

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

July 15, 2024
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Gonzalez, Imfura, Phan, Rashid

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners White, Wong

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Asma Ahmed, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hilts, Andrew Ndayambaje, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Zahn

POLICE LIAISON: Major Mark Tarantino

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

July 1, 2024

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Singh 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.

Lucerno Nina, a 15-year-old Bellevue resident, spoke as a proud member of the Bellevue Boys & Girls Club who attends the club every day along with a 4th grade sister. The speaker said the journey with the club began with a devastating hurricane in Puerto Rico, resulting in a move to the United States five years ago. The club made things easier, helped the speaker mature and find a voice and discover a passion. During the pandemic the club was open every day offering a sense of community and belonging in a safe place. High school has been challenging, and three schools have been tried in seeking a better fit and to avoid negative influences. Through it all the club has been there as a constant in times of change. The plan ultimately is to attend the University of Washington to study law. The Commissioners were asked to keep the Bellevue Boys & Girls Club in mind in making funding recommendations because there are thousands of kids who need the club in their lives.

Maria Alamo, a resident of Bellevue for seven years and the previous speaker's mother, asked the Commission to support the Bellevue Boys & Girls Club. The speaker noted having been involved with the club for seven years as the parent of children who attend the after school programs. The club has had a very strong influence by providing a safe environment where children can grow and build relationships. The club is more than just a place for activities, it is a community that supports families. Supporting the Bellevue Boys & Girls Club will help to ensure a bright future for Bellevue.

Martha Hernandez-Arias, a Bellevue resident for 18 years, stressed the importance of the Noticias en Espanol program to the Spanish-speaking parents with children in the Bellevue School District. The program makes clear what is happening by giving access to information and resources in a very good way. The Commission was urged to support the program.

Jennifer Fischer, a Bellevue resident for 32 years, spoke as the executive director of Bellevue LifeSpring. The staff were thanked for the work they have done in diligently reviewing all of the applications. Bellevue LifeSpring partners with many of the organizations that have submitted applications, and the Commission was thanked for supporting them as well. Bellevue LifeSpring was the first non-profit service organization in Bellevue having been funded on Hunts Point in 1911. The organization continues that tradition of neighbors helping neighbors. The challenge being faced is that the numbers are alarming. There are over 4000 students who are at risk of hunger and homelessness in Bellevue. Of those, there are over 100 unaccompanied youth with no legal guardian in their lives. Over 700 are experiencing some form of homelessness. Those are the children Bellevue LifeSpring supports. The agency only serves children and families living within the Bellevue School District boundary. The two programs put forth for support are the food assistance program and emergency rental assistance program. The two programs are designed to prevent hunger and homelessness for children. The requested total of \$2 million for each program represents the need. Every school has children experiencing homelessness who are living on the streets, in cars or in shelters.

Cassandra Sage explained that Influence of Choice is a student substance prevention program and a mental health promotion program. The agency serves the cities of Bellevue, Issaquah, Sammamish and Renton by focusing on parent education and promoting healthy choices over other choices. National statistics show that 50 percent of kids will listen to what their parents' expectations are about alcohol or other drug use if the parent sets an expectation. Influence the

Choice holds parent events that help parents understand the importance of boundaries, creating healthy choices, and of having dialog about the ways in which substances might influence a child's life. The Commission was urged to fund the application.

Trish Bloor spoke as a member of the board of Influence the Choice. As a member of the human services commission for the city of Issaquah, the speaker allowed knowing how challenging it is to read through all the grants and decide which ones to fund. The Commission was asked to give serious consideration to funding the program for all the reasons voiced by Cassandra Sage. No other program offers the same services. Influence the Choice, which has been around for 12 years, can be a valuable asset to the Bellevue community. There is a correlation in the Healthy You survey results which shows a slight drop in the use of substances by students in the schools.

Elbert Fernandez spoke on behalf of Noticias en Espanol. As a parent of a student in the Bellevue School District, the speaker noted that there is great value in the service. It is not just about translating notices from English to Spanish. Noticias en Espanol provides a lot of context to help parents better understand.

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi antisemite pigs and who said Bellevue's government is corrupt to the bone. Speaking to the city of Bellevue, the person claimed there are not honest men working for the government, so the system is totally dead. Trump will be president again and will make America great again. When nothing is done to stop the government, Bellevue police and prosecutors can do whatever they want. They can lie under oath and the judges do not react to it. Fascism cannot happen without the judicial system supporting it. The Commissioners are acting as soldiers of fascism. The United States has a constitution and needs to use it. What is happening now in King County and the state is pure fascism where the three branches of government are working together.

Liliana Medina spoke on behalf of Noticias en Espanol and all the community that has benefited by the program. The Commission was urged to consider continuing support for the project. School districts often say that Hispanic students in particular graduate at lower rates. That often happens because families do not understand the system. Noticias en Espanol takes the time to explain all the opportunities available in the public school system, and once parents have that information they can better support their children. Parents have come forward to say the program made a huge difference in the ways they can support their children. There are families who do not know about all the opportunities for their children. Thanks to Noticias in Espanol, they can know about the opportunities. There are currently more than 600 families who wait every week for news to come to them.

Elizabeth Gonzalez, a parent of a student in the Lake Washington School District, asked the Commission to consider funding Noticias en Espanol. The program greatly helps those whose first language is Spanish in hearing about school news and opportunities.

Cassandra Sage explained that Noticias en Espanol is a collective action network involving various cities, including Bellevue, Kirkland and Redmond, and the Bellevue School District and Lake Washington School District, coming together to increase and improve outcomes for Spanish-speaking students. The program began in April 2020 during the pandemic by providing

information about how to do things online. It was discovered that by focusing on Spanish-speaking students and their families, there were needs that went far beyond Covid. The project has continued and it delivers information that is broadcast by respected pillars of the community who understand culturally the differences between the American education system and the system that the parents grew up in. They are able to explain the significance and the importance of how to check students' grades online and many other things. The notices talk about other programs, including Hopelink and getting help with utilities, things that will help families help their kids to have better outcomes. The Bellevue School District currently has an overall average graduation rate of 95 percent, which is amazing. Only 77.5 percent of Spanish-speaking students, however, are graduating. Noticias en Espanol helps to fill that gap.

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

Councilmember Zahn thanked the Commissioners for their efforts in reviewing the applications and making recommendations to the Council. The Council received a briefing recently on the revenue forecast and learned that revenues for the coming biennium are expected to be flat. A number of other municipalities are actually seeing a reduction in revenues, so Bellevue is in good shape. From the standpoint of human services and other city priorities, however, some difficult decisions will need to be made about increasing funding where possible.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Senior Administrative Assistant Gysel Galaviz reported that the previously discussed notion of having only one meeting per month has been adopted. Accordingly, the Commission's next meeting will be September 9 and there will be only one meeting in October, November and December. In lieu of attending a second meeting per month, the Commissioners will be expected to attend a community meeting. A calendar of possible meetings for the Commissioners to attend will be provided to the Commissioners.

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw said the meeting schedule change is intended to be temporary. The Commission's bylaws state that the Commission meets twice per month. If the new approach works, it will be continued, except during funding cycles when more meetings are needed. The list of things the Commissioners can elect to do in lieu of a second meeting includes touring agencies, attending lectures or panel discussions focused on a human services topic, attending a meeting of a different city of Bellevue board or commission, participate in monitoring visits with staff, or joining a community meeting that is one of the convening groups for human services organizations. A suggested list of activities will be provided to the Commissioners. The intent is to facilitate having the Commissioners learn firsthand about human services needs in the community and the agencies working to fill those needs.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Imfura, Ruth Blaw explained that monitoring visits do not occur at set times. They can be in the morning or afternoon. Other meetings the Commissioners could attend in lieu of a second meeting might be in the evenings or even by Zoom.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland pointed out that the visits will give the Commissioners something to report during Commissioner reports.

Andrew Ndayambaje shared with the Commission that the November 4 meeting will feature a panel discussion with agency representatives. The Commissioners were asked to make suggestions for who should be invited to participate.

Commissioner Phan suggested hearing from those focused on food insecurity, adult education, child care, youth with disabilities and adults with disabilities.

Chair Singh said it would be helpful to hear more about the needs of asylum seekers.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Finalize Human Services 2025-2026 Recommendations

Chair Singh noted that following the July 1 Commission meeting, the final spreadsheet had been sent out to the Commissioners.

Ruth Blaw said one correction from the July 1 meeting had to be made. The Commission's recommendation for Application 18, Cancer Lifeline, had been \$5000. However, the minimum is \$10,000. Accordingly, staff bumped that application up to the minimum and reduced Application 17, Bellevue LifeSpring, by \$5000.

The Commissioners concurred with the revision.

Ruth Blaw said the Commission would be asked to vote on the specific funding recommendations, and to prioritize the extra funds/dream column. With regard to the latter, staff presented the Commissioners with two options. In both Options 1 and 2, shelter was shown as funded at 100 percent of the ask. Under Option 1, the remaining funds would be awarded down the list application by application until the funds are gone. Option 2 would award the remaining non-shelter funds by group, with to 70 percent for ((the pink box)) and 30 percent for ((the green box.))

Chair Singh said a third option would be to allocate the remaining funds on a 50-50 basis between the pink and the green.

Commissioner Phan asked about prioritizing BIPOC organizations first and putting the rest of the funds toward general services within the dream fund. Chair Singh suggested that the recommended funding category already provides funding to BIPOC organizations.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza pointed out that

staff had included some footnotes with Option 2 clarifying when a percentage split is used

A motion to approve Option 3, with the dream column for all shelter programs the amount needed to match the ask, and with the balance of funds split 50 percent for the culturally and linguistically specific agencies, and 50 percent for the general agencies, in line with the footnotes provided by staff under Option 2, and to approve the full package of recommendations was made by Commissioner Rashid. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gonzalez. The motion carried by majority vote (4-1) with Commissioner Phan voting no.

Chair Singh announced that the 2025-2026 funding recommendations had been approved and would be presented to the Council in the fall. The Commission and the staff were thanked for their hard work.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Singh adjourned the meeting at 7:03 p.m.