

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

September 19, 2023
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Commissioners Halsted, Jain, Piper, White

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Vice Chair Singh

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Mansfield, Commissioner Amirfaiz

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Donna Adair, Andrew Ndayambaje, Department of Parks & Community Services; Nico Quijano, City Manager's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis, excused

POLICE LIAISON: Major Mark Tarantino

GUEST SPEAKERS: Nico Quijano, Homelessness Outreach Program

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Commissioner Halsted who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present with the exception of Vice Chair Singh who joined late, and Chair Mansfield and Commissioner Amirfaiz who were both excused.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. September 6, 2023

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Commissioner Halsted took a moment to note that in compliance with Washington state public disclosure laws regarding the use of public facilities during elections, no election-related topics could be discussed during oral communications or any other public participation portions of the agenda, including promoting or opposing ballot measures, and supporting or opposing a candidate for election, including oneself. Any speaker discussing topics of such a nature will be

asked to stop. Additionally, 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 the conduct of the public during meetings can be found in Ordinance 6752.

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi garbage rats. The Commissioners are under the illusion that they are slaves.

Commissioner Halsted voiced a reminder that public comments must pertain to Human Services Commission business.

Alex Tsimerman said Seattle has what it calls the Alex Tsimerman rule and noted having received 16 trespasses from that city for 1400 days. King County has done the same. The rule in Bellevue is only about Alex Tsimerman.

Commissioner Halsted said the comments made were not pertaining to the business of the Human Services Commission and asked the speaker to stop.

Alex Tsimerman said that is only the interpretation of the chair concerning what was being said.

Commissioner Halsted declared the speaker's time up.

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

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Acting Human Services Manager Christy Stangland noted that Kinderling had reached out to the Commission a couple of months ago regarding a possible tour. Hero House has also extended the offer to provide a tour of their location. It was noted that staff would follow up with the Commissioners to determine interest and available dates.

7. PUBLIC HEARING

A. Public Hearing on the 2024 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Annual Action Plan

A motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jain and the motion carried unanimously.

Jesenia Davila voiced appreciation for the microenterprise programs. It is said that a leader is the one who knows the way, makes a way and shows the way. That is what 4Tomorrow and microenterprises has done for many. They have shown the way and have helped many to be able to learn about the accountability they have toward their companies. It is not just a company with a name, it comes with responsibility. The program has helped to resolve problems and doubts.

From realizing estimates to an elevator pitch, from how to begin or start up a company, to driving that company to success. One phrase that marked the path to the secret to change is to focus all energies not on fighting against what is old but instead towards constructing something new. The microenterprise experience was unique and made the recipients feel like part of the team and showed them a lot of respect with every comment made. The recipients were taught to direct and how to begin.

Luisa Fonseca voiced being very grateful for the program called Hope for Tomorrow. The members went from zero to having their own clients. The program helped the recipients to gain the confidence to know there will always be good and bad things, but that they will always come through. They showed the way with the help of accountants and with other aid. Now there is more work, and the recipients can be confident that having gone through the program they can be more secure. The program people were with the recipients the whole time. They helped with the microenterprise but also in the personal lives of the recipients. The program has improved mental health by making it known there is hope to keep moving forward. The recipients can persevere with a lot of work and a lot of effort. The whole team is to be thanked for being with the recipients at any hour. Having recently lost a son who passed away, 4Tomorrow helped work through the sorrow. They help channel motivation toward the microenterprise through art classes, and with good mental health all can persevere.

Jessica Shell, repair project manager for Habitat for Humanity Seattle/King County, said the organization's partnership with Bellevue began in June. Three projects have already been completed and more are in process or in the pipeline. Habitat has worked previously in King County, in Federal Way, Skyway, White Center, South Seattle and Renton, and is now able to expand into Bellevue. The program offers a wide array from minor home repairs to critical home repairs. With Bellevue's funding specifically, the missing middle can be addressed, allowing for smaller projects to be accomplished.

Catherine Fluentes, community impact senior manager with Upwards, formerly known as WeeCare, the largest and fastest growing child care network in the nation partnering with municipalities and local governments to address the child care crisis, noted that currently in Bellevue there are approximately 25,911 women not participating in the workforce given the estimated child care capacity gap of over 3631 slots. The equates to several thousand families struggling to find affordable child care. Child care can be a significant barrier to entry into the workforce, especially for women. Many working parents struggle to balance their job responsibilities with the demands of caring for their children, and in the absence of affordable and quality child care options, many are forced to choose between working and staying home. According to the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of January 2022 the labor force participation rate for women ages 25 to 54 in the Bellevue area was 74.9, while the rate for men in the same age group was about 89 percent. The gap is even wider for mothers with young children; for women with children under the age of six the participation rate was only 61 percent, compared to men at 93 percent. The statistics highlight the significant impact of child care on a mother's ability to participate in the workforce. Lack of available and affordable child care can limit a women's employment options and decrease women's earning potential, contributing to gender inequality in the workforce. The Covid-19 pandemic only exacerbated the challenges. Addressing the challenges is critical to making sure all Bellevue families have the opportunity to

participate in the workforce and reach their full economic potential. The organization's BOOST program helps communities prioritize working families by increasing child care capacity through various supply building efforts, by decreasing the cost of child care by expanding operational capacity, and by improving access for families through the WeeCare centralized network. The original CDBG application request was for \$420,000 to support 70 microenterprise child care providers, creating more than 21 new jobs and supporting more than 800 low- and moderate-income families. The Commission has recommended reducing the funding amount, which would decrease the total number of eligible participants from 70 to 26 providers, which is only 24 percent of the active child care providers in Bellevue that need support. The Commission was urged to reconsider the funding level.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jain and the motion carried unanimously.

8. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

9. OLD BUSINESS – None

10. NEW BUSINESS

A. Root Causes of Homelessness

Nico Quijano, Homelessness Outreach Program Manager, noted having the responsibility of working with individuals experiencing homelessness as well as within city government to help design policies and programs to address homelessness. A 2022 work titled *Homelessness Is A Housing Problem*, by Greg Colburn and Clayton Aldern, examines the suspected causes of homelessness and looks at how their prevalence in a community might actually predict homelessness. The work groups the potential causes into two factors: individual factors and large-scale factors. Poverty and unemployment are obvious contributing factors. If one does not have the economic means or financial support necessary to obtain stable housing, they may not be able to pay for affordable housing and may lose it. Mental health difficulties or drug use are also contributing factors. Demographics include things people may have no control over, such as their racial identity or racial background, but which nonetheless make them systemically vulnerable. Large-scale factors include things like the weather, given that people can survive more easily outdoors where the weather is milder overall. The size of the homelessness response system in a given area, along with the availability of social services, are contributing large-scale factors based on the notion of where there are more services and more shelters available, more people will come seeking the services and the shelters. In that scenario, the creation of homelessness services actually invites homelessness. The political environment and housing availability are other large-scale factors. Where housing is more expensive or less available generally, there is more homelessness.

The authors looked at the prevalence of the factors across communities and across the country and compared the findings against the homelessness figures to get a handle on what might be accurate predictors of homelessness. They also looked at the notion of the dissolution of the family unit, or the lack of strong communal ties, as contributing factors.

Colburn and Aldern found that individual factors largely do not predict homelessness across a community. Some of the individual factors, like poverty, were found to have a negative correlation, which is to say that communities with high rates of poverty were found to have lower rates of homelessness. The city of Detroit is a case study in having high rates of poverty and low rates of homelessness. The authors did find, however, that individual factors do contribute to the risk that someone could become homeless. The presence of addiction, mental health difficulties, financial insolvency and other individual factors do increase one's individual risk of becoming homeless. Simply growing up in or living in a community that is generally much poorer than other communities, or which has a higher rate of drug addiction, does not mean the entire community is likely to see a higher incidence of homelessness.

Colburn and Aldern also found that most large-scale factors also do not predict homelessness. Communities with milder weather do not necessarily have more homelessness. Communities that offer more services, or which have policies in place that are more tolerant of individuals experiencing homelessness, do not have higher incidents of homelessness. The authors did, however, find two significant factors that do serve as predictors of homelessness, namely the median cost of rent and the vacancy rate. Where the cost of rent is higher, homelessness is higher, and where the vacancy rate is lower, homelessness is higher. After experiencing an economic downturn in Detroit there were thousands of vacant units, and the units were affordable within the context of what the community members could afford. Thus, while the people were dealing with poverty, they had access to affordable housing. Lack of affordable housing units drives up homelessness rates. A circle drawn around those in a community where the average rent is \$600 will include more of the residents, including those who are medically vulnerable, those who have lost their jobs, those facing addictions, and those fleeing domestic violence situations. Should rents in that community rise to \$800, those same people will be on the very edge of being able to afford housing, and some of them will be pushed outside the circle. As average rents rise, more will be pushed out. The median rental rate for family units in King County in May 2021 was \$2995. At that point, far fewer people can afford it and are thus pushed out of the circle.

The people who are at the edge of the housing market are complex for a variety of reasons. There are things caused by individual choices, by policy choices, and by systemic inequities. As rents increase, the circle slowly closes on those who have the least amount of resources. As more people get squeezed out, they become susceptible to and at risk of homelessness.

Nico Quijano stated that while there are individual factors that lead to each person's homelessness, the cost and availability of units is the pre-determining factor behind the rate of homelessness in a community. There are ways communities can choose to manage homelessness. A great deal of money is spent on homelessness intervention and on helping those who are homeless, but there still are people panhandling on street corners, and there still are people setting up tents in public spaces. It is a fair question to ask where all the money is going, but when the question is asked it will be found that the return on investment for the services paid for by the community are actually significant.

Bellevue currently provides funding for three static shelters. PorchLight, formerly known as

Congregations for the Homeless, offers 100 beds to men experiencing homelessness. Sophia's Place offers 21 beds to women experiencing homelessness. Mary's Place provides shelter to families experiencing homelessness, and they have 90 rooms. Collectively, that is well north of 200 people in Bellevue who on a nightly basis would otherwise be on the streets. Each of the shelters is full on a consistent basis and it can be difficult to find an open spot for someone in need. The services funded by the city are keeping a cap on an even bigger program, keeping things from getting even worse than they are. When someone ends up on the street in an unsheltered situation, they are exposed to an array of experiences and harms that can leave a permanent, scarring effect on them. They may not have access to mental health resources, they may self-medicate, they may be exposed to the cold which worsens their various health conditions, all of which further removes the person from stability. Offering support through funded programs can prevent some of that scarring.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that while the services are essential, steps must be taken to continue to expand the array and variety of housing that is available. A phrase used a lot in the homeless services community is Housing First, which is the notion that in order to help someone experiencing homelessness it is necessary to put them under a roof. Until they have warm meals, clean water and an address to call their own, they cannot be expected to find a job, to treat their mental health difficulties, to overcome the challenges keeping them from stability. Housing First is vitally important, but it is not the only thing that is needed. The same services offered to the homeless need to be offered to folks once they move into housing.

Regardless of what causes leads people to homelessness, the way the community can best address the issue is by understanding what causes homelessness on a communal level. Homelessness ends where housing stability begins. In order to reach stability, individuals must be able to put down new roots in a new home. Those roots, however, will not grow unless the seeds are planted through the provision of essential services and a stock of affordable housing options. It is a big lift, but the city has the authority, the resources, and the capacity to tackle it.

Commissioner Jain asked if there is a correlation between persons becoming sheltered and finding work, or if becoming sheltered and being provided for by the government leads people to believe they do not need to seek employment. Nico Quijano responded by saying that there certainly have been cases where people seek to strive for an ultimate form of stability, but that applies whether they are in a shelter, in a tent, or are couch surfing. The motivations of individuals are not necessarily inspired by their specific housing circumstances so much as they are from something within them. In communities where persons are experiencing homelessness, it is largely true that where those individuals recognize that there are opportunities for them to grow and do better, they can inspire the entire community of homeless individuals.

Commissioner Jain asked if there are any programs in place that seek to help homeless persons find employment. Nico Quijano there are many organizations doing unique and amazing work in that regard. Those working with the homeless must be willing to help the people they are helping to fill out applications, learn to dress appropriately for an interview, and drive them to job interviews. There are various specific employment programs, many of which are funded by the city, that hone in on specific job-searching skills to help applicants be successful.

Major Mark Tarantino noted to have come across a number of homeless persons, especially while serving as a member of the city's police bicycle unit. Often those persons expressed not being open to receiving any services. Nico Quijano said as an outreach worker it is always necessary to be aware that that may be the case. Some homeless individuals, when offered services may adamantly choose not to engage. The reality is that many such persons have in the past been turned away, denied services, or mistreated. Outreach workers must learn the skills of building rapport and must offer what the persons are willing to receive, even if it is only water or handwarmers. An educated guess would put the number of homeless persons not wanting any kind of services at between 10 and 20 percent. The reality is that in most cases what those persons are being offered is a cot somewhere to sleep on. But when those persons see their peers accept help and begin to make progress, they often start to engage with the outreach workers.

Commissioner White asked about progress made in regard to the safe parking program. Nico Quijano said the site on the other side of the freeway was permitted for use as a safe parking site, but to date a provider has not been selected. A new RFP was issued earlier in the day for someone to facilitate the safe parking program.

Commissioner Halsted asked where the biggest demand and need is. Nico Quijano reiterated that the shelters are consistently full. There is a clear need for more rooms, beds and spaces for people to occupy. Finding ways to expand the housing stock, both upfront and for the long term, is a difficult task given the available resources. The primary need is to identify resources to make sure that all available services are adequately funded.

With regard to permanent supportive housing and transitional housing, Commissioner Halsted asked if there are other types of housing situations that have worked in other cities. Nico Quijano said there is a whole array of different programs and services offered by cities. They include things like permanent supportive housing that provide on-site services such as mental health and case management. There is also permanent housing that offers some drop-in support. There is transitional housing, which is usually term- or time-limited, aimed at helping persons chart a course forward. There are programs that help people interact with the private market to find housing they might be able to afford in the immediate future, even going so far as to pay for some initial costs. There is another program called shelter plus care that puts a person in an apartment, pay for that apartment, and then help the person work their way towards some form of independence and stability. There is an array of shelter options as well ranging from individual hotel rooms to cubbies, cots in a room, and shelter encampments. Given that every homeless person or family has different needs, there is a clear need to increase the stock of housing and to continue to diversify the housing stock.

Toni Esparza stressed the need to provide shelter opportunities for victims of domestic violence and for persons with disabilities. Such persons are on the margins and can quickly get squeezed out of housing.

Commissioner Jain asked what percentage of homeless persons transition into a more stable status, and how many persons are added to the rolls of the homeless every year. Nico Quijano allowed not having specific numbers but expressed the sense that generally the housing market continues to tighten, and as the median income continues to increase, homelessness will continue

to be a growing difficulty for the community. The available statistics relative to the Point in Time count generally shows the number of homeless persons holding static. That could, of course, have more to do with the methodology rather than any specific increase or decrease in the amount of homelessness. Regardless of the general Point in Time and the HUD statistics, vulnerabilities continue to exist in the community and are getting worse. The pandemic tore through the resources many people had, leaving them facing homelessness. There is a sense among providers that there is a storm coming and there will have to be a reckoning with how little that has actually been done to provide affordable and necessary housing for the community.

B. 2024 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Preliminary Funding Recommendations

Commissioner Jain referred to the microenterprise assistance programs and commented that even though WeeCare and Centro Cultural Mexicano have much higher funding needs, the recommended allocation for Centro Cultural Mexicano is 35 percent of the requested amount, and 37 percent for WeeCare, far below their minimum funding. With 4Tomorrow, which previously received funding, the allocation amounts to 89 percent of the requested amount. From the perspective impact, the two new organizations have a lot to offer, especially WeeCare in regard to the child care crisis. For Habitat for Humanity, the recommended allocation matches the requested amount even though their projects are slow in terms of implementation. Toni Esparza clarified that the preliminary funding recommendations were determined by the Commission, not by the staff. The Commission had suggested moving Habitat for Humanity up to \$150,000. With regard to the microenterprise programs, it is correct that 4Tomorrow previously received funding. It is making an impact and continued funding could sustain that impact. The question is whether continued funding should be provided to keep the program going, or whether investing in the startup of other programs instead is a better option. In preliminarily recommending funding, the Commission looked at both the dollars requested and the projected impacts of the various programs in terms of residents served.

Commissioner Jain called attention to the major home repair program through the King County Housing Authority and asked why the administrative costs were equal to the cost of repairs to be effected. Donna Adair explained that the home repair program currently has excessive funding due to the pandemic and the sales of homes that resulted in loan paybacks. Administration for the home repair program is handled by Bellevue staff and addressed annually. The projects done are based on the funded program year. The administrative work covers both the King County Housing Authority and Habitat for Humanity, and it includes environmental reviews, lead-based paint tests at about \$1200 per home and recording fees for the loans. Because there is funding left over from prior years, more funding will go into home repairs than will be allocated to the program.

Commissioner Halsted suggested, based on the discussion, reducing the allocation to Habitat for Humanity to \$75,000 and increasing the allocations for the microenterprise programs.

Commissioner Jain proposed sticking with the original staff recommendation of \$98,000 for Habitat for Humanity, and \$177,000 for each of the three microenterprise programs.

Commissioner Jain expressed concern that an equal allocation of funds for the microenterprise programs would not take into account the actual need.

Vice Chair Singh voiced support for going with the original staff recommendation. Commissioner Piper concurred, as did the other Commissioners.

A motion to approve the original staff recommendation was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Singh and the motion carried unanimously.

C. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely

Commissioner Piper requested to participate remotely for the October 3 meeting.

Commissioner White requested to be excused for the October 17 meeting.

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Christy Stangland took a moment to introduce Julie Kim, a management fellow working with the City Manager's Office doing work with human services, including work around the Needs Update, community outreach, and agency monitoring visits.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Halsted adjourned the meeting at 7:21 p.m.