

**CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

December 1, 2025
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Gonzalez, Perelman, White

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioners Hays

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Phan, Rashid

STAFF PRESENT: Toni Esparza, Donna Adair, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hilts, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Mayor Robinson

POLICE LIAISON: Major Ellen Inman

GUEST SPEAKERS: Kalika Curry, Eastside Pathways; Debbie Lacy, Eastside for All

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Chair Singh who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Perelman, who arrived at 6:33 p.m., and Commissioners Rashid and Phan.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Sharmila Rathinam with Eat Happy Now said the organization is a nonprofit food-rescue service powered by real-time technology. Funding from the city has helped to scale up the program. The additional funding of more than \$30,000 in supplemental funding provided during the period of reduced SNAP benefits was very helpful. Eat Happy Now uses a mobile application to connect surplus food from grocery stores, restaurants, and cafés with residents in immediate need. The organization delivers culturally relevant produce within an hour of donation. There are more than 600 volunteers who help in delivering the food; over a 100 donors; and over 100 receiving organizations. Approximately 70 percent of all food rescue is volunteer-driven, with the

remaining 30 percent managed by paid staff. Technology has significantly increased operational efficiency and goals for the future include using the platform to expand the capacity for food banks. Using funding support from the city, the organization has rescued more than 261,000 pounds of food and served over 1,900 residents monthly, benefitting 13 organizations such as shelters, low-income housing groups, and food banks.

Alex Tsimerman began disparaging remarks toward the Commissioners and then shifted to matters involving trespass orders that were asserted to have been improperly issued by the Mayor. An appeal was referenced, cited a U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding public-meeting disruptions, and alleged wrongdoing by city officials.

Chair Singh interjected with a request to adhere to the rules for public comment, but Tsimerman insisted that the comments related to city business and continued with further claims regarding election materials, motivations of city leadership, and perceived violations of rights. The remarks concluded with additional accusatory and inflammatory statements.

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Mayor Robinson expressed regret that the Commission must endure remarks such as those made by Alex Tsimerman, something that should not be part of the Commission's job. The comments had nothing to do with human services. The Commission was thanked for its work administering the recently expanded city funding and noted that additional contributions from Amazon had supplemented resources for Renewal Food Bank. The Amazon funding was contingent on the city maintaining its original funding commitment; the combined efforts resulted in nearly one million dollars allocated to food security, housing, and legal support.

Mayor Robinson said the city is facing a challenging climate marked by instability in food, housing, and other basic needs. The Commissioners were urged to prioritize essential support for food assistance, housing stability, legal aid, and access to medical benefits. Drawing upon professional experience as a longtime physical therapist, Mayor Robinson emphasized that inadequate medical care during childhood and early adulthood often leads to chronic, long-term health problems. Preventive support in terms of reduced stress, stable housing, reliable access to food, and basic health care is essential to community well-being and is consistent with the Council's emerging priorities.

Major Inman informed the Commission that the police department is partnering with Factoria Mall, specifically Target, for an annual holiday program formerly known as "Shop with a Cop," now titled "Heroes and Helpers." The event is scheduled for December 13 and involves at least 100 children who will each receive a \$100 gift card and shop with the assistance of police officers and department staff, both Commissioned and non-Commissioned. The program provides a joyful opportunity for children and families during the holiday season.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw informed the Commissioners following the panel discussion staff would provide an overview of the process for electing new officers, which will

occur at the first Commission meeting in December.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Panel Conversation on Convening & Collective Impact

Human Services Planner Saada Hilts explained that during interviews, surveys, and focus groups conducted as part of the City of Bellevue's 2023–2024 Human Services Needs Update, service providers expressed a growing need for organizations that function as convening partners, specifically entities that bring together multiple agencies, coordinate collaborative work, strengthen partnerships, and support collective impact across the human services ecosystem. To advance those efforts, the city allocated \$200,000 in the 2025–2026 biennium for convening, coordination, and collaboration. It was explained that convening refers to the intentional act of gathering stakeholders to share information, build relationships, coordinate services, reduce duplication, and work toward shared goals, especially through organizations that do not themselves provide direct services but enhance the functioning of the broader network.

Saada Hilts introduced the evening's panelists as Debbie Lacy, founder and executive director of Eastside for All, and Kalika Curry, executive director of Eastside Pathways.

Debbie Lacy explained that Eastside for All, founded in 2019, is an advocacy organization focused on building infrastructure in East King County for racial and social justice. Although primarily a systemic-change organization, it also provides limited direct support to individuals experiencing hate crimes or bias-motivated incidents.

Kalika Curry said Eastside Pathways was founded in 2011 and now serves all of East King County by working with over 70 partner organizations representing sectors such as health, education, government, nonprofit agencies, for-profit entities, parents, and families. Expanding the organization's regional lens allows it to support agencies whose work extends beyond Bellevue. There are longstanding partnerships within the network; approximately 68 percent of the partners have been engaged for six years or more.

The panelists were asked how they define collective impact and how their organizations approach the work. Kalika Curry explained that the strength of collective impact lies in blending and coordinating efforts across agencies so that organizations break out of silos and take shared ownership of community outcomes. The importance of being "future-ready" was stressed. Collective impact allows organizations to center the needs of students and residents rather than the limitations of individual agencies. It brings all relevant stakeholders together to address intersecting issues such as housing and basic needs with finite resources.

Debbie Lacy said because Eastside for All focuses on systemic change at a local level, its collective-impact work centers on convening stakeholders to advance racial and social equity.

No single entity can advance racial equity alone. Eastside for All applies an equity lens to each initiative. The organization prioritizes convening nonprofits founded by and serving communities of color and immigrant communities, especially those with limited representation in decision-making, and those with limited financial and technical resources. The goal is to ensure that participating organizations receive meaningful, concrete benefits from collective work.

Debbie Lacy said there were eight core organizations convened under the city-supported initiative. Each organization was founded by people of color and immigrants, and serves those same communities with the least amount of resources. It was stressed that documenting in-house linguistic and cultural expertise helps to illuminate the depth of culturally grounded support the organizations offer their communities. The organizations bring significant strengths and community expertise, even when operating with limited resources. None of the eight organizations, including Eastside for All, have annual revenues exceeding \$1 million, and six of the organizations were projected to have less than \$250,000 in revenues for 2025. Despite limited funding, the organizations provide extensive services for their communities, making them central to equitable collective-impact efforts. Convening them therefore not only strengthens community services but also builds the organizational capacity of the groups themselves, ensuring they will emerge stronger through collaborative work.

Saada Hilts asked what types of convening spaces or models are most effective in helping agencies share resources, align services, and learn from one another. Kalika Curry acknowledged that effective convening depends not only on structure but on the willingness of participants to engage openly. Recent increases in fear, perceived threats, and divisive pressures have made some organizational leaders less willing to share information or participate. The conditions, compounded by primary and secondary trauma experienced by agencies and their leaders, has reduced an openness to collaboration. Nevertheless, it remains important to understand convening models from a fidelity standpoint. The COVID-19 pandemic taught a lot about shifting from in-person to remote or hybrid formats, which significantly improved equitable access. Individuals with disabilities were better able to participate as remote attendance removed physical barriers. Digital platforms also reduced reliance on verbal communication and helped lower operational costs by eliminating the need for food and physical meeting spaces. However, there were trade-offs: smaller community-based organizations, especially those without storefronts, struggled to maintain visibility and connection with families when physical spaces were unavailable. Eastside Pathways treats the tension as a design feature by functioning as an archive that tracks community needs, efforts, and solutions. In an environment where leadership turnover and systems change frequently, the organization's role in documenting and reporting the experiences of parents and families helps maintain accountability and continuity.

Continuing, Kalika Curry stressed that consistency in convening is crucial for information sharing. During the pandemic, Eastside Pathways hosted weekly meetings attended by 100 to 200 participants who self-organized into groups focused on remote learning, mental health and wellbeing, housing, food security, and philanthropy. The housing group ultimately dissolved because participants realized they were attending as many as five separate weekly housing forums, which illustrates how fragmented the system had become. Convening is most effective when stakeholders know there is a single, reliable place, be it physical or virtual, where they can bring shared concerns. The consolidation reduces duplicative conversations and preserves

leadership time. Although physical space remains important, especially for direct service providers, sustainable convening requires thoughtful investment in models that balance basic needs with long-term coordination capacity.

Debbie Lacy agreed and expanded on the types of convening structures that have proven most effective for Eastside for All. Convening must generate meaningful outcomes not only for the broader community but also for each participating organization. One essential practice is direct compensation. Eastside for All commits to financially compensating organizations that collaborate in its convenings in recognition of the significant value the partners contribute. Under the current grant, most funding flows directly to partner organizations rather than to Eastside for All. Since its founding, the organization has directed more than \$525,000 to its partners, not as charitable donations but as payment for collaborative work that requires substantial time, expertise, and effort. Addressing the financial constraints of the partners builds trust and strengthens engagement. Convening is conducted through small, intentionally composed groups. The organizations typically convened are those with limited financial resources, those experiencing racial disparities, and those serving culturally specific communities, many of which lack physical space for their programs. By gathering groups with shared constraints but different areas of expertise, Eastside for All fosters equitable collaboration. The organization not only facilitates discussion but also coordinates concrete action, such as arranging joint advocacy meetings with the mayor, planning commissioners, school districts, and other entities. During the efforts, partners determine who will lead each engagement depending on subject-matter expertise, while Eastside for All provides administrative and logistical support to ensure that meetings occur. The combination of compensation, small-group convening, administrative support, and shared leadership has proven especially effective in producing meaningful and measurable outcomes.

Saada Hilts asked what types of support agencies need the most, particularly the smaller, culturally specific organizations, and how convening helps meet those needs. Kalika Curry said responding on behalf of partners is a significant responsibility, but the findings from the organization's recent biannual partner survey provided clarity. Using the metaphor of a choir sustaining a note, it was noted that sustainable systems require coordinated support so that when one individual or organization needs to pause or rest, the overall service to families continues uninterrupted. The goal of convening is to create systems so well coordinated that families do not experience service gaps simply because one provider needs time or capacity to recover. Many smaller providers operate with minimal staff and resources while addressing community needs of great magnitude. Community-rooted leaders ensure that everyone receives what they need despite scarcities. Smaller, agile organizations, such as those that function like speed boats, have consistently expressed the need for low-barrier, trust-based funding rather than complex, burdensome contracting structures. However, shifts in regional funding practices, such as increased insurance and reporting requirements under King County protocols, have created new administrative burdens that many small agencies cannot meet. Eastside Pathways has therefore begun providing technical support, helping partners with data reporting and considering ways to reduce insurance-related barriers. For some grants, including recent Best Starts for Kids funding, the administrative costs required to comply with the reporting obligations exceeded the funds received for program delivery. In such cases, Eastside Pathways works to absorb portions of the overhead so that smaller agencies can remain focused on serving children and families. The is

also a need to address the emotional and psychological needs of community-based leaders, many of whom come from the same communities they support and therefore experience both direct and secondary trauma. Coordinated systems can lessen the burden through shared responsibility.

Kalika Curry said another area of need involves support for developing understanding of systems. Many leaders, pressed by daily demands, have limited time to analyze structural factors influencing their work. Eastside Pathways helps its partners interpret policy changes and navigate situations requiring pre-compliance with federal or state directives, such as issues involving gender-inclusive facilities. Because partnership contracts include pre-commitments to behavioral change, Eastside Pathways encourages partners to act when systemic barriers arise, reinforcing accountability while ensuring responsiveness to community concerns. Pairing responsiveness with accountability is essential and the organization is committed to pre-established behavioral change, which offers a hopeful path forward, preventing stagnation and enabling ongoing progress for families and communities.

Debbie Lacy fully agreed with those comments and expanded on the challenges facing nonprofit organizations, particularly those led by immigrants and individuals for whom English is a second language. Many such leaders possess deep expertise in their programmatic missions but often do not anticipate the extensive administrative work required to sustain a nonprofit, including tasks far removed from direct service. Eastside for All has for years explored the idea of an entity that could provide pooled back-office support, such as insurance, human resources, and accounting, without functioning as a traditional fiscal sponsor, a model that many organizations in the network view with hesitation. All organizations engaged in the network have expressed interest in shared administrative resources. Ongoing consultation with the Together Center and regional bodies such as the Eastside Human Services Forum and the Alliance for Eastside Agencies are focused on determining what is needed to build a robust nonprofit infrastructure.

Debbie Lacy emphasized that the role of Eastside for All in convening work is closely tied to anti-displacement. Concern was expressed that, in the event of another crisis comparable to the COVID-19 pandemic or any other large-scale emergency, the community may no longer have a sufficient base of nonprofits to mount an effective response. Citing the current crisis involving ICE enforcement as an example, it was stated that only a small number of organizations are presently able to respond within minutes when a family's primary income earner is detained. The trauma and intensity of the work is significant. The priority is not only to ensure that existing nonprofits can remain in the community and serve local residents, but also to grow the nonprofit infrastructure to meet expanding needs. A parallel was drawn between businesses and nonprofits being priced out of the area. The displacement disproportionately affects under-resourced organizations that also contend with racial discrimination and cultural barriers.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza asked why agencies are often hesitant about the concept of a fiscal sponsor. Debbie Lacy replied that in a fiscal sponsorship arrangement, the sponsoring organization assumes the legal responsibility for the sponsored project, which becomes a project of the fiscal sponsor. Many organizations are understandably uncomfortable ceding that level of control and authority to another entity, making such arrangements feasible only where there is strong mission alignment and extensive agreement on values and operations.

Kalika Curry added further context by referencing discussions with representatives of the Best Starts for Kids program and stating that if Eastside Pathways were to act as a fiduciary sponsor for other organizations under that funding stream, the sponsor would be subject to the same detailed reporting and oversight requirements imposed on its own contracts. The structure would be financially unsustainable because the funds would be consumed by data collection and compliance rather than direct service. In practice, funders sometimes advise using nuanced language that treats partner organizations as consultants paid for discrete projects rather than as subcontractors to navigate the constraints. Stressed was the importance of ensuring that information about such distinctions is widely shared so that organizations can accurately frame their work and funding relationships. Eastside Pathways was able during the prior year to reinvest \$175,000 but has since had to reduce passthrough funding due to both decreased revenue and the rising cost of providing administrative support. There is an inherent risk in employing staff across different organizational and employment models, and that calls for careful thought about how investments are structured to support diverse employees, organizations, and employers.

Debbie Lacy summarized the needs of the convened organizations by explaining that when partners were asked to rank their top three needs, funding and physical space emerged consistently as priorities. The needs are interrelated given that when organizations have dedicated space, they become more visible in the community, which aids fundraising and service delivery and improves access for those they serve. Participants in Eastside for All's groups often describe the interdependence. The lack of one resource can undermine the effectiveness of others.

Debbie Lacy said all organizations involved in the collective have received new or additional funding since joining the group. A majority have indicated that their confidence in fundraising and their ability to secure financial support has improved. Among the six organizations that identified space as a priority, three have obtained access to space they can use occasionally or as needed, and two have secured space for regular use. There have been successes from the joint advocacy, including obtaining additional funding from Kirkland and Redmond to support responses to ICE-related crises. Bellevue's investment has included \$200,000 in legal funding to support organizations working on that specific crisis. There is an emotional toll on leaders who are repeatedly called upon to respond to emergencies, but there is also a strong sense of pride, camaraderie, and solidarity among organizations from different cultural and racial backgrounds that have come together to secure the resources. The shared achievement helps sustain their efforts, and the Commission has supported the work.

Vice Chair White asked what square footage constitutes an ideal physical space for a group. Debbie Lacy responded that it is difficult to provide a single figure because the need varies widely by organization and by the nature of the work. Most organizations in the network require larger spaces, not primarily for staff offices but for community gathering. As "A to Z" service providers, the organizations must be able to host community events, crisis response activities, and ongoing programs. Without adequate gathering space, they cannot fully perform their roles. Spaces of more than a thousand square feet are necessary rather than optional.

Kalika Curry added that Eastside Pathways has collected specific data on space needs and would be able to share that research separately to ensure accuracy. Changes in the organization's relationship with the city has affected its ability to convene. Under a previous contract, Eastside Pathways collaborated with the city to hold eight racial equity council meetings and two all-partner meetings annually, with access to city facilities included as part of the agreement. With the loss of that collaboration and a \$100,000 reduction in funding, the organization now must pay for facilities it previously used at no direct cost. For the current year alone, approximately \$76,000 had been spent on rental spaces, diverting funds from convening support and reinvestment into simply securing physical locations for gatherings. To illustrate the scale of space requirements, it was noted that Eastside Pathways' collaborative action network meetings involve approximately 15 to 30 organizations per network, each typically sending one to three staff members. Monthly meetings thus draw between 20 and 45 participants and can often be accommodated at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, where Eastside Pathways is housed. However, larger events, drawing 150 to 200 participants four to five times per year, require renting venues such as the Meydenbauer Center. The organization has outgrown other community centers and is unable to use library spaces for these purposes. The organization is effectively in competition for available facilities and the operations director has begun booking venues in January for the following year due to the high demand. The pressures have pushed the organization to conduct more activities remotely, even as the need for in-person convening remains strong. Eastside Pathways has sought to maximize its limited physical resources by sharing its office space with partner organizations that lack storefronts. Staff occupy the office only one day per week, and the organization's insurance arrangements allow partners to use the space for smaller, more intimate convenings. Gratitude was expressed to St. Andrew's Lutheran Church for making several small rooms available to Eastside Pathways partners. While the arrangements help at a modest scale, the broader need for adequate and affordable convening space is both ongoing and urgent.

Commissioner Gonzalez asked how families facing difficulties due to ICE detentions can reach out to the organizations working on the issue, and asked which groups are involved under the relevant funding allocations. Debbie Lacy said several organizations provide support. The organization can connect families directly to services depending on their city of residence and their cultural or language needs, or can make referrals where needed.

Kalika Curry added that Eastside Pathways works with many of the same partner organizations and has focused significantly on ensuring that school districts collaborate effectively with community agencies so that families do not fall through the gaps between systems. The Parent Caregiver Council is a welcome and empowering space where parents can engage directly with elected officials and agency leaders. All of the meetings are free to attend and open without formal enrollment.

Debbie Lacy highlighted an additional convening space known as Safe Haven, which has operated since 2019. A link to Safe Haven can be found on the Eastside for All website. There is a group that meets monthly, and the next in-person meeting will be held at the Together Center in Redmond. There is a substantial workload involved in organizing such gatherings. Effective infrastructure requires convening efforts focused on different populations and subject areas; no one entity can meet all the needs.

Debbie Lacy explained that Eastside for All launched an initiative called Build for Belonging to advance equitable development. With the Eastside cities planning thousands of new affordable housing units over the next two decades, there are promising opportunities for integrated nonprofit and community-serving space. The convened group has been meeting with city councils, planning commissions, and both nonprofit and private developers to encourage mixed-use designs that incorporate nonprofit office and community space, as well as affordable retail opportunities. After two years of collective planning, the organizations involved have developed a new model for community engagement in urban planning. The model was first presented to approximately 30 staff from the city of Redmond representing multiple departments and it is now being implemented more broadly within the city. The same model was also presented at the American Planning Association conference in Seattle where representatives from the collective trained planners on applying the approach across jurisdictions.

Debbie Lacy described the efforts to secure long-term community space. After years of difficulty accessing local libraries or public facilities with restrictive booking policies, the collective determined that obtaining dedicated space is essential. Bellwether Housing will be developing a new affordable housing project in Redmond's Overlake Village that includes a 10,000-square-foot community facility designated for the collective's partner organizations. The project, expected to open in early 2028, will provide office space, a commercial kitchen to support food business incubation, and an event space for community gatherings. The development will allow smaller organizations, many of which currently lack any physical space, to work, convene, and serve their communities. Eastside for All expects to sign the purchase and sale agreement for the facility in January and hopes the model can be replicated by other organizations willing to collaborate. There is a clear need for broader community participation, including access to city facilities and corporate office spaces, as the community works to build its own infrastructure.

Saada Hilts affirmed the significance of the developments, noting that many agencies visited during monitoring sessions have reported being displaced, outgrowing their current spaces, or feeling pushed out of the area.

Saada Hilts asked the panelists how equity, community voice, and culturally responsive practices are kept central in the work of the organizations. Kalika Curry responded by describing the structural model of Eastside Pathways, which is designed as a heterarchical model organized around centrifugal circles rather than a traditional hierarchy. At the center of the model is the community or focus population, which holds the authority to set priorities and identify key issues. The organization's board holds fiduciary responsibility but does not direct programmatic decisions, which allows community members to lead without needing formal titles, financial means, or advanced education. The leadership council members, many of whom are powerful leaders in their own communities, maintain full autonomy over decisions made within convening spaces. The second layer of the model encompasses leaders and practitioners from various roles, such as educators, health workers, public safety staff, and parents. The participants contribute expertise about how systems currently function and help design strategies for change. The outermost layer, composed of boards, executives and staff is responsible only for determining what resources are needed to implement the priorities established by the community, not for deciding what those priorities should be. Also highlighted was the importance of partnership

agreements that clearly outline authority and scope of influence before collaborative work begins. The agreements ensure that when community members bring needs or trauma into a space, there is a genuine commitment to action rather than a vague aspiration for future change. Examples from previous years in which community-identified needs prompted immediate shifts in organizational programming include the COVID-19 response. The organization's longevity and accumulated knowledge about local systems shows that experience allows Eastside Pathways to guide partners effectively and hold systems accountable when progress lags. Institutional memory strengthens community-driven change.

Continuing, Kalika Curry elaborated on the unique role of collective impact organizations in systems change. Practical knowledge comes from long experience and includes an understanding of where obstacles exist and where progress is possible. It is extremely difficult for an individual to serve as a change agent while remaining employed within a large direct-service provider, because pushing against entrenched systems can jeopardize job security. Eastside Pathways as an organization is specifically structured to support upstream systems and policy change, and to pay people to be good troublemakers rather than to simply manage the status quo. In this way, collective impact organizations like Eastside Pathways and Eastside for All provide a safer and more sustainable environment for staff who choose to be change leaders, particularly for those who must balance their advocacy work with responsibilities such as supporting a family.

Kalika Curry said the general principles around equity and cultural responsiveness are embedded in the organization's structure and staffing. Eastside Pathways' staff is composed entirely of people of color, with a significant proportion being immigrants and queer-identifying individuals. The organization is firmly rooted in the communities it seeks to support. Rather than approaching communities as outsiders arriving on a horse with a cape, the staff bring lived experience and cultural consciousness to their work. The organization's adaptive leadership model ensures that change is informed by multiple perspectives and grounded in community realities.

Debbie Lacy offered a concrete example of how equity is operationalized in Eastside for All's work by describing the complexity of sustaining a cross-racial coalition in which all members are people of color but who experience different forms and degrees of disparity. The incident recounted involved the development of the Prisma affordable housing complex in Redmond, which includes a planned nonprofit and community space on the ground floor. During the early stages of partnership with Bellwether Housing, it came to light that the city of Redmond and the Redmond Police Department were interested in establishing a police substation within that same building. The nonprofit collective responsible for the community space had not been consulted however. Upon learning this, the collective paused the partnership, effectively halting progress on the project, and initiated discussions with the city, Bellwether, and police leadership. Within the coalition, a minority of organizations strongly opposed the idea of a police substation in that particular building, citing deep concerns based on community experience and potential impacts on those the space was intended to serve. While the coalition recognized that a police presence might be appropriate elsewhere in the neighborhood, the members argued that co-locating a substation with the community and nonprofit hub would be harmful. In an explicit act of equity, the larger group chose to honor the minority view and refused to move forward with the project under those conditions, despite the fact that most organizations urgently needed the office and

gathering space and could have chosen to proceed without the dissenting members. The decision was a clear example of centering those farthest from justice. The coalition prioritized the voices of those with the most at stake, even when those voices were few in number and the decision entailed significant sacrifice.

Saada Hilts asked the panelists where they see opportunities for deeper partnership with the city of Bellevue to strengthen the human services ecosystem. Kalika Curry said Eastside Pathways has been a partner to the Strive Together national network of collective impact initiatives since its inception. The network annually presents a national award for outstanding collective impact leadership in honor of Bill Henningsgaard. Despite Eastside Pathways' long history and strong performance, the Eastside Pathways organization has not received the award, nor is the organization mentioned when the award is announced. That underscores a broader point: when Eastside Pathways completes civic infrastructure assessments and compares itself to similar organizations across the country, the key difference is not in strategy or framework, but in the degree of city involvement. In other regions, municipalities are deeply engaged as partners and collaborators in collective impact efforts, not merely as funders. Those partnerships enable some collective impact organizations to operate with budgets in the tens of millions of dollars and to build facilities such as classrooms and early learning centers that directly support communities. With regard to regional advocacy efforts, Eastside Pathways works alongside Graduate Tacoma and the Community Center for Education Results, backbone organizations representing approximately half of Washington State's students. When they visit the state capitol together, state officials frequently respond that funding decisions are delegated downward, first to the state, then to counties. At the county level, East King County's requests are often dismissed on the grounds that there are not enough students from specific demographic groups, such as Black, queer, immigrant, or other intersectional identities, and that conditions in East King County are not perceived as dire enough relative to other regions. The pattern leaves East King County children and providers consistently under-resourced, despite documented needs. Meaningful change will require strong advocacy partnerships between backbone organizations and cities. The Commissioners were asked to imagine the difference it would make if Eastside Pathways could go to Olympia not only as a network of nonprofits, but also explicitly on behalf of cities and counties in East King County. Such unified advocacy could counter prevailing narratives that minimize the needs of local students and families. The same arguments are repeated year after year.

Kalika Curry issued a challenge the city to work not only as a funder but as an active collaborator and co-advocate. Concern was expressed about a perceived reduction in collaboration with the city, even as financial support has continued. Specific examples were highlighted, including the loss of access to city facilities and printing services that previously were embedded in the contract. The annual community report now costs approximately \$5,000 to print, an expense once covered through partnership with the city. The report is a critical tool for empowering parents with data on issues such as individualized education plans and graduation outcomes. While a local bank has generously covered the printing costs for the current year, continued in-kind support is essential to the organization's ability to equip families with information to advocate for their children.

Kalika Curry emphasized the need for the city to be a thoughtful partner in navigating the

cultural and relational impacts of competitive funding structures. Divide and conquer funding practices can create rifts between organizations that can lead to long-lasting interpersonal and inter-organizational tensions rooted in competition over scarce resources. Eastside Pathways staff spend considerable time helping to repair relationships and providing a safe container where partners can move beyond past hurts to focus collectively on the well-being of children. The Pizza with a Purpose initiative, initially funded by the city of Bellevue in 2017 and piloted at Interlake High School, has expanded to three Bellevue high schools. Using data to identify key service components, such as career exposure, mentorship, financial planning, postsecondary enrollment planning, listening circles for students and parents, and ongoing support, the initiative coordinates services around Black students to help them stay on track for graduation. The list of partners includes Africans on the Eastside, Eastside Youth Coalition, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Bellevue School District, the local YMCA, Roots of Us, and other organizations. With an \$80,000 investment, Eastside Pathways is able to align seven organizations so that each student receives support from multiple touchpoints, demonstrating the power of investing in coordinated collective impact rather than isolated programs.

Kalika Curry described for the Commissioners an earlier research project on trauma-informed restorative practices funded by Best Starts for Kids that involved 35 providers. The work revealed that many organizations could not effectively serve students because they lacked memoranda of understanding with the Bellevue School District. Advocacy supported by Bellevue's human services funding helped organizations such as Africans on the Eastside and Eastside Youth Coalition secure MOUs, thereby enabling them to enter schools and deliver services. Expanding the efforts from one high school to three for a specific student population required two full-time staff to manage the coordination. Additional Best Starts for Kids funding allowed Eastside Pathways to bring in MCNA and begin adapting the Pizza with a Purpose model for other focus populations, including Muslim students and Spanish-speaking communities through collaboration with NISO programs. The work is not only about sustaining and scaling existing efforts, but also about extending proven models to new communities. The city's dollars go farther when invested in collective impact approaches.

Commissioner Perelman asked the panelists to address the balance between supporting many small, culturally specific organizations versus consolidating services under a larger entity to reduce administrative overhead. There is value in niche organizations but centralization and advising organizations not to duplicate existing services might sometimes be more efficient. Kalika Curry emphasized that attempts to be everything to everyone can create significant risk for organizations and can lead to ineffective service delivery. Collective impact is designed to prevent the problem by ensuring that each organization operates intentionally within its own capacity and expertise. When centering the needs of families and students, no single organization has ever been able to meet all needs alone. Instead, successful support systems rely on multiple providers, with each offering distinct, culturally responsive, and relationship-based services in a coordinated manner so that families do not bear the burden of navigating disparate systems. It takes providers who mentor students, those who support cultural identity and empowerment, those who offer career exploration tools, and those who facilitate community healing through food, movement, or conversation. The problem is not the presence of many organizations but rather the lack of coordination when they operate in isolation. Collective impact bridges that gap by ensuring that service providers communicate, collaborate, and sequence their work so that

families receive cohesive support rather than a fragmented set of disconnected services.

Kalika Curry explained that advising organizations not to proceed with a particular initiative occurs regularly, not as discouragement, but rather to help organizations avoid wasted effort and to encourage collaboration. Eastside Pathways uses its resources to facilitate knowledge transfer among partners, paying organizations to teach others about effective communication strategies, transcreation models, political navigation, and systems thinking. Executive directors across East King County generally collaborate well, and often coordinate with one another to retain valued staff even when individual organizations face funding reductions.

Debbie Lacy affirmed that the question touches on multiple issues: collective impact as practiced in the current networks, the potential for shared administrative services, and the recurring idea of merging or centralizing organizations. Conversations about pooled resources have taken place for decades and have confirmed that such models can work when one organization is positioned to take the lead and distribute funds among smaller partners. Indian American Community Services is one example of a mid-sized organization that has secured larger grants and redistributed funds while providing accounting and administrative oversight. The Commission was cautioned, however, against encouraging consolidation based on assumptions that smaller organizations duplicate each other's work. There have been multiple instances in which city staff suggested that organizations serving communities of color were performing overlapping functions. The Commissioners were urged not to make such assumptions, noting that similar questions are rarely directed at white-led organizations which frequently coexist in large numbers without scrutiny. Smaller culturally specific organizations serve communities in deeply holistic ways that cannot be compartmentalized into single service categories such as food, mental health, or crisis response. Being required to choose one function under an umbrella organization would cause many to disengage entirely, as their model of care is intentionally comprehensive and community-rooted.

Debbie Lacy said there are opportunities for deeper partnerships with the city, including collaboration in areas where Eastside for All has already built relationships and established co-created processes. Similar collaboration could occur across human services, small business support, and economic development. Eastside For All views as essential elements of strong partnership co-creation rather than top-down direction, shared leadership models, recognition that bigger is not always better, unrestricted general operating support, and sustained investments in capacity building rather than only direct services. While crises such as the recent ICE detention emergency require urgent response, it is equally important to plan for long-term sustainability. Without building a durable nonprofit infrastructure, the community risks emerging from one crisis unprepared for the next, with depleted organizations and diminished capacity to serve residents. Agreement was expressed with earlier the comments made by Mayor Robinson about the gravity of the current moment. Addressing immediate needs and maintaining a long-term vision must occur simultaneously to prevent exhaustion, attrition, and the loss of critical community-based organizations.

Toni Esparza stated that based on Bellevue's most recent Human Services Needs Update the community remains far from meeting the overall service demand. That document indicates that only 49 percent of Bellevue residents were able to obtain help when needed. Across multiple

service areas, residents reported barriers such as long waitlists, limited language access, and transportation challenges. Any concern about duplication of services does not align with the data, as unmet need remains substantial across the system.

Kalika Curry reported that major philanthropic foundations in the region have stated they will not fill gaps created by reductions in federal funding, insisting that the shortfalls fall outside their role. That has shifted the financial burden to individual donors, many of whom now feel overextended. The funding environment is particularly difficult for smaller organizations, especially those led by Black, Indigenous, and immigrant community members who were already underfunded due to longstanding structural inequities, including perceptions that East King County does not have enough of “those kids” or that local needs are not severe enough to merit investment. The internal strains experienced by nonprofit staff include heightened trauma exposure, increased service demands, and shrinking budgets. Eastside Pathways began the year with more than seven staff members but is currently operating with only five; the anticipation is that the number will be even lower next year. Despite the shrinking capacity, the organization faces increased expectations from partners and donors, including demands for more detailed, real-time data and more complex reporting. Some leaders are being advised to leave the nonprofit sector altogether because remaining financially viable has become increasingly untenable. East King County is often misunderstood by external observers who assume that access to wealth equates to the absence of systemic challenges. The Bellevue School District’s recent state-level intervention illustrates that adequately serving students requires systemic change, not isolated programmatic solutions. Investment in essential services through a systems lens. Without structural reforms, enrollment declines and funding shortages in local school districts will worsen. The solutions must include infrastructure and policy changes, not just additional programs.

Saada Hilts thanked Kalika Curry and Debbie Lacy for their participation and acknowledged the depth and importance of their contributions.

B. Next Meeting Details

Chair Singh reminded the Commissioners that the next meeting would occur on January 4 and will include election of officers.

Ruth Blaw explained that the election of officers for the Commission takes place at the first meeting of each year. The Commissioners were provided with a handout that outlined the election procedures. The key elements of the procedures were noted to be that any Commissioner may nominate themselves or another member; nominees may speak or answer questions; nominees may decline; and elections will occur sequentially, beginning with the chair. Votes will be taken in the order the nominees are named, with the affirmative and negative votes recorded verbally. Any abstentions will be counted as affirmative votes, and the first nominee to receive a majority will be elected. Once elected, the new chair will immediately assume leadership of the meeting.

Gysel Galaviz reminded the Commissioners of the upcoming parliamentary training session that is scheduled for December 8 and noted that a reminder with details will be sent out.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Singh adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.