

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

May 18, 2026
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Phan, Commissioners Besana, Hays, Gonzalez, Perelman, Singh

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Rashid

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Camron Parker, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hilts, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

POLICE LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Rashid.

Chair Phan welcomed new Commissioner Carolyn Besana, and the Commissioners took a moment to introduce themselves.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. March 16, 2026

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

B. April 20, 2026

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

A motion to approve the minutes was made by x . The motion was seconded by x and the motion carried unanimously.

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Phan 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.

Adama Gonzalez spoke representing NISO and explained that the organization was established in 2018 as a community-led initiative designed from community input. It was initially partnered with Side Pathway before expanding with funding from King County. The organization has influenced policy changes in King County, an accomplishment the organization is proud of. NISO works with hundreds of families who have children from birth to age five. The focus is on preparing children for kindergarten readiness by empowering families with advocacy tools and support. The organization concentrates on four primary service areas: health, education, basic needs, and parent support. Many staff members, referred to as promotoras or family liaisons, are hired directly from the community and often are former participants in the program. The organization enjoys partnerships with various school districts, municipalities including Bellevue and Kirkland, the Bellevue Police Department, and numerous nonprofit organizations. The organization collects data to improve services and outcomes for participating families. NISO has for the first time submitted an application to the city for grant funding.

Axton Burton, Executive Director of Pride Across the Bridge, referenced the recent fatal stabbing of transgender teenager Juniper Blessing in Seattle and noted that the suspect was a Bellevue resident who surrendered several days later. The limited public response from Bellevue leadership has been deeply painful for the queer and transgender communities. The tragedy has felt profoundly local and personal. There have been other losses as well within the transgender community, including a transgender elder from Bellevue and a transgender teenage girl from Duvall two years ago. The grieving process is ongoing. Pride Across the Bridge, which organizes more than 330 annual events throughout the Eastside in support of queer communities. The organization's "big book of all things queer" is being translated into four major regional languages to improve accessibility. The organization emerged both from necessity and a desire to create spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals can find community locally rather than being forced to seek support elsewhere. The organization has created a connective infrastructure and accountable queer-led leadership rooted in lived experience and community relationships, which previously has not existed in Bellevue or neighboring Eastside communities. Isolation, fear, invisibility, and violence remain daily realities for many queer and transgender residents, particularly amid the escalating national rhetoric and policies targeting transgender individuals. The recent tragedy, combined with broader national developments, has intensified fear and grief within the community. Funding from the city of Bellevue will help sustain volunteer-driven programming, provide food and recurring activities, expand multicultural access, and continue building safe spaces where community members can gather, connect, and feel visible and supported.

Significant work remains to be done toward establishing long-needed community infrastructure in Bellevue.

Dr. Janis Clark, founder and president of Safe Homes, explained that the organization was established on June 1, 1995, and it has for nearly three decades served youth, veterans, and families throughout King, Snohomish, Pierce, Thurston, and Kitsap counties. The organization's approach is grounded in trauma-informed care, cultural responsiveness, and strong community partnerships. Particular attention is given to the organization's Women Veterans Division, which was launched in 2009 to address gaps in traditional veteran services affecting women veterans, especially Black and Native women veterans. Many women veterans experience military sexual trauma, domestic violence, homelessness, unemployment, and untreated mental health challenges that are frequently overlooked within existing systems. The Women Veterans Division was created to provide dignified, safe, and culturally grounded support through a four-pillar model designed to promote both sustainability and long-term stability. The model includes housing stability through safe housing for women veterans in crisis, financial education and wealth building through credit improvement and debt reduction, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities connected to living-wage careers and small businesses, and emotional and mental wellness services specifically addressing military sexual trauma through culturally responsive healing practices. A partnership with the city will help to expand housing access, strengthen financial stability, and increase access to trauma-informed care for women veterans who historically have been underserved.

Meredith Myre spoke representing Imagine Housing as the Housing Stability Resident Services Manager. Imagine Housing has provided affordable housing on the Eastside for nearly forty years. Over the past fifteen years, the organization has expanded its work to include resident services aimed at helping individuals and families connect with resources and maintain housing stability. The organization has submitted funding applications totaling \$285,000 to support resident services programming, along with an additional request of \$55,000 for behavioral health partnerships serving the organization's most vulnerable residents. In 2025, ninety-nine percent of the residents served maintained stable housing for at least twelve months. Ongoing city funding for staffing and on-site resident services is essential to sustaining housing stability for Bellevue households, including individuals transitioning out of homelessness. Resident services creates supportive environments that allow residents to move from survival toward long-term stability and independence. Staff hosted more than 470 community events in 2025 to strengthen resident connections and reduce isolation, while more than 8,900 referrals were made to partner organizations and service providers for assistance with food, behavioral health, financial support, job training, education, health care, and legal services. Over 17,000 basic-needs items such as cleaning supplies and personal care products were distributed to residents in 2025, while more than 1,200 KidVantage orders, including diapers, wipes, strollers, and clothing bundles, were fulfilled. Access to essential items enables residents to direct limited financial resources toward rent and food, thereby promoting long-term housing stability. The average household income among the residents is approximately \$28,292 annually, with seventy-seven percent of residents earning less than thirty percent of area median income. The Commission was thanked for its past support, and was asked to continue funding for the 2027–2028 cycle.

Terra Hakam, a board member and volunteer advocate with Family La Casa of King County,

said the organization's mission is to support children, families, and communities facing economic injustice throughout King County by providing free advocacy services in family law cases, connecting families with support services, and pursuing systemic change. The organization advocates for hundreds of children annually in high-risk custody cases and reported that in 2025 the organization served eighteen Bellevue residents across six cases. During the first quarter of 2026 alone, the organization has already worked on six cases involving fifteen Bellevue residents. The severe challenges faced by children involved in complex custody disputes, including exposure to domestic violence, neglect, abuse, and prolonged family conflict. More than half of parents involved in family law cases in King County cannot afford legal representation, leaving courts without a full understanding of children's circumstances or family dynamics when making critical decisions. Family La Casa provides objective insight into children's living conditions and experiences to ensure that judges receive informed recommendations focused on child safety and well-being. An example cited described an ongoing Bellevue case involving three children living with their mother and requiring Russian-language interpretation services. The case involves allegations of physical abuse, abandonment, and neglect, and has continued for more than a year and a half. Advocates and legal staff have already submitted two reports to the court, with trial proceedings still pending. The organization's recommendations will play an important role in helping ensure the children's safety and minimizing additional trauma. The Commission was asked to continue supporting the organization with funding during the 2027–2028 cycle.

Zakira Abu spoke on behalf of MCNA regarding the Eastside Youth Mentorship and Mental Wellness applications. Immigrant, refugee, African immigrant, and multilingual youth across Bellevue and the Eastside often experience isolation, bullying, identity pressures, and mental health challenges without access to trusted mentors who understand their lived experiences. Through partnerships with the Bellevue School District, Eastside Pathways, Africans on the Eastside, and local families, the organizations has developed mentorship, STEM and robotics programming, sports activities, and family engagement opportunities intended to create trusted and supportive spaces for youth. Examples were cited in regard to programming at Ardmore Elementary School where students who were initially quiet reportedly became more engaged, took leadership roles in robotics activities, developed confidence, and strengthened connections with peers and family members. The initiative represents preventive community-building work intended to foster belonging and support before young people become disconnected or lose hope. The Commission was thanked for its commitment to youth wellness, prevention, and equitable access, and hope was expressed for continued partnership in building stronger futures for Eastside youth.

Jennifer Savage with The Sophia Way explained that the organization serves women experiencing homelessness by providing shelter, safety, and pathways to permanent housing. More than 500 women accessed services during the previous year, and over 140 women were successfully supported into housing. The women served are individuals facing extremely low incomes, trauma, and multiple barriers to stability, but they are able to rebuild their lives when provided with appropriate support. Homelessness among women extends beyond a lack of housing and involves the need for consistent trauma-informed care, stable shelter, food access, and clear pathways toward recovery and independence. The Sophia Way's approach focuses on both emergency shelter and long-term stabilization through housing programs, day centers,

support services, and collaborative community partnerships. The Commission was thanked for its continued commitment to investing in effective solutions that create lasting stability within the community.

Mike Stewart, newly appointed Chief Executive Officer of Kindering, explained that Kindering which was founded in Bellevue more than sixty years ago, annually serves over 800 Bellevue children with diverse developmental needs and their families. Appreciation was expressed for the city's support of the organization's free childcare consultation, parent education, and family stabilization services, which are critical resources during increasingly turbulent times. Demand for the services continues to grow due to economic hardship, housing instability, and heightened immigration-related concerns affecting families. The stressors directly impact child development and disproportionately affect children of color and children with disabilities, who face elevated risks of expulsion from childcare and preschool settings. The inequities align with concerns identified in the city's human services needs assessments. Despite the challenges, ninety-six percent of children referred to the organization's childcare and preschool consultation program in the previous year were retained in their childcare settings. The success is attributable to the collaborative relationships developed with early learning providers throughout Bellevue. Kindering's parent education and family support programming, which offers culturally respectful coaching and group classes to caregivers of young children, help families address behavioral concerns, reduce stress, and build confidence in supporting child development. The organization's Families in Transition program, which serves children and families experiencing housing instability, including immigrant and refugee families, provides services that include developmental evaluations, pediatric therapies, infant mental health therapy, outreach, case management, and connections to housing, employment, and food resources. Eighty-eight percent of participating children made measurable progress toward developmental goals during the previous year. The Commission was thanked for its partnership. Continued investment in the programs will provide life-changing support for children and greater stability for families facing significant challenges.

Sharmila Rathinam, founder of Eat Happy Now, explained that the organization was established three and a half years ago to address the problem of perfectly usable food being discarded into landfills. Through the use of technology and a proprietary application, the organization connects culturally relevant produce, grocery stores, and restaurants directly with individuals experiencing food insecurity. The organization's operational model is focused on real-time food redistribution, with food being collected and delivered within an hour without the need for centralized storage, packing, or sorting facilities. The organization fills an important gap in the food assistance ecosystem by increasing access to culturally relevant foods that are often unavailable through traditional food banks. Much of the organization's work involves educating and advocating with food donors who may not initially understand the concept of food rescue and redistribution. Since its launch, Eat Happy Now has rescued more than one million pounds of food and served nearly 50,000 individuals throughout Washington State. The Commission was thanked for its prior investment and support which has resulted in the rescue and distribution of more than 300,000 pounds of food in Bellevue alone, benefiting more than 3,800 food-insecure residents through monthly food access support. In 2025, the organization rescued more than 100,000 pounds of food and served over 3,400 Bellevue residents. The organization's technology platform allows for the collection of detailed real-time data, and the recent incorporation of

artificial intelligence tools has enabled the organization to generate more meaningful impact reports and operational analyses. Future funding will be used to support expanded food rescue operations, additional culturally relevant food distribution, and student advocacy efforts through the creation of Eat Happy Now clubs at local high schools. Appreciation was expressed the Commission's continued support. Operational efficiencies and increased capacity make possible the organization's data-driven approach.

Tia Kennebrew, Program Director for New Bethlehem Programs with Catholic Community Services, thanked the Commission for its continued support and said the organization's guiding principle is that all individuals deserve housing. The New Bethlehem Programs operate both a twenty-four-hour shelter system utilizing hotel and facility spaces, and a day center serving families and single adults. The services available through the day center include showers, food, hygiene products, and safe parking accommodations. The organization has operated in the Kirkland area for the past ten years and has experienced a growing demand for services as more individuals and families seek support. During the previous year, the shelter served and housed forty-one families, helping them transition into permanent supportive housing or rapid rehousing programs. Many families arrive with significant barriers, including eviction histories and criminal backgrounds. The organization employs a low-barrier, trauma-informed approach to service delivery. The clients are not required to provide extensive documentation for assistance, and the shelter serves undocumented residents as well. New Bethlehem Programs is the only family shelter on the Eastside offering twenty-four-hour enhanced wraparound services combined with case management. Additional services include housing assistance, employment support, tutoring for children provided by volunteers, hygiene supplies, and meals for day center visitors. The Eastside community relies heavily on the services. The organization is committed to continuing its work to ensure that families receive housing and supportive care.

Miriam Padilla, a mother of seven children, four of which still live at home, shared a personal account of surviving domestic violence and prolonged housing instability. Described were periods of staying with family and friends, as well as living in a vehicle with children until the vehicle was ultimately towed, leaving the family homeless. Even after securing employment, the family could only afford to rent a single room shared by five people, without adequate space or facilities to provide a stable home environment for the children. There were repeated unsuccessful attempts to obtain housing assistance and support from various organizations before eventually connecting with 4 Tomorrow. The initial interaction with a coordinator from the organization created a sense of safety and trust that had been absent for a long time. After obtaining improved employment and sufficient income to pay rent but lacking funds for move-in expenses, the organization was again contacted for assistance. Participation in the organization's life services program provided financial support for move-in costs and reconnected the family with the same supportive coordinator. As a result, the children were able to move into a stable apartment where they now feel safe and secure. The testimony further described the ongoing guidance and support provided through the program, including resource referrals, assistance navigating challenges, and access to therapy services. It was emphasized that while many families initially appear to need only financial support, the organization also provides healing, clarity, and empowerment that enable long-term stability and renewed confidence in building a better future.

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS -
None

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw distributed a schedule outlining the upcoming special meetings related to the Commission's funding review process. The document summarized the total number of funding requests received, the number of applications submitted, the number of new programs under consideration, and the amounts budgeted for funding.

The Commissioners were informed that three special meetings were scheduled for June 15, July 6, and July 20. Because the Commission lacked a quorum at the previous meeting, the schedule has been adjusted accordingly. The Commissioners have been divided into two working groups, each paired with staff support. The Commissioners will work collaboratively with staff to review areas of need and develop preliminary funding recommendations. The special meetings will occur in a nearby conference space rather than the regular meeting room, and while members of the public can observe, the sessions will not be recorded and will not include public interaction.

The Commissioners were encouraged to review the schedule carefully in preparation for the upcoming funding discussions. Additional details, including staff recommendations for the first round of meetings, will be provided at the next regular meeting.

Potential scheduling concerns were voiced relating to the July 6 meeting date because of its proximity to the Fourth of July holiday weekend. Chair Phan encouraged the Commissioners to identify conflicts as early as possible in order to avoid scheduling complications.

Ruth Blaw explained that there is some flexibility within the broader September and October timeline if meeting dates need to be adjusted. Rescheduling will likely involve moving the agenda sequence rather than adding additional meetings. The need to have a quorum for each scheduled meeting was stressed.

Commissioner Hayes suggested revisiting attendance concerns closer to the meeting dates, possibly during the June 1 or June 15 meetings, to confirm if the July 6 meeting remained workable. Ruth Blaw agreed that periodic reassessment will be beneficial.

Commissioner Hayes then shifted the discussion toward the practical challenges of reviewing the large number of funding applications and asked staff if there are recommended strategies or organizational methods, particularly for newer members, to use when evaluating the applications. In response, Ruth Blaw explained that Commissioners will be assigned particular categories for focused discussion during the special meetings.

Commissioner Singh said the applications gradually become easier to evaluate once familiarity with the format is gained. The Commissioners should read all of the applications carefully, paying close attention to the populations served, organizational descriptions, and programmatic details.

Chair Phan acknowledged the substantial workload and advised the Commissioners to pace themselves to avoid becoming overwhelmed or allowing applications to blend together. Highlighting, note-taking, and periodic breaks have been essential strategies during prior funding cycles. Chair Phan stressed the importance of understanding the organizations' work within the community rather than attempting to memorize extensive statistical data, noting that the Commissioners can always refer back to the application materials as needed. The Commissioners were encouraged to consult with staff whenever clarification is needed because staff members work closely with the applicant organizations and possess additional contextual knowledge. It is important to give each organization adequate attention and consideration.

Commissioner Singh expressed appreciation for the staff, noting that the funding review process would not be possible without their support and coordination. The staff play a central role in the Commission's effectiveness and success.

Ruth Blaw explained that during the deliberations the staff will answer questions based on information contained in the submitted applications but will not contact agencies to obtain additional responses. The approach is intended to preserve fairness and avoid creating an uneven playing field in which agencies with faster response times might appear more favorable. Some applications may be incomplete but they nevertheless will be advanced for Commission consideration. The staff recommendations might reflect deficiencies in incomplete applications, although the Commissioners retain discretion in determining how to evaluate such submissions.

Commissioner Basana asked for clarification regarding how the sixty-seven applications were organized and how Commissioners will know which applications corresponded with each special meeting session. Commissioner Singh replied that the applications are generally reviewed in order. Human Services Planner Christy Stangland added that the applications are grouped by service category rather than alphabetically in order to create a more logical and systematic review process. Similar types of applications, such as legal service programs, will be clustered together to help facilitate focused discussion. Staff will provide funding recommendations as part of the review process. The recommendations will be developed using the city's strategic plan and established evaluation guidelines, and they intended only to offer structure amid the substantial disparity between requested funding amounts and available resources. However, Commission remains the ultimate decision-making body and is not required to follow the staff recommendations.

Commissioner Singh encouraged the newer Commissioners to ask as many questions as necessary during the process, emphasizing that even unexpected questions can prompt valuable new perspectives during the deliberations.

Commissioner Perelman asked staff to provide the Commission with information about how much funding each organization received during the previous funding cycle. Ruth Blaw responded that the forthcoming staff recommendation materials will include prior funding allocations as part of the review documentation. Christy Stangland added that the applications also identify prior funding amounts.

By way of disclosing conflicts of interest, Commissioner Perelman noted being a member of the

board of an applicant organization that had submitted multiple funding requests. Ruth Blaw said the Commissioner can remain present during discussions but should recuse themselves from deliberations and recommendations concerning those specific applications. Recusals will apply only to the affected applications rather than the entire funding process, allowing for continued participation in discussions involving all other agencies.

Commissioner Perelman also sought clarification regarding applications that appear to have incomplete or unchecked sections, specifically in regard to new initiatives and how the categories relate to culturally and linguistically specific versus culturally and linguistically responsive services. Ruth Blaw said culturally and linguistically responsive services refers to organizations adapting services to meet language and cultural needs, such as through translation services, whereas culturally and linguistically specific services refers to organizations fundamentally grounded in and built around the language, culture, or lived experience of the populations served. The Commission expects all funded agencies to demonstrate cultural and linguistic responsiveness in their service delivery.

With regard to the recent commissioner appreciation event organized by the city, Senior Administrative Assistant Gysel Galaviz said the City Clerk's Office was seeking feedback. Chair Phan suggested that future appreciation events should be hosted somewhere outside of City Hall because the commissioners already spend substantial time in the building.

Commissioner Singh voiced appreciation for the event but suggested that there is room for improvement. Commissioners should feel comfortable providing candid feedback to the city regarding ways future appreciation events could be enhanced. Gysel Galaviz clarified that all forms of feedback, including suggestions for improvement, were be welcome and would be relayed appropriately.

Human Services Planner Saada Hilts commented that following the equity and bias training, the Commissioners shared reflections on what would help create a safe, positive, respectful and productive culture during the intensive funding review process. The themes were compiled into a draft framework intended to guide future meetings and deliberations. The proposed community agreement emphasized creating an environment where all Commissioners feel heard, respected, and comfortable asking questions. It also encouraged open and honest dialogue that allows space for differing perspectives and difficult conversations without judgment. Additional principles included approaching funding discussions with confidence, curiosity, kindness, and empathy while remaining mindful of personal bias and maintaining a focus on shared community goals and impacts. The agreement also stressed collaboration, constructive disagreement, viewing mistakes as opportunities for learning, and mutual support among Commissioners throughout the process.

Commissioner Singh proposed adding language emphasizing responsibility and accountability in stewarding taxpayer funds, noting that the Commissioners serve as representatives of the community and therefore carry an obligation to make careful and responsible funding decisions. Saada Hilts agreed to incorporate the statement into the final version of the community agreement and then explained that the updated agreements will be displayed at future meetings as a reminder of the shared expectations and values guiding the Commission's work.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Human Services Convening Funding Recommendations

Christy Stangland introduced the item and clarified that the available funding amounts to \$200,000 per year. The convening funding opportunity is intended to support organizations that bring together educational institutions, human services providers, and other community stakeholders to increase the collective impact through collaboration. The funding originates from Parks and Community Services resources.

Christy Stangland reported that five organizations had applied for the convening funding and that their requests totaled \$395,000. One applicant, Dahlia Living, was deemed ineligible due to missing required documentation. The recommendation of the staff was to allocate \$80,000 each to Eastside For All and Eastside Pathways, with an additional \$40,000 for Hero House.

Commissioner Singh asked why the staff recommendation had not included funding for Leadership Eastside, a valuable program in the community. Christy Stangland responded that although Leadership Eastside is regarded positively, its activities are more focused on convening professionals generally rather than specifically convening human service and educational providers, which is the central purpose of the funding category.

Commissioner Gonzalez asked if Hero House currently operates a formal convening structure. Christy Stangland explained that while Hero House engages in some informal convening activities, it does not currently maintain a formal convening model. Chair Phan added that the agency would like to develop convening activities in response to identified community needs. The distinction is important because the staff recommendation effectively supports the development of a new convening initiative rather than the continuation of an existing formal program.

Christy Stangland explained that during the previous funding cycle both Eastside For All and Eastside Pathways had each received \$100,000. Commissioner Perelman observed that the Eastside Pathways application indicated the prior reduction in funding has led to staff layoffs and significant operational impacts. Christy Stangland clarified that prior funding cycles had not used a competitive application process. The current structure represents a shift toward a Commissioner-led competitive review system.

Commissioner Perelman expressed disagreement with the proposed funding for Hero House. Additional information about the organization should be gathered before supporting the funding. The available convening funds should not be spread too thinly across multiple organizations when at least one established organization has already indicated that prior funding reductions negatively affected staffing and operational capacity. Eastside Pathways serves a critical role on

the Eastside by bringing organizations together and funding for that organization should be restored to the prior funding level of \$100,000. Increasing funding for Eastside For All to the full amount requested should also be done if possible. Both organizations have demonstrated substantial community impact.

Chair Phan summarized the recommendation emerging from the discussion as eliminating funding for Hero House during the current funding cycle and redistributing the proposed \$40,000 allocation equally between Eastside Pathways and Eastside For All.

Commissioner Singh proposed giving \$20,000 of the recommended Hero House funding to Leadership Eastside and splitting the balance between Eastside For All and Eastside Pathways.

Vice Chair Hayes expressed support for maintaining the previous funding levels for Eastside Pathways and Eastside For All. Reductions in funding will likely diminish the organizations' operational capacity and have a negative impact on the community. Hero House appears to represent a newer initiative without a demonstrated track record in formal convening work, whereas Eastside Pathways and Eastside For All have already demonstrated successful outcomes and measurable deliverables. Eastside For All was praised for clearly identifying tangible community impacts within its application materials. Future applicants will benefit from emphasizing measurable outcomes and deliverables more prominently.

Vice Chair Hays also expressed disappointment that Dahlia Living had been deemed ineligible due to incomplete documentation, noting that the organization appears to address important issues related to disability housing and independent living, which is an underserved area that has not yet received significant Commission attention. Interest was expressed in seeing the Commission address such issues in future discussions.

Chair Phan agreed that the needs addressed by Hero House are important, but the organization could potentially participate in future human needs assessment focus groups and other collaborative processes without receiving convening funding at this time. Leadership Eastside's professional networking and leadership development focus is different from the direct service provider convening work carried out by Eastside Pathways and Eastside For All. The latter organizations are more directly engaged in coordinating service delivery and ensuring that residents are connected to necessary community resources, which aligns more closely with the intent of the convening funding category.

Commissioner Basana stated that Eastside For All appears particularly familiar and visible within the community. An interest was expressed in continuing to learn how funding allocation decisions are typically made and stated an openness to additional discussions regarding Hero House and the rationale for reallocating funds to other organizations.

Commissioner Gonzalez then asked if staff had attempted to assist Dahlia Living in correcting the deficiencies that rendered its application ineligible. Christy Stangland explained that multiple outreach attempts were made requesting the required financial documentation, and opportunities had been offered for phone or in-person assistance. Despite repeated requests and clear deadlines, the organization continued to submit the same incomplete materials before eventually

not responding at all. The missing documentation represents the standard nonprofit financial requirements necessary for eligibility. Commissioner Gonzalez voiced regret that Dahlia Living could not be funded because the organization appears to address important needs.

Commissioner Gonzalez agreed with the notion of allocating \$100,000 each to Eastside For All and Eastside Pathways.

Commissioner Perelman asked about Leadership Eastside's primary funding sources. Christy Stangland responded that participant fees, fundraising events, and sponsorships likely constitute the organization's major revenue sources. Detailed budget information was not readily available. Commissioner Perelman clarified that the question stemmed primarily from uncertainty about the organization's nonprofit status rather than opposition to its mission.

Commissioner Singh suggested allocating at least a small amount of funding, possibly \$10,000, to Leadership Eastside. Christy Stangland pointed out that under the funding structure established for the cycle, the minimum allowable award is \$20,000.

Vice Chair Hayes reiterated support for Leadership Eastside's work generally but emphasized that the organization's mission does not align sufficiently with the convening category's intended focus on bringing together service providers to collaboratively address community needs. Even if Dahlia Living had qualified, its proposal may not have fully aligned with the convening purpose of the funding category. The importance of addressing disability-related housing and independent living issues in future Commission discussions was stressed.

A motion to not fund the Hero House application and to redistribute the \$40,000 equally between Eastside Pathways and Eastside For All was made by Vice Chair Hayes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gonzalez and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Draft Funding Recommendation Guidelines

Chair Phan said more than 190 funding applications totaling over \$18 million had been received, making it necessary for the Commission to establish agreed-upon guidelines to ensure equitable recommendations consistent with city policy.

Commissioner Singh asked about the reference to the 2025 Needs Update Priorities. Ruth Blaw said the categories listed, food, shelter and financial assistance, are the three critical needs identified by the 2025 Needs Update.

Vice Chair Hayes commented that while the guidelines appear to be well-constructed overall, relying too heavily on data derived from the 2025 update could be problematic given the rapidly evolving nature of community needs. Conditions and priorities can shift quickly. Stressed was the importance of remaining attentive not only to previously identified community needs but also to where emerging needs might develop during the current funding cycle. The proposed guidelines themselves are satisfactory.

Commissioner Basana said the guidelines are comprehensive and thoughtfully structured.

Specifically referenced was the guideline favoring deeper investment in fewer programs over distributing partial funding broadly across many organizations. Many of the established programs seeking funding are widely recognized within the Bellevue community and are frequently recommended by the city and community resource networks. That level of familiarity and embeddedness within community systems supports the value of maintaining strong, stable funding for organizations with a demonstrated community presence and effectiveness.

Commissioner Basana asked if future application review materials will identify categories such as youth services, immigrant support, and refugee services in a clear and organized format within the Commissioner notebooks and review charts. Christy Stangland confirmed that those classifications will appear in several locations throughout the review materials, including within the staff review summaries and comparative charts showing prior funding allocations and current requests. Youth-focused programs will be specifically highlighted because youth services represents a City Council priority area. Immigrant and refugee services will likewise be identified where applicable, though they will not be grouped into a separate category.

Commissioner Gonzalez asked if the applicant organizations themselves will be made aware of the funding guidelines and stated priorities. Chair Phan clarified that the document under discussion is intended primarily as internal guidance for the Commission. Christy Stangland said the substance of the priorities and evaluation framework has been communicated through the city's supplemental funding guidance distributed to the applicants. Although the wording in the guidelines is more direct and concise, the priorities themselves will not come as a surprise to the applicants because they were already embedded within the city's publicly available funding guidance materials.

Ruth Blaw added that the guidelines are intended to help the Commissioners navigate the difficult reality of having more than 190 applications competing for far fewer resources than are available. The purpose of the guidelines is to provide a shared framework to assist the Commissioners in making difficult funding decisions and prioritizing among the competing requests given that it will not be possible to fund every qualified application.

Commissioner Perelman referred to the guideline calling for the Commission to expand access for Bellevue residents to culturally and linguistically specific human services and recalled previous discussions that involved establishing percentage targets for culturally and linguistically specific funding allocations. What was questioned was if the phrase "expand access" could create confusion or unintended pressure to increase allocations beyond previously discussed benchmarks. Ruth Blaw explained that the language was taken directly from the city's adopted strategic plan. It reflects an aspirational policy statement guiding long-term funding priorities.

Commissioner Perelman expressed concern that the wording could potentially create tension during funding deliberations if Commissioners felt compelled to prioritize expansion even when other categories or priorities might be equally compelling. The language focused simply on "offering access" might provide clearer guidance without implying a mandatory increase in funding percentages. Ruth Blaw responded that because the wording came directly from the adopted strategic plan, staff cannot not independently alter the language within the policy itself. The Commissioners theoretically could choose whether or not to include the statement within the

internal guidance document. The current percentage targets could also evolve over time as the strategic plan continues to develop.

Commissioner Perelman said the concern centered less on changing the strategic plan itself and more on ensuring that Commissioners have clear and internally consistent guidance during the difficult funding discussions. Situations could arise in which the Commissioners will need to balance youth priorities, immigrant and refugee services, and culturally specific services simultaneously, potentially creating philosophical tensions if the language implies mandatory expansion in one area over another. Christy Stangland offered an alternative interpretation of the language, suggesting that “expanding access” could also refer to reaching previously underserved populations or funding programs serving communities not currently well represented within existing services, rather than simply increasing percentages or funding totals across the board.

Christy Stangland emphasized that the language reflects policy priorities that are already adopted by the City Council and therefore cannot simply be rewritten. Commissioner Perelman acknowledged the explanation but reiterated concern that the Commissioners will likely engage in extensive philosophical discussions throughout the funding process and therefore needs clear guidance that balances all competing priorities effectively.

Chair Phan observed that regardless of specific wording, the tensions and balancing challenges are an inherent part of the Commission’s difficult funding responsibilities.

Vice Chair Hayes then requested clarification regarding the distinction between the Council and emerging priorities section and the separate 2025 Needs Update priorities, noting that the categories do not fully overlap. It was asked how the Commissioners are expected to weigh priorities that appear to originate from different policy sources or time periods. Ruth Blaw responded by explaining that the various priorities reflect different waves of emerging community challenges and policy responses. The youth priority originated from mid-biennium Council priorities, while immigrant and refugee support became more prominent due to significant current events and rapidly developing crises over the previous two years. In contrast, the Needs Update priorities emerged somewhat earlier during a period when food insecurity, shelter instability, and financial assistance represented the city’s most acute identified concerns. The priorities do not align perfectly because the city has effectively been responding to successive crises and evolving community conditions. As a result, the overall list of priorities has expanded over time to address both longstanding and emerging needs.

Chair Phan raised a concern regarding the wording of the provision directing the Commissioners to prioritize meaningful and existing programs. The phrase could be interpreted to mean that the Commissioners will be determining if the work of some organizations is meaningful while the work of others’ is not. All organizations seeking funding are engaged in meaningful work from their own perspectives. The language might imply otherwise, even internally during deliberations. It would be better to leave it out of the guidelines.

Commissioner Perelman suggested that rather than removing the phrase entirely, the Commission could identify an alternative word that better reflects the intended evaluation criteria

while avoiding any unintended implications. Simply prioritizing existing programs without any additional qualifier could also create unintended bias against newer initiatives.

Chair Phan proposed replacing “meaningful” with “impactful,” reasoning that organizations are often able to demonstrate measurable community impact through outcomes and data.

Commissioner Perelman agreed that “impactful” would provide a more appropriate and objective standard.

Ruth Blaw clarified that the guideline in question is specifically intended to address situations in which agencies submit multiple applications, leaving the Commission to weigh the relative impacts and sustainability of the existing programs against requests for partial or new funding initiatives.

There was agreement to replace “meaningful” with “impactful.”

Chair Phan then raised an additional question regarding Section 6.1 of the guidelines and asked if the language sufficiently reflects the importance of service navigation programs. Navigation services emerged as a significant issue during the human needs update process. Navigation-related applications constitute a substantial subset of the overall funding requests. Although navigation is not specifically identified within the written guidance, aspects of the Council strategic target areas appear to align closely with the goals and functions of navigation services. Ruth Blaw explained that Section 6.1 represents the formal human services target area language drawn directly from adopted city policy and strategic planning documents. Many navigation programs likely align closely with the target areas, but the Commission cannot independently alter the official wording contained within the adopted strategic plan language.

A motion to approve the Commission funding recommendation guidelines, as amended, was made by Commissioner Gonzalez. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Singh and the motion carried unanimously.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Phan adjourned the meeting at 7:49 p.m.



Liason to the Human Services Commission

6/2/26

Date