valued, and that their contributions to the community give them fulfillment.

The Commissioners were asked to take a few minutes to reflect on the ways diversity, equity and inclusion impact their work as a member of the Commission.

*\*\* Off record chat from 7:00 p.m. to 7:05 p.m. \*\**

Commissioner Mansfield reported wanting to see more diversity, equity and inclusion training in the future to positively impact the work of the Commission. There have been some exclusionary things happen in the past that need to change. Too many are stuck thinking that "equity" and "equal" are the same thing, which they are not. Equal is giving every child standing by a fence the same size box to stand on, but equity is giving each child a box that will allow them to see over the fence.

Commissioner White welcomed the diversity, equity and inclusion training near the beginning of the year before moving forward with decision-making processes.

Commissioner Singh voiced support for the fact that the Commission has access to a lot of diversity data in terms of those who are served by the various programs.

Dr. Linda Whitehead thanked the Commissioners for their participation and engagement and stated that equality is giving everyone a pair of shoes, but equity is giving everyone a pair of shoes of the right size. The Diversity Advantage Initiative is one of the tools the city has for impacting the work done by the Commission. Throughout the city there are employee resource groups which are comprised of folks of different affinities and like interests. The diversity liaisons and the departmental diversity, equity and inclusion teams support those groups. The departmental teams also look at the city's hiring processes to determine who is being hired. Too often it has been concluded that an appropriate person could not be found for a position, which justifies always hiring the same groups of people. Conversations are being had, and that needle is being moved. The focus is always on seeking highly qualified people, but it is also on looking for reasons to hire as opposed to reasons not to hire.

Continuing, Dr. Linda Whitehead said community engagement is a vital piece of the work. Justin Chan is the lead administrator for the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network, a group of community member volunteers wanting to help the city move the needle forward. Centering Communities of Color is a new initiative, and the group is also focused on expanding community engagement. The Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network group reports directly to

the City Manager, while the Centering Communities of Color group influences the City Council.

The Diversity Advantage Team provides training and resources to help city boards and commissions to become better vehicles for aiding the city in becoming a more just and equitable community. The training sessions include a focus on micro aggression. The team stands ready to help the Commission develop the skills and willingness to participate in courageous conversations; assist in applying an equity lens to decision-making that addresses implicit bias; support the members in their approaches to prioritizing relationships and centering the community voices that are furthest away from justice; and to help facilitate conversations and strategies that increase diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging within human services.

Commissioner Halsted asked what kind of training sessions the team offers. Justin Chan said along with micro aggression training, the team does comprehensive overviews of diversity, equity and inclusion, especially about race; engages in raising awareness about community celebrations and events such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, pride events and Juneteenth. Should the Commission want training on how to address gender pronouns, the team can provide that as well.

Dr. Linda Whitehead said many hear terms like “intersectionality” and “implicit bias” and they think they know what they mean, but they may not really know. Those and other terms are heard throughout the day. Some can embrace them, and some cannot. The team comes into play in helping people gain a deeper understanding.

Sara Boyle said the team provides both formal and informal training. It takes interacting with others, learning about different traditions and having different conversations. In January a health fair event was held in celebration of the legacy of Reverend King. The Living Voices event is slated for February 15 as part of Black History Month. In June some pride events will be hosted. Past events have included events for Transgender Awareness Week, and Asian American-Pacific Islander-Native Hawaiian Month.

Commissioner Jain asked what diversity, equity and inclusion gaps remain to be filled. Justin Chan said it is great the Commission will be considering the allocation of \$3.1 million. Equity is one of the components of that grant. The team will work with the Commission to understand how to acknowledge and honor the statement around advancing racial equity in ways that will result in meaningful community impacts.

Sara Boyle added that the team has been in place for just over a year, during which time there has been a consistent commitment and desire on the part of staff and community members to move the work forward. Many allow that while they want to do the work, they do not really know how. Many of the practices and procedures of the past were not created with Bellevue’s current diversity in mind. Part of the gap lies in helping folks to understand how to reimagine the way things have always been done.

By way of context relative to the ARPA funding, Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza said every other year a human services needs assessment is undertaken to gather data through surveys, focus groups, providers and those who use the services. The data identifies the areas of the biggest needs across the continuum. There is a growing demand for human services funding that is greater than the funding that is available. The \$3.1 million in ARPA funds was allocated by the Council at the end of 2022 for the current budget cycle. In all, the Council has allocated \$17 million in ARPA dollars to human services, of which \$7 million went to rent assistance in 2022, \$5 million is for rent assistance in 2023, and \$2 million went to fully fund the requests received from the 24/7

shelters. The areas for which proposals are being solicited for the remaining \$3.1 million are the areas that were identified in the needs assessment as the biggest gaps. Accordingly, the target areas are basic needs, behavioral health services, child care, civil legal aid, domestic violence and sexual assault survivor services, food insecurity, homelessness services, and fostering wellbeing in the face of racial and ethnic discrimination.

#### B. Officer Elections

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

A motion to nominate Commissioner Mansfield to serve as Chair was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Singh.

No other nominations were made.

A motion to close nominations was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Singh and the motion carried unanimously.

The nomination of Commissioner Mansfield to serve as Chair carried unanimously.

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

A motion to nominate Commissioner Singh to serve as Vice Chair was made by Commissioner Mansfield. The motion was seconded by Commissioner White.

No additional nominations were made.

The nomination of Commissioner Singh to serve as Vice Chair carried unanimously.

#### C. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely

Chair Piper requested to be allowed to participate remotely on February 22. Commissioners Halsted, Singh and Jain indicated they would not be able to attend or participate on March 7.

A motion to approve remote participation by Chair Piper and Vice Chair Amirfaiz on February 22 was made by Commissioner Mansfield. The motion was seconded by Commissioner White, and the motion carried unanimously.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Piper adjourned the meeting at 7:35 p.m.