

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

July 18, 2023
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Mansfield, Vice Chair Singh, Commissioners Amirfaiz Halsted

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner White

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Piper, Jain

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Asma Ahmed, Andrew Ndayambaje, Department of Parks & Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

POLICE LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: Christopher Lovings, Rachel Boketa, Floribert Mubalama, Adam Dibba, Megan Beers, Liz Arjun

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 by Chair Mansfield who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Piper and Jain.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

June 6, 2023

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Alex Tsimerman said the City Council meeting on July 17 there were some 30 people signed up to speak. Alex Tsimerman was signed up first on the list, but Mayor Robinson let others speak first and then stopped oral communications after 30 minutes and 10 people. After raising an argument, the police were called and Alex Tsimerman was escorted out. The same has been done in many meetings, including at the King County Council where Claudia Balducci does the same.

The Council is being aggressive because it wants to bring in an Iranian Muslim man to government. A week ago, hate crime allegations were brought against Mayor Robinson and next week the same will be done for Claudia Balducci. The city cannot support Iranian people serving as government. There is a war with Iran and American soldiers are dying. It would be the same to support a Russian or a North Korean. Iranians hate America. Iranians have promised for many years to bomb Israel and then the United States. The idiotic situation should be stopped.

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

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland pointed out that staff has been sending out a weekly article. The intent is to send out the article during the week of Commission meetings.

Christy Stangland said the RFP for CDBG funding closed on Saturday and nine applications were received, each of which is being reviewed to make certain they are eligible for funding. The expectation is that the reviewed applications will be forwarded to the Commissioners by mid-August ahead of discussing them for funding recommendations.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. Panel Conversation: Trends and Challenges with Services to the African Diaspora Community

Human Services Planner Andrew Ndayambaje welcomed Chris Lovings, chair of the Civic Engagement Committee for the Washington State Coalition of African Community Leaders (WSCACL); Rachel Boketa, program manager for Ubumwe Women Association; Floribert Mubalama, founder and executive director at Congolese Integration Network (CIN); and Adam Dibba, founder and director at Africans on the Eastside.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked the group to comment on the misconceptions or misunderstandings about the African diaspora community. Chris Lovings said a common misconception people make is in underestimating the economic, academic and professional achievements that have been made by the African diaspora community. Diaspora is a word that refers to community members who either many years ago or only a short time ago spread from the continent of Africa to the United States. Many within the diaspora have excelled in several fields and highlighting their accomplishments helps to challenge negative stereotypes. People assume the diaspora is a monolithic group, but that is not the case given that the diaspora is a collection of people from different countries, tribes, cultures, languages and experiences. When coming to the states, it has been necessary to culturally assimilate. Diversity is one of the greatest strengths, and by leveraging diversity to learn from different cultures throughout the diaspora, unity has been strengthened.

Rachel Boketa agreed and said the term diaspora itself creates some confusion. Africa is not a country; it is a continent with many different regions and countries. Many in the diaspora come

to the states voluntarily through various development programs. Many skilled immigrants sought working visas to come work in the states. Refugees, asylum seekers and even some undocumented persons also came to the states, and those persons have had children born here who have American citizenship but who have African DNA. Putting all members of the category into a single group creates the misconception that they are all the same. There are numerous languages spoken by those in the diaspora and their needs differ.

Floribert Mubalama said there is prejudice, discrimination, bias and misunderstanding about the diaspora. The members come from different countries, and they do not all speak the same languages. Many of them struggle to integrate when they come to the United States. There is a tendency, however, to treat all of them the same. There are white Africans, and black Africans, and many different cultural heritages.

Adam Dibba noted having been an immigrant to the United States and having raised three daughters who are, of course, Americans. There are misconceptions about everyone in the diaspora being dumb, that they do not know what they are saying, and that they are not able to get jobs. Many, however, have made contributions through various means, including through volunteering in the community. Many have also started businesses.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked for comments regarding the most significant human services needs and barriers impacting the African diaspora community. Floribert Mubalama shared coming to the country in 2014. Every year since then there have been drowning cases involving young Africans, especially Congolese. What can be read into that is problems associated with isolation and mental health. Housing accessibility and affordability is also an issue. Many who study in Bellevue must travel for an hour each to get to school, all because of housing. There is less access for African immigrants and refugees to physical activities such as soccer. Soccer and physical activities are used as therapies in dealing with mental health issues, especially for those coming from war-torn countries. Others face barriers due to systemic isolation and lack of social supports. Those who are focused on their education face isolation from their own communities. Many face nutrition and basic needs problems. Girls need support as well, including physical activities.

Rachel said those needs and barriers are common to people in different categories. Many people need information, but they cannot access it due to language barriers. Many cannot access public services as a result, even though they are entitled to them. Ubumwe Women Association works with single mothers and single heads of households. The women have specific problems in need of specific solutions. Most of them come as refugees and immigrants from conflict-affected areas where they faced violence and sexual assault. Once in the United States, they become disillusioned because they do not get the support they need and do not know where to find services. They face many economic and legal issues, as well as mental health issues. Those who came to the United States through voluntary programs claim they do not receive any support unless they go to where refugees seek help.

Adam Dibba commented that when embarking on the journey 25 years ago the evident basic needs were housing, jobs, education and the ability to sustain oneself. The piece that was missing was that most of the individuals did not drive. Building trust took time and it started by working

with the youth. Through advocacy efforts, the people were taught how to sustain themselves and how to advocate for themselves. Current advocacy focuses on teaching the people how to understand American systems.

Chris Lovings noted the communities are experiencing prejudice, discrimination and racism. Those are compounding issues. Someone with a language barrier will have trouble gaining a quality education, and the lack of understanding will lead many to believe the person is ignorant because of where they came from and who they are. Many in the diaspora are unfairly targeted with racist healthcare practices. There are systems in place that advantage some and disadvantage others. With regard to navigation support, many do not understand simple things like how to pay the electricity bill or access city services, or even how to ride public transit. Workforce development faces the barrier of many in the diaspora being considered ignorant. Many are in fact highly skilled in different areas but are forced to take more menial jobs just to support their families.

Each panelist was asked to provide a brief overview of the programs and services provided by their organizations that address the needs and barriers.

Adam Dibba said Africans on the Eastside was created about three years ago to serve the forgotten ones, the talented young children and families that people tend to forget because they sit in the corner and do not say much. Adam Dibba's own daughter faced being labeled as having ADHD without any kind of actual professional diagnosis simply for being quiet in school. That label was challenged, and it was found the schools were not giving the child what was needed to thrive. Youth in the school system are being taught an understanding of the American system, but without any regard to their specific cultures. The youth need to celebrate their cultures while also assimilating into the American culture through education. Youths aged 16 in America are often considered to be adults, and consequently doctors do not share information with their parents. That approach can traumatize a family that does not understand that. The organization talks to the families to help them understand. Often when doctors talk to families about mental health they do not do it in a way the families can understand, and it scares them and leads them to using alcohol and drugs. The organization focuses on helping the youth and their ESL parents find solutions. Finances and resources are needed to continue doing the work.

Floribert Mubalama pointed out the need for physical space in which the organizations serving those in the diaspora can work. The CIN rents space in a residential area and it is very expensive. The organization started in 2016 and began with a focus on removing integration barriers for refugees and immigrants. The organization is non-discriminatory and welcomes everyone. The program has evolved and now provides home visits to prepare children under the age of five to prepare them for kindergarten by helping the parents in becoming the first educators of their children. Most of the parents do not speak English and did not go to school in America. The organization also helps women offer child care services in their homes as a way of helping to stabilize their families. The youth program has evolved from mentorship to helping young people stay academically focused in order to be successful and graduate. The organization has a contract with the King County prosecutor's office to work in restorative community pathways. The program helps children who have been victims of incarcerations by cleaning up their background checks so they can go back to work or school. Support groups in which the young people gather

every week helps them a lot. The human service grant received from Bellevue is helping to support Bellevue students. The organization also has a young girls soccer program in Bellevue. There is also a program called Health Boat that focuses on addressing the determinants of health faced by the community, and case management and cultural support to increase positive family connections. A trauma-informed approach is used given that so many have come from war-torn countries. More housing is needed given that all shelters in King County are over capacity.

Rachel Boketa said Ubumwe Women Association started in 2017 as a support group discussing culture issues. When Covid hit, the mission broadened to a non-profit that supported female households, many of whom had lost their jobs. The organization received a grant from the city to connect single women with organizations that provide ESL and connecting them with employers. A case manager-led monthly support group session is held to help overcome the traumas of mental health by building social cohesion and creating a network in which the women can share experiences and support and learn from each other. Some women have been provided with rent assistance and have been connected to legal services providers.

Chris Lovings said the WSCACL was founded in 2018 on the idea of supporting African-descent organizations and members by sharing resources, building trust to encourage collaboration, and to be an influential voice for the African diaspora. There are 55 member organizations, 85 separate individuals, and a reach of 140,000 in Washington state. The organization offers civics classes in Snohomish County where the voting system was explained. There has been a focus on systemic challenges, and board and commission postings. There have been workshops and training with the international rescue community about economic finance support for organizations and individuals trying to start organizations. There have been leadership workshops focused on what it looks like when one sits on a board or commission. System navigation is a very important element of the work of the organization. The organization has received parental assistance funding, and funding from the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Fund. Culture and heritage programming is offered for youth and adults. All of the member organizations are encouraged to put on events that bring people together to avoid social isolation and anxiety.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked the panelists to talk about the challenges each agency is experiencing that the Commission should be aware of.

Rachel Boketa thanked the city for awarding the organization grant dollars but stressed that more funding is needed. Financial resources are needed to expand the programming and to provide more meaningful support to the African diaspora. The need is great, and resources are scarce. There is also a need to have more conversations in support of city policy development. If the city wants to better serve the African community, it should seek to hear from members of the community.

Chris Lovings said the work done by organizations is often focused on treating symptoms. More needs to be done to address the root causes. It is well known that many in the African diaspora cannot afford to live in Bellevue; the question is what the city intends to do to keep the community members in the city. There are renter protections that have been dropped since July 1. Non-profits are always in need of funding, and city funders often force them to compete with

each other. There should be some time spent looking at models other cities use to address the issue. Work has been done by the Seattle Foundation and Neighbor to Neighbor, and there are other ways to focus on funding.

Floribert Mubalama said the challenge is always money. The need for physical space is also a challenge. Space is needed in which to run programs. It is very difficult to continue providing services without funding, and those providing services should be seen as community leaders.

Adam Dibba said Africans on the Eastside has done most of its work with almost no funding for almost a decade. The paperwork requirements associated with applying for grants is a big barrier. The organization is working on capacity building programs and partnerships. Access to African diaspora students and families continues to be a barrier. The summit put on by the organization was attended with students who were very excited to hear about Africans on the Eastside and the work it does.

Chair Mansfield thanked the panelists for their participation and for everything they are doing through their respective agencies and communities. There is still a lot of work to be done. All information shared gives the Commission a broader scope of the needs in the community.

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked about the African diaspora demographics and was told by Adam Dibba that just in the last week a total of six families from Gambia were encountered who live on the Eastside. From that contact, almost 15 kids are being supported through the agency. Just in the last month, another 22 families in Kirkland were receiving support.

Floribert Mubalama said that are more than 300 students between the ages of 17 and 27 living in the Bellevue area are from Congo alone.

Commissioner Amirfaiz allowed that the census data does not track those from the African diaspora. In terms of solidarity and advocacy, the city, King County, the state and the federal government should step up its tracking.

Christy Stangland allowed not having specific data beyond the census data. The 2019 census data under the category of African/African American showed one percent of Bellevue's population in that column. In the most recent census data, that figure rose to two percent.

Floribert Mubalama said a collective strategy is needed to make sure the demographics are documented and well understood.

Rachel Boketa added that it would be beneficial if there was coordination among the non-profit organizations to avoid things like double counting and to build the data.

Vice Chair Singh thanked the panelists for their comments and added that through travel it can be seen that all countries are different. It is refugees and immigrants that make the United States complete.

Commissioner White thanked the panel members for sharing what is going on in their respective

communities. The question asked was if other cities in America have successful initiatives or projects the city of Bellevue should consider implementing. Adam Dibba said New York City has a great program for building housing for people from Gambia. They also have a youth program that is very successful.

Chris Lovings said Bellevue Essentials is an incredible program. The city of Shoreline through its DEI work has a program called Community Bridge that is similar to Bellevue Essentials. The city observed a gap for community members who spoke English as a second language. The DEI coordinator pulled together a program with essential elements of the citywide program and created a cohort model which was named Community Bridge.

Chris Lovings also shared that the first WSCACL summit was held in February at the Bellevue Botanical Gardens. The experience served to bring folks together, including several Councilmembers who attended. As opportunities arise for community members to gather, Bellevue should be considered as the place.

Floribert Mubalama shared being enrolled in a program called PACH (People's Academy for Community Engagement) soon after arriving in Seattle. The program taught the participants all about the workings of the city, including its board and commissions, and how to get involved in the processes. Additionally, refugee and immigrant week was hosted last year by the city of SeaTac. Renton has previously hosted the event, and this year it will be in Seattle. It would be good if Bellevue were to host the event next year.

Rachel Boketa said Bellevue has a program called Cultural Conversations where the participants share stories and ideas.

Commissioner Halsted said it was very valuable to hear from the panelists. It is clear that each community has a rich and vibrant culture. That is something that Americans in general often miss out on. Too often the Commission, in deliberating funding, hears about programs but does not have the advantage of putting names and faces to those programs. The question was asked if the various communities embrace technology to communicate and in order to learn. Adam Dibba answered that many do. It would be wonderful to have the resources to build on technology. When funding is tight, however, the dollars are always put toward something else. Young people are learning tech in school, but they are not always sharing what they learn with their parents. Commissioner Halsted said it would be good to help close that loop.

Floribert Mubalama said there is a huge divide in the use of the digital world by refugees and immigrants. People are coming to the United States every day, and they are not coming from developing countries, rather they are coming from refugee camps and from war-torn countries where technologies are not available to them. Most therefore struggle with using technology. It is true there are translation services available, but if people do not have access to the technology, or do not know how to use it, it does them no good. Investments in digital literacy would be welcomed and could help many.

Rachel Boketa said a recent rapid assessment survey done for Ubumwe showed that young refugees and immigrants know that Washington state is known for its technology opportunities,

but many of them believe that work in the tech sector is only for Indians. In India there are numerous computer programs, and many end up seeking visas to come work in the United States. Young people say they need vocational training in things like coding to help them get jobs.

Chris Lovings agreed, adding that the main community tool used by WSCACL is WhatsApp. Other communities may use other applications. It is easy to share flyers about community events by using the application, but unless there is a community leader willing to respond by saying they are going to attend, attendance at the event will not be great. It takes more than just technology to get members of the community to show up. It takes trust.

A motion to approve adding to the agenda Human Services Needs Update Listening Session under New Business was made by Vice Chair Singh. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Halsted and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Human Services Needs Update Listening Session

Christy Stangland explained that the listening session would serve as the beginning of the planning around the Needs Update process. Megan Beers and Liz Arjun, consultants with Health Management Associates (HMA), were introduced to lead the session.

Senior consultant Megan Beers explained that HMA is a national research and consulting firm and noted being a psychologist by training, and a team member at HMA for a couple of years and having spent the last ten years in community based organizations in King County. The work HMA will be doing for the city will involve intentional engagement with community members and providers, all aimed at gathering data in different ways to facilitate doing the best strategic planning around meeting the needs in the community.

Liz Arjun noted having been with HMA for almost six years and having been with King County prior to that working on issues ranging from human services to public health. Liz Arjun noted having a masters in social work and a masters in public health and will bring to the table an understanding of the policy opportunities.

Megan Beers said to date the consultant team has been working closely with Toni Esparza, Christy Stangland and the city's human services team for almost a month. The outreach efforts are just getting under way. The survey will be launched soon, and focus groups will be taking place over the next couple of months. The listening session is intended to get the perspective of the Commission in terms of how the Needs Update has been used in the past and what questions the Commission is wanting to see addressed as part of the assessment.

Vice Chair Singh commented on the fact that Bellevue is home to people from all over the world. People are not aware of what services are available to them, owing largely to misconceptions and a lack of trust in government. Those who come face major changes that they do not always know how to address.

Chair Mansfield said affordability is a basic underlying issue that affects so many things, like

who can afford to live in Bellevue, and who can afford child care, and even if child care is available. Affordability issues often mean people must share living quarters. Affordability triggers a number of needs for human services.

Commissioner Halsted said there are clear issues in regard to the basic needs of food and housing. Beyond that there are important behavioral and social needs, especially with technology in the hands of youth. Relationships are very important within various cultures and communities. Once people start coming together and caring for each other, that will help build up the communities.

Megan Beers noted that much had been said by the panelists and others about the issue of social isolation.

Commissioner White raised the issue of affordable housing. There are condominiums being built in the Downtown with a starting point of \$3 million. There are also homeless shelters that are almost complete in Eastgate, but the middle section of affordability is completely lost. There needs to be options for younger people and newer families as well as older generations that do not want to live in a big house anymore but who are not ready for a retirement home.

Commissioner Amirfaiz said the challenge for the next three to five years and beyond is responsible growth. There has been a lot of growth in Bellevue, but it has not been well thought out; it has been more reactionary. To a large degree, the city relies on those with salaries that can afford \$3 million condominiums to help with the provision of human services. Their housing needs, however, need to be balanced with those who need affordable housing. As development continues, there will also be a need to address infrastructure needs and things like congestion. The city needs to be both livable and safe.

Megan Beers asked how the highlighted issues create challenges for developing human services strategies and funding.

Commissioner Halsted said there clearly is a challenge given the scarcity of money. Beyond that, there are so many needs without a clear root cause. It often feels like the problems are never really solved given the unlimited number of needs. For the city there needs to be a focus on integrating the various needs into a cohesive strategy.

Chair Mansfield added that some who make policy decisions relative to housing affordability have reacted to the need by calling for microhousing but allowing the units in specific areas. There does not seem to be a clear understanding of what the human services needs are. Capacity cannot be built without a budget. Absent funding, it is difficult to change strategies. When the needs are increasing because of things like affordability, lack of funding means the needs will only continue to increase and getting to the actual causes will go by the board.

Commissioner Amirfaiz said people often suppose that the Commission has lots of money, and many in need come to the city for that reason. Too often money is thrown at issues without really evaluating them long term. There are entities in the human services realm that have a lot of political clout, and sometimes funds flow to them without much accountability. All cities

struggle with the need for funding, but the perception that Bellevue is a rich city drives the thinking of many. There is no good data about how many of the homeless are mentally ill or are substance abusers, versus families that can pay the rent. Without good data, it is not possible to invest expecting a good return. The Needs Update data is dependent on who is talked to. If those on the periphery are not talked to, and indeed if there is no awareness of them, it will not be possible to address their needs.

Megan Beers said determining who has been talked to in the past, and who has not been talked to in the past, and how to engage and build trust in those communities are the conversations the consultants and staff have been having.

Megan Beers asked the Commissioners to comment on what has proved to be valuable and useful in the past in terms of the Needs Update, and what has been missing.

Chair Mansfield agreed with Commissioner Amirfaiz about the need for data, and also agreed with the need for some demographic data around where the information comes from. Achieving differing viewpoints has, in the past, been very valuable at making the Commission aware of issues.

Commissioner White stressed the need to have more information about the ways in which organizations are able to fundraise and get money. The Commission often learns from reading the newspaper how much some organization has raised at a fundraising event. Having that information can help the Commission decide where to allocate funds to make the playing field more level.

Commissioner Amirfaiz stressed the need for good data that is validated. The data garnered from a focus group with only ten people attending may not be valid.

Commissioner Halsted commented that the Needs Update always includes a massive amount of information. Given the importance of data, using visualizations is helpful in understanding the numbers in terms of supply and demand.

Vice Chair Singh noted that the city keeps and tracks data over time and the Commission should rely on it.

Commissioner Halsted said the Needs Updates are abstracted to focus on specific issues, like homelessness. In reviewing applications, the Commission can note which organizations address homelessness while keeping in mind how much money is available for allocation. The Commission cannot really know, however, what will be solved by a given allocation. Having panel discussions is very helpful in terms of bringing the stories to life and visualizing the problems. Data is important but so is context.

Vice Chair Singh commented that some people who seek rental assistance actually have their own money but apply anyway and lie on their applications. Christy Stangland said there are in fact laws in place addressing that issue. There have been agencies who turned in clients for prosecution for fraud. Agencies have eligibility requirements and applicants are required to agree

that the information they give is accurate.

Megan Beers asked what strategies the Commission currently uses to guide decision making around human services investments, and asked what strategies might need to be adjusted. Chair Mansfield said before going into a funding cycle the Commission usually identifies the most emergent needs. At the same time, the Commission always seeks to fund the continuum of services. That strategy may need to be tweaked going forward in favor of looking at the biggest needs and where the most can be done.

Commissioner Halsted said in the final analysis all funding decisions should be made in favor of actually moving the needle in the right direction. At the same time, outcomes should be measurable. There is always a lag between the data from the Needs Update, funding decisions, and reporting outcomes.

Chair Mansfield said it always comes down to the nitty gritty of measuring outcomes. There is always a desire to see measurable outcomes, but in many instances it is hard to accomplish that. No matter what, the funds allocated to agencies do help people, but of course the Commission wants to help the most Bellevue residents possible.

Commissioner Amirfaiz voiced support for having strategies that will lead to good outcomes. The information included in the grant applications is not always as tight as hoped for. In the end the organizations need to be accountable in terms of how they are moving the needle. Just reporting that a hundred people were served is not the point. It needs to be known what the actual outcomes were resulting from the allocation of public dollars. The onus should be on the providers to deliver data showing how the funding allocations are actually making a difference in the lives of Bellevue residents.

Commissioner Halsted said the Needs Update paints a good picture of the need in the community. The Commission also sees non-profits and organizations creating all manner of programs to address needs in the community. What is missing is the actual direction. When the city issues an RFP, it does so seeking specific ideas for how to meet a specific need. Something like that is needed for the overall funding cycle.

Commissioner White agreed with the need for the Commission to have a better understanding of what each organization considers success to be success. Having that information would help the Commission in strategizing.

Commissioner Amirfaiz countered by suggesting that the Commission allocates funds for a specific purpose and outcome. It is not up to the non-profits and organizations to determine what success looks like, it is up to the Commission to tell them what it expects to see as a result, and it is up to the organizations to report on exactly how they succeeded in helping Bellevue residents.

Christy Stangland said the staff have begun looking at how other cities share information in an attempt to come up with something like a dashboard. The data would be presented twice a year, with service units reported first and with the outcomes being reported at the end of the year.

A motion to extend the meeting by five minutes was made by Commissioner Halsted. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Singh and the motion carried unanimously.

Christy Stangland added that the conversation will continue so there will be additional opportunities for making suggestions.

C. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely

Christy Stangland noted Commissioner Piper had requested remote participation for both the September 6 and 19 Commission meetings. Commissioner Amirfaiz made the same request.

A motion to approve remote participation at the September 6 and 19 meetings for Commissioners Piper and Amirfaiz was made by Vice Chair Singh. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Halsted and the motion carried unanimously.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mansfield adjourned the meeting at 8:03 p.m.