

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
JOINT MEETING
MINUTES

October 26, 2021
6:30 p.m.

Joint Virtual Meeting

BELLEVUE COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Commissioners Amirfaiz, Ma, McClure, Mercer, Piper

BELLEVUE STAFF PRESENT:

Alex O'Reilly, Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Megan Farwell, Michael Shiosaki, Department of Parks and Community Services

KIRKLAND COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

M.J. Carlson, Jori Hamilton, Laney Brackett, Gabriela Lopez, Michelle Alten-Kaehler

KIRKLAND STAFF PRESENT:

Jen Boone, Regi Schubiger, Leslie Miller

ISSAQUAH COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Pat Sadat-Ngatchou, Ana Jimenez-Inman, Sarah Soriano, Clair Hansen, Manny Brown, Lucrecia Choto, Trish Bloor, Hannah Roberts, Jaime Farjardo

ISSAQUAH STAFF PRESENT:

Hannah Roberts, Monica Negrila,

REDMOND COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Vibhas Chandorkar, Antoinette Smith, Kristin Muscott, Jacob Brown, Rachid Erekaeni,

REDMOND STAFF PRESENT:

Brooke Buckingham

SAMMAMISH COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Joyce Bottenberg, Rich Benack, Stan Gunno, Nushina Mir, Julie Varness

SAMMAMISH STAFF PRESENT:

Rita Badh

GUEST SPEAKERS:

Debbie Lacey, Eastside For All; Em Rose, Helen Wong, Chinese Information and Service Center; Lalita Uppala, India Association of Western Washington

RECORDING SECRETARY:

Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m. by Jonathan Stutz, Kirkland Human Services Commission vice-chair, who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

Mr. Stutz stated that because in-person meetings are prohibited by the Governor's emergency order, the meeting would be conducted virtually. He noted that anyone from the public wanting to comment would be permitted to do so.

3. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSIONS

A. Presentation on Hate and Bias Incidents in East King County

Em Rose with Chinese Information and Service Center stated that her sister-in-law had a horrifying experience at a gas station in Redmond when she tried to pre-pay with cash. The cashier refused to take her money and when asked why, he yelled that he did not need her money or her business, then yelled at her to leave. She felt shaken, left without gas, and concluded that her hijab and the color of her skin were what motivated the man to threaten her.

Debby Lacy with Eastside For All related the story of an incident that took place at a grocery store in Bellevue where two customers, seeking service, were ignored and commented to each other that a store employee did not want to help them. The worker overheard the comment and yelled at them, "get out of here, you effing Mexicans." One of the customers then talked to the store manager, during which the worker came up to them and said, "get him out of here, the effing dirty Mexican, or I will slap the *blank* out of him." The manager asked the worker to move away. The customers filed a report but there was not any follow-up, and nothing was ever known beyond that. The victim spoke with an attorney.

Lalita Uppala with India Association of Western Washington said a senior male, browsing through a store aisle, was rudely yelled at, "You stink of curry. Go back to your country." The man rushed out of the store and called his adult son who was shopping nearby to come pick him up. The man now refuses to go anywhere.

Helen Wong shared the story of a woman shopping at a Lake Hills retail shop who, as she was getting into her car, was yelled at by another woman. "You are an effing *blank*. You are a filthy disease," yelled the woman. She was then spat on as she shut her door, and the woman then came right up to the car and spat on the car window.

Ms. Rose related that a black teen was riding a bike at a high school in Kirkland. Passengers in a passing car threw a rock at him. His parents were too scared to call the police after the incident and felt helpless. She also noted that a black woman was called a *blank* at the Kirkland Costco when multiple witnesses were present, but nothing happened to the perpetrator after the incident.

Ms. Lacy shared that at a school in Issaquah a student reported another student running into him in the hallway, and then again later in the locker room, where he started pushing the first student and calling him a terrorist. The first student hit the second student, but instead of the

school listening to both sides, only the story from the second student was heard and the first student received in-school suspension for three days.

Ms. Lacy said the stories were only some of the horrific stories that are in the database of the King County Coalition Against Hate and Violence. She said such incidents go widely underreported, particularly hate crimes. There are other incidents that are not legally called hate crimes, but which nonetheless impact the communities greatly in terms of a sense of belonging and a sense of safety. The King County Coalition Against Hate and Violence was formed to address this underreporting by collecting data in a standardized way. Being able to speak about incidents, while difficult, is essential for making sure such events are spotlighted and not pushed under a rug. It must be acknowledged that forms of racism and identity-based violence is occurring in local communities. Whenever possible, the incidents should be talked about both in terms of what is happening and what the community response is, which will have a deterrent effect on hate and bias crimes. Traditional law enforcement remedies such as stricter laws unfortunately disproportionately affect communities of color. Law enforcement responses to hate crimes and bias-related incidents are necessary but they need to be full-spectrum and include many ways for community members to seek and gain support.

Ms. Lacy said the community-led and community-created effort to form the King County Coalition Against Hate and Violence involved a core group of five organizations and coalitions that worked with the Office of Equity and Social Justice for King County. Everyone agreed that all reporting should be completely confidential and anonymous. Reports received are not shared with the police, though individuals who report are encouraged to contact the police if they choose to do so. Information is shared with them about the various ways they can be supported based on what they have experienced. The information gathered will be used to inform a community response by way of policies and practices.

Ms. Wong said between March 2020 and October 2021 there were 499 reports of hate and bias in the community. According to law enforcement reports, in 2020 there were 59 cases prosecuted by the King County prosecuting attorney. As of June 2021, there have been 11 cases prosecuted. The disparities show how much more effective community-based reporting is in building a relationship with survivors to where they have the courage and trust to report. It is recognized, however, that a high number of cases go unreported.

Ms. Wong said the King County Coalition Against Hate and Violence provides culturally and linguistically relevant support. One survivor who speaks limited English was physically assaulted in front of her toddler in Bellevue. She was in shock and was physically hurt, yet she was expected to write her own report. A couple of days later when she was more ready, she found a friend who was willing and able to translate her report, but she was told later the reports were contradictory and therefore the case could not be prosecuted as a hate crime.

With regard to trauma-informed social and emotional support and referral, Ms. Wong said it is known that those who have lived experience understand the historical and intergenerational trauma survivors face. There are examples where community members are in their first language able to feel as though they have been listened to or heard. Strength-based engagement with survivors involves understanding where they are at, and the cultural resiliency survivors have in order to meet them where they are in their healing journey. One hallmark and strength of the coalition is that it is community-led and collective minded. The coalition's base of seven community members represents 23 agencies and more than 25 languages. The coalition's holistic approach to healing includes case management. Clients have been linked with case managers who speak their language and have been afforded things like grocery support, immigration, and legal support. The result has been trust built in and relationships with community members.

The coalition also engages in a systemic analysis and community education. The coalition is not funded by King County, but it seeks to bring awareness to the situation and a lens of understanding of the impacts of systemic and institutional racism on the community.

Ms. Wong shared with the group an overview of the King County data collected through the community partnerships. She noted that incidents are happening across the board in the form of physical assaults, physical threats, vandalism, robbery, verbal assaults, different unfair treatments, discriminatory signage, virtual harassments, virtual dangerous situations, workplace discrimination, and people being coughed or spit on. The survey tool used is open-ended and allows the respondents to share their stories even if they do not fit into a specific category. The bulk of the collected incidents has involved verbal assaults or different unfair treatment. More specific information is captured from the narratives that are tied to the data.

Through the survey tool, respondents are asked to indicate why they believe the perpetrator caused them harm. The vast majority of the responses to the question were tied to race or ethnicity, though the responses also included disability, immigration status, gender identity, sexual identity, religion, age, housing status, and the use of facemasks. Respondents are allowed to choose more than one category. Outreach has been conducted through Chinese Information and Service Center and other community partners and the data shows there has been a huge uptick in anti-Asian racism and violence, which correlates with the Covid-19 pandemic timeline. The Asian community is, however, not the only community facing violence.

Ms. Wong noted that any incident that is hateful is very harmful and can trigger lasting trauma. However, it is important to understand that incidents that do not rise to the level of being a hate crime in a legal sense are not acknowledged, which contributes to the culture of acceptance, which in turn allows more severe incidents to happen.

Ms. Lacy shared with the attendees a map showing where incidents have occurred based on reports made that included a location. She said it was her intent going forward to overlay the map with maps of demographics, adding that she suspects the most incidents are occurring where there are more people of color and immigrants.

There are several partners in the East King County area that are working together. Currently, Eastside For All, Chinese Information and Service Center and Muslim Community Network Association are independent members of the King County Coalition, but the anticipation is that there will be others joining. When Eastside For All joined near the end of 2020, steps were taken to make sure more communities were represented and able to do the outreach. To that end connections were made with 4Tomorrow, which serves the Latinx community; Eastside Embrace, which serves the black and African-American community; Immigrant Women's Community Center, which serves many different immigrant families in East King County; and India Association of Western Washington, which serves the South Asian community.

Data specific to East King County providers, said Ms. Lacy, indicate verbal threats and different unfair treatments are the top two categories. She pointed out that together more than half of the incidents reported are crimes or potential crimes. That is important given that 88 percent of the incidents were not reported to law enforcement. Communities of color are often reluctant to report to the police for a number of reasons; the same is true for undocumented community members. The result is that many suffer in silence and have no confidence that anything will be done. To date, about four percent of the 60 Eastside incidents gathered have involved complaints about the police themselves.

Ms. Rose shared with the group details about a number of cases that have occurred in the

various Eastside cities. She reiterated that not all incidents get reported to anyone, so the known incidents represent only a subset of the total.

Lalita Uppala with India Association of Western Washington concurred that the number of reported incidents is not an accurate representation of her community's experience with the bullying and racism being experienced. The reality is the number of incidents skyrocketed following 9/11. The organization has not previously had the capacity to document such incidents, yet it has always stepped up to organize quarterly hate crime info sessions to raise awareness in the community. The data collected, to date, shows that verbal assault is one of the most frequently occurring forms of bullying the community encounters, impacting personal safety and mental health. The organization recognizes the need to address the situation with a community-led and culturally relevant approach to reporting, educating, creating awareness, and addressing culturally nuanced coping strategies before things get to the level of classic hate crimes such as the one that occurred in September in Lynnwood that resulted in loss of life for a Sikh individual.

Ms. Lacy shared data information regarding incidents by cultural groups and by age. She noted the data collected by Chinese Information and Service Center showed an increase in the number of reports made by seniors. The data shows that Asian seniors are being targeted disproportionately at an increasing rate, though across East King County there is a more even distribution in terms of the age of survivors. A third of all incidents take place at private businesses or workplaces. It is important to be able to go to the business community and share what is being seen and reported, to gain their insights and to learn whether or not they have any kind of supports in place for their employees. Public schools have been identified as another place where incidents are occurring, as well as on public streets and sidewalks.

Ms. Wong said there have been meetings with police chiefs on the Eastside to talk about the Coalition and how each can support the other. The police have acknowledged that the number of incidents reported to them is far fewer than the actual number of incidents. She said Chinese Information and Service Center has 217 current cases. Some of those incidents have been reported by the survivors to law enforcement, but in some cases, they were told their situation involved free speech and not criminal activity. For many, making a report to the police and being told nothing will be done only adds to that trauma. Survivors face lasting trauma, some of which is triggered by systemic barriers that continue to perpetuate harm, leading to feelings of fear and a lack of safety. Many fear leaving their homes, and many simply feel hopeless and experience anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.

With regard to recommendations, Ms. Uppala noted the need to center the voice of the BIPOC communities in policy making, and the need to ensure budgets reflect and support the activities of the various organizations against racism, bullying and hate crimes, in particular, activities and policies that can be community-led, community-informed and culturally relevant.

Ms. Wong highlighted the need to make investments in promoting community messaging and visibility on anti-racism and anti-hate. Many survivors report not having support and not knowing who to go to for help. Collective messaging and visibility could generate feelings of safety. Investing in culturally responsive mental health support and survivor support services is needed. There is a lack of such services, and where they do exist, they are often fee based, which is a barrier for many clients. There is also a need to provide advocacy and legal services to victims via pro bono lawyers.

Ms. Rose stated that incidents of hate and violence do not occur in a vacuum, which means solutions also cannot occur in a vacuum. There have been instances which could have been so much worse if a bystander had not stepped in. Community education needs to be expanded

with strong messaging about how anyone can provide support in the moment. Different strategies and tools for intervening in the moment need to be shared with the community. The work is exhausting, challenging and seemingly never-ending, and a lot of support is needed to keep it going through partnering.

Ms. Lacy allowed that a lot of work goes into connecting with various systems. There have been meetings with the police, with mental health professionals, the King County prosecutor's office, and with King County Councilmembers during which proposals were made for possible new hate crimes supports. Most of the work occurring at that level is expensive and required, but it is unfunded. The need did not just crop up in 2020, or even at the end of 2016 when the previous president was elected. There was a marked escalation of incidents in the aftermath of 9/11, especially against the Muslim community and all black and brown folks, particularly those who were immigrants. There is a clear need to institutionalize the ability of the community to prevent and respond.

Michael Itti, executive director of Chinese Information and Service Center, said the agency was created in 1972 by community volunteers. For nearly 50 years the organization has worked to support and respond to community needs by providing services to families from early learners to older adults. He noted his appreciation for the time and engagement of the members of the various human services commissions. He said his desire was to see more partners join the Coalition in order to better respond to the community throughout East King County.

Ms. Lacy said Eastside For All focuses on race and social justice advocacy in East King County. The anti-hate work is very much a part of the work of the organization.

Mr. Stutz thanked the presenters for the information shared and turned the floor over to Ms. Badh to address the questions logged in the chat column during the presentation.

Ms. Badh said the first question was how to provide support to the victim of a hate crime. Ms. Lacy said persons who are not part of an organization that provides services can refer victims to one of the community-based organizations, and they can talk to the victims about contacting local law enforcement. The various cities have different reporting tools; the city of Bellevue has an online option for reporting bias-motivated behavior. Providing support is largely about listening, letting the victims know they are not alone, and asking them what they need.

Ms. Badh said the next question pointed out the significant rise in anti-Semitism and asked if the Coalition is working with Jewish organizations to track incidents in King County. Ms. Wong said the ongoing work of the Coalition is to support the communities where hate and bias is happening, and to partner in ways that will provide the needed support. The Coalition is currently in an expansion phase and is bringing on new community members interested in the work. The goal is to work with those impacted by hate and bias and who are currently underrepresented.

Ms. Badh read a question that acknowledged the number of incidents reported to law enforcement and asked if it is known how many of those reports have actually been given a case number. Ms. Lacy said that would be a question for law enforcement to answer.

Ms. Badh shared a question about how the Coalition is working with city councils and police chiefs to create awareness and action plans to address the hesitation of victims to report incidents to the police. Ms. Wong said there is a clear need to partner with cities and police departments. She stressed that the Coalition is not police based and understands the harm law enforcement has done to communities of color, particularly black and brown communities.

Ms. Badh read a question that highlighted the fact that many incidents occur in public spaces where there is a likelihood of having witnesses present and asked if perpetrators feel their behavior is tolerated by the community. Ms. Rose said in many cases that is exactly the situation. Absent strong community messaging, people are feeling enabled to commit acts of hate and bias without repercussion. The same contributes to the feeling of hopelessness for the victims and makes them less likely to reach out for help. There is a clear need for increased support for bystander training, intervention, and awareness.

Mr. Itti said the organization has reached out to the leadership of King County Metro and Seattle Public Schools. The challenge for Metro is finding ways for people to feel safe when riding a bus, particularly someone who does not speak English. Should they become a victim on a bus in an enclosed space, they should feel as though they have a way to request assistance. Additionally, others on the bus should be informed about ways they can intervene as a bystander.

Ms. Badh asked if there is such a thing as bystander training and where one might go for that. Ms. Lacy said one very well-known resource is the Hollaback Organization which provides frequent training online. There are also different local groups that partner with the Coalition at the local level.

Ms. Uppala shared that India Association of Western Washington has used API Chaya, a Seattle-based organization that has done extensive bystander training for agency staff and youth in the community. They will be offering training soon with seniors in the community.

Ms. Badh asked if there are plans to provide training in the schools relating to anti-Asian hate. Ms. Wong said there are a lot of school boards. The Coalition has established relationships with some of them and is working to establish relationships with others. There are clear capacity issues, however, given that the Coalition has a limited number of staff, but there is a desire to focus on anti-bullying, anti-hate, and anti-racism work, and to encourage the schools to have an anti-racist curriculum.

Breakout Sessions

City staff reported on the discussions of each group.

Ms. Roberts reported that her group participants had all been impacted when they learned about the scale of the hate in the area. The group discussed the Coalition is missing members from the Jewish and Native American communities. There was a discussion around the fact that grassroots organizations are doing most of the work. The need for more bystander training was discussed, including the notion of posting signs in transportation areas in different languages indicating where to call to report a hate crime. There was a discussion about how to support capacity building and financial support for the organization.

Ms. Badh said her group discussed the need for more information about bystander training. Concerns were voiced about incidents that are not technically a crime and the need for law enforcement agencies to refer victims to agencies for help. There was a discussion about the need for commissions to look at the organizations that work in the areas of hate and bias, and the need to fund them. There were concerns voiced about the underreporting of incidents. The group was glad to learn there are organizations like the Coalition where incidents can be reported but stressed the need to get information out to the public about where and how to report incidents.

Ms. Stangland said her group members were surprised at the data presented, particularly in

terms of the overall numbers. There was support for bystander training, and training so people can know how to handle an incident should they have hate or bias aimed at them. There was a desire voiced to see relationships built between city government and the school district, both of which tend to work in silos. The group agreed there should be more events that encourage integration and crossover so people can know they are supported. The group members voiced their support for organizations in the community that are doing the work of making sure the needs are being met in the community. The fact that 51 percent of the reported incidents occur in public spaces highlighted the need for getting information out about not tolerating acts of hate and bias.

Ms. Negrila said there were concerns and frustrations expressed by her group about the underreporting of incidents and what to do about it. The group recognized the importance of knowing where incidents are taking place. Many noted they were not aware there is a tracking tool and found it very helpful to learn that there is. There was agreement that there is a lack of trust and a need to improve relationships with the police. The group had creative ideas about supporting outreach programs and bystander training. It was noted that the Bellevue Human Services Commission is regularly attended by a police officer and the suggestion was made the same should be the case for other commissions.

Ms. O'Reilly said her group members made comments about the importance of victims of hate and bias incidents to have sufficient trust to talk to people from organizations that are part of the Coalition and to know that they will be heard. It was recognized that many people have experienced a sadness about hate and bias crimes becoming a part of the culture of the community. Most concerning is the fact that such behavior is often tolerated. One member of the group pointed out that bystander training is needed for those involved in incidents in large groups but stressed the need for bystander training for those involved in incidents involving small groups where some of the more overt things that happen are likely to occur. The group highlighted the need to recognize that many BIPOC-led organizations are not well funded, and their members are working for free. The need to support the programs financially was discussed. A commissioner from Issaquah talked about the recent development of their equity board and how that helped her be more aware of things in the community that may discount or leave out the BIPOC community.

Ms. Miller said her group noted how the presentation had pointed out the importance of where to look for data. Looking only to a local city to understand what is happening in the community could miss almost all of the problem. The group stressed the need to work closely with the school districts to make sure there are safe places for kids to report incidents. Students need to understand that being tough does not mean having to bear burdens on their own. There was a conversation about how the work of addressing hate and bias fits into the larger need for mental health support. The discussion highlighted the need to work with and support victims while also addressing the rage and hate in the perpetrators.

Dr. Farwell said her group members agreed in regard to wanting people in the community to know that services exist and how to connect with them. The members also agreed that BIPOC should be centered in the process and asked how to ensure that it is happening. The group recognized that a big piece of the work of commissions is allocating funds and as such, is in a position of earmarking financial resources to programs that are helping to support the effort. There was an interest in learning more about bystander training, and in thinking about the larger context for services for people affected by hate crimes and bias, including interpretation, legal services, and culturally responsive mental health work. The group voiced an interest in knowing more about organizations that are formally engaged in the topic and organizations that are hubs for communities likely to be impacted by hate crimes and bias.

Ms. Esparza said her group commented in regard to data where there is not just one source of

truth. Looking in only one place will mean voices and representation will be missed. Group members also focused on viewing hate and bias not just as a human service issue but also as a public safety issue. Public safety has associated with it a lot of data, measurements, and funding; the anti-hate and bias work needs to be viewed as a part of that. It was observed by one group member that cities have found ways to address the safety of some people, but not necessarily all people. The discussion flowed to how the presentation might inform the work of the commissions and the funding to address the needs. It was noted that there is no way to prioritize between housing stability, food security and the important work focused on the physical and emotional safety of residents. The suggestion was made to stop the focus on silo funding and to think outside of the box, which could include shared budgets across city departments, and community engagement in budgeting to determine what the community wants to see funded, both in public safety and human services.

Ms. Miller took a moment to highlight and celebrate city of Bellevue Human Services Manager Alex O'Reilly who has been serving the Eastside community for a couple of decades. She acknowledged that Ms. O'Reilly would soon be retiring and thanked her for her years of service.

Mr. Stutz stressed the need for each commission to take the time to talk about the next steps and making valuable use of the data collected and shared with the joint commissions.

5. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Hamilton. The motion was seconded by Ms. Carlson and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Stutz adjourned the meeting at 8:35 p.m.