

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

April 20, 2026
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Rashid

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

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Robinson

POLICE LIAISON: Major Dave Sanabria

GUEST SPEAKERS: Natalie Daniels, Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center; Julia Devin, Community Development

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 Perelman who arrived at 6:05 p.m.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Erica Hoard spoke representing Americans for Equality, a non-profit organization established to remove barriers to high-performing careers by providing training, professional development, and internship opportunities. The organization has operated for approximately four years from its headquarters in Bellevue and from an additional location in Kent. Over time, the organization has trained more than one thousand individuals in résumé preparation and interview readiness, and hundreds more in technical and professional skills such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and program management. The speaker emphasized the importance of providing practical experience through internships to address the challenge faced by job seekers who are required to demonstrate prior experience before obtaining entry-level employment. The

Commission was asked to support of the organization's funding applications.

Matthew Vasiliev, also with Americans for Equity, elaborated on the scope and structure of the programs. There are three core services: résumé writing and mock interview assistance delivered through a proposed mobile lab; a training program offering more than twenty courses and access to thousands of online learning modules funded in part by federal grants; and an internship initiative designed to provide hands-on experience to participants.

Melvin Pretlow with the same organization noted having personally participated in the program before joining the organization as a staff member and explained that the organization's services are offered at no cost, thereby reducing financial barriers to entering technology and other professional fields. Advances in artificial intelligence are reducing the availability of traditional entry-level opportunities, making internships increasingly critical for workforce development. It was emphasized that the goal of the organization is to expand services in the Bellevue area and to strengthen the regional workforce.

Irene Muller with Essentials First explained that despite the region's economic prosperity, many households struggle to afford basic hygiene supplies, particularly as the cost of living rises. According to research conducted in partnership with the University of Washington, a significant portion of residents in Washington State cannot obtain hygiene necessities without sacrificing other essential expenses such as food or transportation. In 2025 the organization distributed hundreds of thousands of hygiene products to thousands of families, many of whom were unemployed, refugees, or households with children. Emphasizing that the demand for assistance continues to grow, the speaker called for coordinated action, including stronger partnerships, sustained investment in community-based services, and policy initiatives to address the underlying causes of hygiene insecurity. Appreciation was expressed for the Commission's ongoing support of community organizations and human services programs.

Mariana Martinez, executive director of Centro Cultural Mexicano, explained that the nonprofit serves Latino and Hispanic communities across King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties through culturally responsive bilingual programs delivered by staff who reflect the communities they serve. The organization has four central areas of work: building community connections through cultural celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo and Día de los Muertos; providing programs that address arts and culture, basic needs, small business support, education, health, environmental sustainability, and digital equity; engaging with the youth through innovation maker spaces designed to foster creativity and leadership; and advocating on behalf of community members. The speaker emphasized the importance of continued collaboration with the city, particularly in light of the economic pressures such as inflation and family separation, and expressed appreciation for the city's ongoing support.

Jennifer Fischer with Bellevue LifeSpring expressed gratitude for the city's financial support and provided specific examples of the impact of recent funding allocations. With regard to emergency rental assistance, it was noted that funds totaling slightly more than \$200,000 were fully utilized during the first quarter of the year, enabling 84 families, including 185 children, to avoid eviction and remain in stable housing. Additionally, funding exceeding \$128,000 for food

assistance allowed the organization to distribute grocery vouchers to more than 3000 students during the mid-winter school break, ensuring continued access to nutritious food for children who rely on school meal programs. The speaker acknowledged the partnership between the organization and the city and thanking the Commission for its continued trust and commitment to supporting vulnerable families.

Alex Tsimerman delivered remarks focused on concerns regarding civil liberties, local governance, and demographic changes in the community. The speaker referenced prior legal disputes with city authorities and expressed strong criticism of municipal leadership, alleging violations of constitutional rights and expressing dissatisfaction with local policies and demographic trends. The remarks were delivered in a confrontational tone and concluded with a call for political change.

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Councilmember Robinson reported on the process of filling the Commission's vacant seat, explaining that the panel interviewed approximately ten applicants and narrowed the selection to four highly qualified candidates. From them Carolyn Besana, a public benefits specialist with the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, who previously participated in Bellevue Essentials and who represents Northwest Bellevue, was selected as the preferred candidate. Formal approval by the City Council is anticipated in mid-May.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw announced an upcoming appreciation event for Commissioners. The previous year's event was successful and for the upcoming event attendees will now be permitted to bring a guest. The Commissioners were invited to confirm their attendance either during the meeting or by email to staff at a later time.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

Ruth Blaw said a strong presence from community agencies is anticipated for the May 4 public hearing. At the meeting the Commission will also review and vote on recommendations regarding the allocation of convening funds. Dahlia Living has become ineligible after failing to complete the required steps in the application process and not responding to follow-up communication. The upcoming funding cycle has generated 192 applications, an increase from the 155 applications in the previous cycle. The total funding requests amount to approximately \$18 million dollars, which exceeds the approximately \$6.4 million available for the Commission to allocate. All applications will be available electronically in the near future, and paper copies will be provided upon request.

Commissioner Singh suggested keeping one paper copy of the applications available at City Hall for Commissioners to access if desired.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Eviction Prevention and BCRC's Housing Accord Program

Natalie Daniels, Manager of the Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center which is housed in the Community Development Department, said the Center is celebrating its 30th anniversary. The mission of the center was described as strengthening the community's capacity to resolve disputes and reduce conflicts, particularly in landlord-tenant and neighbor-to-neighbor situations. The program maintains a membership in Resolution Washington, a statewide umbrella organization with 21 dispute resolution centers. The membership allows for accessing state grant funding that makes up almost half of the program's budget. The services are available to residents of Bellevue, Redmond and Kirkland. The center handles more than 500 cases annually and provides services free of charge through the support of trained volunteers. The work of the Center supports the broader municipal equity initiatives by expanding access to resources and coaching for renters, thereby contributing to housing stability and community well-being.

Julia Devin, coordinator of the Housing Accord program, shared that the program was developed from earlier eviction resolution efforts that were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic eviction moratorium, the Center experienced a significant increase in caseloads as landlords were required to pursue dispute resolution before proceeding with eviction. Through the efforts, the program achieved a high resolution rate and helped thousands of individuals remain housed while enabling landlords to receive payment through available rental assistance programs. Building on that experience, the Housing Accord program expanded its scope beyond rent arrears to include mediation of maintenance concerns, lease violations, and conflicts among tenants. The program's voluntary, confidential, and neutral approach operates on trust-building and impartial facilitation, which is essential to achieving mutually acceptable outcomes. In addition to mediation services, the program offers referrals to social services and educational workshops that are designed to strengthen communication skills and prevent disputes before they escalate.

The broader context in which the program operates was emphasized by noting that maintaining stable housing remains challenging for many as both tenants and landlords face increasing pressures. The program is specifically designed to assist households at risk of eviction who may not yet qualify for homelessness services, thereby addressing a critical gap in the housing support system.

To illustrate the scale of the issue and to engage the Commissioners in understanding the current trends, the presenters offered an interactive segment that was intended to highlight recent data on eviction filings and housing instability within the region.

The interactive segments indicated that eviction filings in King County are at an all-time high. The 8732 eviction filings represents a 12 percent increase over 2024. Statewide, the number of filings reached 23,000. The 2500 filings in Snohomish County represented 16 percent increase. The Housing Accord Program completed 292 cases during 2025, accounting for more than half of the total 538 cases handled by the Conflict Resolution Center that year. The increase reflects a continuing upward trend in housing-related conflicts following the pandemic period, and

underscores the sustained demand for mediation and support services.

With regard to the nature of the cases handled by the Housing Accord Program, it was pointed out that the majority of cases in 2025 involved eviction notices, including formal notices initiating eviction proceedings or summonses for court appearances. Other cases addressed issues such as maintenance disputes, lease violations, and conflicts between tenants. Approximately 88 percent of the Housing Accord cases were considered resolved or concluded without further action, though it was allowed that measuring outcomes can be complex because some tenants developed plans to relocate or address their circumstances independently. A smaller percentage of cases remain unresolved. Despite the limitations of quantitative data, the program's effectiveness is reflected in the relationships built with clients and the individualized support provided through coaching and mediation.

The human impact of the work was bolstered via the sharing of testimonials from individuals who had received assistance. One example described how newly arrived immigrants found the program to be a vital source of guidance and emotional support while navigating unfamiliar systems and housing challenges. Another example highlighted the program's role in facilitating communication between parties in difficult legal or contractual disputes. The trained volunteer conciliators focus on listening carefully, maintaining neutrality, and helping participants identify practical solutions, often by clarifying the eviction process and assisting individuals in organizing next steps. The examples were presented to demonstrate that, beyond just statistical outcomes, the program's value lies in supporting individuals through complex and stressful housing situations.

Commissioner Perelman asked if the program includes connecting clients with funding resources. Julia Devin said much of the work involves connecting people with human service organizations for rental assistance. The program does not track which clients do receive funding, or which organizations have funds to distribute.

Commissioner Singh noted having previously been a client and having received assistance from the program. Appreciation was voiced for the organization's efforts, but it was acknowledged that while not every situation can be resolved, the support provided is meaningful.

Chair Phan asked if there are times when tenant-landlord conflicts have to be elevated to other housing organizations or the Attorney General. Julia Devin said the program does not provide legal advice and instead refers individuals to specialized legal assistance organizations when potential violations of landlord-tenant law arise. The referrals ensure that clients receive appropriate legal guidance while allowing the Conflict Resolution Center to maintain its neutral mediation role. A central aspect of the work involves supporting frontline service organizations by offering conflict resolution training and guidance on communicating effectively with individuals who are facing housing instability. Emphasized was the importance of building trust, particularly among immigrant communities that may feel apprehensive about engaging with government-affiliated programs. By partnering with organizations already trusted by tenants, the Conflict Resolution Center is better able to connect individuals with assistance and contribute to a broader network of wraparound services designed to stabilize households. The partnerships help to sustain resource networks and strengthen the overall safety net for vulnerable residents.

Julia Devin said attention has shifted over the past couple of years to engagement with landlords and property managers. Following the pandemic, the center deliberately focused on maintaining and strengthening relationships with housing providers in recognition of the significant role they play in preventing disputes from escalating. Through outreach efforts, including training sessions, informal gatherings, and community-building activities, the Center seeks to foster communication among landlords and property managers, and to reinforce the Center's neutrality. The initiatives include collaborative trainings with housing associations and property management organizations, as well as events designed to create a shared learning environment where housing providers can discuss common challenges and strategies. Many landlords demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting tenants and maintaining stable housing environments, and strengthening the relationships has enhanced the Center's ability to address tenant-to-tenant conflicts and other community concerns.

Julia Devins stressed the importance of early intervention in housing conflicts. Participation in a national eviction prevention initiative led to the development of an early referral pilot program which was implemented in partnership with local housing authorities and property management companies. Under the program, tenants receive information about mediation services at the earliest stage of the eviction process, specifically when they are issued a formal notice initiating eviction proceedings. The approach significantly increases engagement with the Center and improves resolution outcomes. There has been a measurable increase in the number of individuals contacting the Center, as well as in higher resolution rates among participating properties. Coaching services, in particular, has emerged as the most frequently used and most effective intervention, and a high percentage of coached cases reach successful outcomes. Earlier engagement allows individuals to explore options and develop solutions before conflicts become more complex or financially burdensome.

Natalie Daniels outlined the core principles guiding the work of the Center, emphasizing neutrality and self-determination as foundational values. The Center does not attempt to rescue individuals or assign blame in disputes, but instead seeks to change the narrative by recognizing that all parties involved typically have legitimate concerns and a shared interest in resolving conflicts. Individuals affected by housing disputes are best positioned to determine solutions that align with their circumstances. Empowering them to make informed decisions is more effective than imposing external solutions. Coaching, therefore, focuses on helping tenants understand their options, develop contingency plans, and navigate the eviction process with greater clarity and confidence. The supportive, education-based approach often leads to successful outcomes and contributes to long-term housing stability.

There are practical reasons why the coaching model has proven effective. The approach succeeds because it is individualized to each tenant's circumstances; is accessible through simple phone conversations that do not require travel or extensive paperwork; is collaborative in encouraging tenants to take responsibility for developing their own solutions; and is preventive in helping individuals address challenges before they escalate into larger crises. By equipping tenants with problem-solving skills and multiple contingency plans, the program aims to reduce future reliance on services while strengthening long-term housing stability.

Answering a question asked by Chair Phan, Natalie Daniels said the collaboration with Kirkland began informally around 2000 after local officials received mediation training and later formalized the relationship through a memorandum of understanding. The intention is to continue strengthening interjurisdictional cooperation.

B. Updates to the Human Services Commission Bylaws

Ruth Blaw reminded the Commissioners that the proposed revisions to the bylaws were introduced earlier in the year by the Assistant City Attorney. The proposed revisions reflect updated municipal ordinances. There are three principal changes: extending the maximum period for excluding individuals who violate rules of decorum from 60 days to 180 days; clarifying the appeals process available to individuals seeking review of an exclusion; and limiting service on all city advisory boards and commissions to two consecutive terms. In addition, several minor edits are proposed to improve the clarity and consistency of meeting agendas and minutes.

A motion to adopt the proposed Human Services Commission bylaws was made by Commissioner Singh. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gonzalez and the motion carried unanimously.

C. Teen After-School Funding Recommendations

Chair Phan said the after-school program is supported by Parks and Community Services funds totaling approximately \$86,000 annually. Three applications were received and preliminary staff recommendations were provided to guide the Commission's discussion.

Ruth Blaw said the applicants were the Boys & Girls Club, Centro Cultural Mexicano, and Seattle Envelopes. The internal staff discussion centered on whether or not to divide the funding and give some to more than one organization, or to give all to a single organization. The conclusion reached was that the Boys & Girls Club application should be fully funded given that the organization is in good standing and has operated the program for many years. Centro Cultural Mexicano, while an excellent organization, is headquartered in Redmond.

Human Services Planner Saada Hilts said Seattle Envelope is also located in Redmond. Its program involves a daily drop-in summer program that provides homework help, college prep, mentoring and enrichment. Their focus is on low-income Eastern European refugees and immigrants, and Bellevue middle and high-school youth. Their expected outcome is focused on academic improvement, confidence and school engagement. The Centro Cultural Mexicano program is focused on a drop-in after-school and summer drop-in for their maker space with particular attention given to digital design, 3D printing, creative tech and the arts, all provided in Spanish and English to Bellevue low- to moderate-income Hispanic youth aged 11 to 18 who are experiencing fear, isolation and limited access to opportunities. Their outcomes will focus on technical skills, emotional growth, confidence and belonging. The Boys & Girls Club program has a year-round five-day program across multiple sites with a focus on Bellevue residents. The services include academic support, career readiness, mental health partnerships, enrichment and leadership programs. Their outcomes will focus on academic success, leadership, healthy behaviors and life readiness.

Commissioner Gonzalez voiced agreement with the recommendation of the staff. Commissioner Perelman agreed as well, as did Commissioner Singh.

Vice Chair Hays suggested that the applications offer a preview of what is to come for the general allocations process, and pointed out that the application does not include a section focused on projections for number of persons served or demographics. Ruth Blaw said all of the applications include a projection for the number of Bellevue residents expected to be served, but nothing about demographics. Saada Hilts added that the teen after-school applications are slightly different in that they rely on a different funding stream. All of the city's contracting processes will be the same, however, which includes scope of work, services to be provided, and the number of youths to be served with the dollars. Every agency must report their demographics annually.

Vice Chair Hays observed that while all applicant organizations provide valuable services, the fact that there is limited funding makes it necessary to make difficult decisions about prioritizing. Accessibility is a central concern, particularly if program locations lie outside the city, creating an extra transportation barrier for youth and families.

Ruth Blaw said among the staff there was a strong feeling that the Centro Cultural Mexicano program is of a very high quality that meets a specific cultural need, and as such deserves some funding.

Vice Chair Hays stressed the fact that if funding is shifted between programs, it will be necessary to take from one program to supplement the other. Support was voiced for accepting the recommendation of the staff.

Commissioner Perelman stressed the need to avoid a peanut butter approach that would give every program something but not enough to assure program effectiveness. The Seattle Envelopes website has not been updated for two years, and the location of the program makes it difficult to access from Bellevue. The Centro Cultural Mexicano program has great energy, but it also is difficult for youth to access from Bellevue. The Boys & Girls Club program is very accessible.

Commissioner Gonzalez questioned whether Centro Cultural Mexicano has enough space to accommodate the program.

Chair Phan highlighted the clear need to make sure organizations are serving Bellevue youth and residents. If there is no organization that offers the cultural and linguistically specific services needed, the kids will have to go elsewhere.

Commissioner Perelman suggested that future application processes could benefit from clearer guidance and more detailed information fields, particularly regarding prior funding history and program outcomes, to assist the Commissioners in evaluating the proposals more efficiently. Ruth Blaw acknowledged the suggestion and indicated a willingness to revise the application materials and seek Commissioner input before future funding cycles.

A motion to approve the allocation of \$86,000 in after-school program funding to the Boys and Girls Club was made by Commissioner Perelman. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Singh and the motion carried unanimously.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Phan adjourned the meeting at 7:34 p.m.