

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on February 21, 2024.

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

January 3, 2024
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Amirfaiz

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Piper

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Donna Adair, Asma Ahmed, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hiltz, Andrew Ndayambaje, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services; Karen Phu, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis

POLICE LIAISON: Major Mark Tarantino

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 by Chair Mansfield who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Piper.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. December 5, 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 – None

Chair Mansfield took a moment to note that under Ordinance 6752, the topics about which the public may speak during a meeting are limited to subject matters related to the city of Bellevue

government and within the powers and duties of the Human Services Commission. Additional information about the new rules of decorum governing conduct of the public during meetings can be found in Ordinance 6752.

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

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis reported that the process of recruiting applicants to fill the vacant Commission seat are under way.

The Council held its first meeting of the new year on January 2 and re-elected Mayor Robinson and elected Councilmember Malakoutian as Deputy Mayor. The Council also focused on the legislative agenda for 2024 and identified issues for which to advocate.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS – None

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Bylaws Update

Assistant City Attorney Karen Phu explained that the Human Services Commission is governed by Chapter 3.61 of the Bellevue City Code. The chapter requires the Commission to adopt bylaws and procedures that are consistent with the requirements set out in the city code. Recently the City Council amended the code for all boards and commissions relative to the meeting rules, and the existing meeting rules spelled out in the bylaws must be updated to conform to the new city code.

Three substantive changes to the bylaws were brought to the table, beginning with Article V Section G, the remote participation rules. The change allows for greater flexibility for Commissioners to participate in meetings remotely. Rather than requiring Commissioners to request remote participation at a prior meeting, the change allows for Commissioners to simply notify the presiding officer and the staff liaison no later than noon of the day prior to a meeting. The rule limiting the number of remote participants will remain in effect, however, where there are more than three wishing to participate remotely, the staff liaison will make the decision as to which three requests should be granted.

The second change related to Article VII Section E, the rules for public participation. The changes conform with the updated city code relative to the rules of decorum for public comment, including limits on topics discussed to matters related to the city of Bellevue government and to the subject matters in the powers and duties of the Commission. The new rules also identify specific conduct which may be considered disruptive during meetings and identifies certain categories of prohibited conduct, and clarify the process for enforcement of rule violations and

disruptions.

The third change is recommended but is not required. It relates to Article VI Section E and the Commission's order of business. Currently the bylaws include two oral communication periods, one at the beginning and one at the end of each meeting. The proposal is to eliminate the second of the two, mirroring the City Council meeting rules. Removing the second public comment period from the Commission's bylaws will create consistency with City Council procedures and will also provide the Commission with more flexibility of its meetings. The Commission could still, at its option, vote to amend an agenda to add additional comment periods as it sees fit.

Karen Phu explained that two process steps are necessary in order to modify the Commission's bylaws. Changes must first be presented at a meeting, then at the Commission's next regular meeting the Commission must vote to approve the changes on the strength of a two-thirds majority vote.

The Commission gave staff direction to bring the proposed bylaw changes to the next regular meeting for a vote.

B. Staff Review

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw reminded the Commissioners that applications for the upcoming funding cycle would open in March and close in April. A big shift is coming to the way the funding recommendations will be conducted. The staff certainly will answer questions in line with their professional expertise, but staff lacks the capacity to be constantly seeking additional information and clarification from agencies to answer Commission questions about applications or programs. The previous practice proved to be somewhat inequitable given that agencies asked to answer follow-up questions took the opportunity to better tell their stories, giving them an unfair advantage. The staff will receive the applications and will fill out some preliminary information to be provided to the Commission.

Ruth Blaw shared with the Commissioners the staff review document that will be filled out for each application, along with an example drawn from a previous application.

Vice Chair Singh pointed out that the staff review document did not include a column for how much was previously funded. Human Services Planner Christy Stangland said that column was removed during the previous funding cycle as a way of making sure of equitable funding. The idea was to move away from the notion of funding as a way of keeping the status quo and to keep the focus on the needs in the community.

Commissioner White voiced recalling discussion during the previous funding cycle about agencies getting funding from alternative sources, particularly the larger organizations, that included fundraising and donations, and asked if the Commission should factor those dollars in when making funding decisions. Christy Stangland said one way to view those other dollars is that they make leveraging Bellevue funds easier for the agency. Some agencies may indicate not being able to offer a specific program without funding from the city. It is up to the Commissioners to decide each agency's stance.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza added that the Commission will be receiving each agency's full application containing all of that information. The staff review is intended to serve as highlighted issues for ease of reference. The Commission has endorsed a strategic plan that provides some emphasis on how to evaluate where to direct dollars. It is true that the larger agencies are able to raise a lot of money, but they also provide a lot of programs and services in the community. Other agencies do not have those same opportunities.

Chair Mansfield agreed that the large agencies have numerous programs and do a lot of work in the community, and the budgets they list in their applications are complete. Even large agencies may not have funding available for the specific program request outlined in their applications. It cannot simply be assumed that a large agency with a large overall budget has the funds for a specific program.

Commissioner Halsted referred to the cost per service unit line item on the form and asked if it represents an average where there are multiple service units. Christy Stangland said there is no way to divide out the various service units where there is more than one given that there is no way to know how the agency is allocating other funds. For a program having bed nights, case management and employment services, only a single cost per service unit will be shown, with each averaged out. That has been the practice over the last several funding cycles.

Toni Esparza noted that some agencies will come in with separate applications for separate programs, and in those instances the cost per service unit will be clearer.

Commissioner Halsted commented that the applications will have two datapoints, what was done previously and what is projected for the year to come. If only two datapoints, it will be difficult to tell if a doubling is too much or if it makes sense given the general trendline. It would be helpful to have data from more previous years of serving Bellevue residents, even if the program was not previously funded by the city. Toni Esparza agreed to ponder how to do that but stressed that when providing data about past funding amounts or service units, care must be taken to avoid persuasion to fund a repetitive contract over a new agency.

Chair Mansfield said there also is the issue of new programs that do not have previous data to consider. Commissioner Halsted suggested new programs must be taken at face value, whereas programs that have been operational for a few years can be subjected to higher expectations.

Christy Stangland added that any data prior to 2023 will not automatically be included in the applications. To gather the data would require going back to previous reports.

Major Tarantino asked how programs are verified to be assisting people from Bellevue. Christy Stangland said staff visit all of the funded agencies on an every-other-year cycle. The monitoring visits include gathering all of the agency's documents relative to funded programs. The reviews include payrolls, policies and procedures and client files all to make sure all contract obligations are adhered to. Toni Esparza added that in addition to the visits, all contracted agencies are required to submit quarterly reports. Those reports must be filed prior to receiving funding.

Commissioner White referred to program accessibility and noted that for four questions the applicant can answer “other” even if it does not make sense to do so given the question. Christy Stangland reminded the Commissioners that the application is used by all of the participating jurisdictions. The questions in the application all have been agreed to by the jurisdictions. There will be some slight changes for the 2024 year. Many of the questions have drop-down menus with answers to choose. If additional information is not included by the applicant, it will not be available for the Commission to consider. In the workshops, the applicants are being urged to provide all of the information the Commission will need to make an informed decision.

Toni Esparza clarified that the questions staff has previously been asked by the Commission to find answers for have all been legitimate questions. The growing number of applications is largely the reason why staff will not be able to take the time to seek additional information going forward. Agencies are being offered very high level assistance by staff in regard to filling out the applications, and agencies are being told to be very clear up front because there will be no attempts to clarify the data.

Commissioner Halsted asked if the purpose of staff review is to make it easier for the Commissioners to review the applications. In many cases it will be necessary to read the application in order to gain a full understanding. Toni Esparza said the staff review form was drafted based on both staff experience and the Commission’s discussions. The intent is to make sure the most-discussed issues, like service unit cost, as easily accessible as possible. The staff review is intended to serve only as a reference document. Having the staff review document in advance aids in directing agencies to be clear about points of emphasis and to address common points where errors traditionally have occurred.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis asked for a sense of how many staff hours have been required in the past to follow up on specific questions raised during the Commission’s review process. Ruth Blaw said the sheer volume of applications increases the amount of staff time needed to review them. Given that the exact number of applications cannot be predicted, it cannot be said for sure how many staff hours might be needed to run down additional information. While additional staff, if brought onboard, would help, there still would be the issue of the imbalance that occurs when an agency, in answering requests for additional information, gets an additional opportunity to tell their story, giving them an advantage over agencies not afforded the same opportunity.

Christy Stangland added that seeking answers to questions raised by the Commission during the review process not only taxes city staff resources, it means agency staff must also devote additional time generating the answers.

C. Election of Officers

Chair Mansfield announced resigning from the Commission in order to pursue additional education and deal with life complications.

Toni Esparza noted Chair Mansfield had served on the Commission since 2017 and had been a part of many funding cycles. Toni Esparza said Chair Mansfield’s commitment, expertise and

insight increased over time and the city has benefited in many ways.

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

Commissioner Amirfaiz nominated Vice Chair Singh to serve as Chair.

Chair Mansfield nominated Commissioner White to serve as Chair.

There were no additional nominations.

The vote was 3-2 in favor of Vice Chair Singh.

A motion to open nominations for Vice Chair was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Singh carry.

Vice Chair Singh nominated Commissioner White to serve as Vice Chair.

Commissioner Amirfaiz nominated Commissioner Halsted to serve as Vice Chair.

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

The vote was 4-1 Commissioner Halsted was elected to serve as Vice Chair.

Regarding the outcomes and the staff review, Commissioner Amirfaiz said it was a lack of clarity on applications that in the past triggered the questions asked by the Commission for additional information. That is why questions were asked of some applicants but not from others. Applicants should be urged to provide complete and clear information in the applications.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mansfield adjourned the meeting at 6:50 p.m.