

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on January 4, 2023.

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION  
MINUTES

November 1, 2022  
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Piper, Vice Chair Amirfaiz, Commissioners Mansfield, Singh, White

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Leslie Miller, Asma Ahmed, Department of Parks and Community Services; Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. October 18, 2022

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None

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

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis said the presentation to the City Council by Chair Piper and staff was well received. The Council went on to discuss the city's Human Services Fund and CDBG funding and reviewed the city's Housing Stability Program funding budget and the Commission's recommendation regarding it. The Councilmembers were supportive of the Commission's ongoing work to address the needs in the city.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza reminded the Commissioners that the City Council's final public hearing on the city's budget was scheduled for November 7. The Council is tentatively slated to adopt the budget on November 14.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Manager Leslie Miller informally polled the Commissioners about their preference for moving the Commission meetings to either Wednesdays or Thursdays where a Monday holiday prevents the Commission from meeting on Tuesday. Commissioner Mansfield indicated a preference for Wednesdays, but all the other Commissioners indicated either day would work for them.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS

A. Review of the 2023-2024 Funding Process

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland said 136 applications were received, an unprecedented number, totaling more than \$10 million in asks, twice the available funding. The Commission was tasked with the difficult job of developing recommendations during a time of tremendous need in the community. At the request of the Commission, the staff provided an optional framework to be used as a starting point for the discussions. Overall, a lot of work went into the process.

Beginning with the process of reviewing applications during Commission meetings and completing three review rounds. During the first round the applications were reviewed but no funding recommendations were considered. The second round involved an initial funding recommendation for each application, and the third round included a review of the initial funding amounts and adjusting them to balance the budget. The applications were reviewed by goal area and by goal area subcategories. The Commissioners were asked to comment on what worked well and what improvements should be considered for the next funding cycle.

Commissioner Mansfield voiced support for the staff recommendations and framework, which served as an equal starting place for each application. It was also good to start with a fresh look at each application rather than with an eye on programs that were previous funded.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz voiced appreciation for having all of the proposals in a binder, and for the staff framework approach.

Commissioner Singh said as a first timer there was a fairly steep learning curve. The staff framework helped a great deal.

Commissioner White, who had not been involved with the funding cycle, indicated appreciation for having all of the information organized and structured in a way that made it easy to compare all of the proposals.

Chair Piper agreed that while it triggered a lot of extra work for the staff, the framework was very helpful as a starting point. The approach of grouping by category and subcategory was a refreshing approach.

Turning to what did not work well, Commissioner Singh said the meeting schedule was challenging given that the review work was done in the summer months. Otherwise, the process was good.

Commissioner White said there was a great deal of information to review. It would be good to have more time.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz said the staff framework was helpful, but it was not clear in terms of how

the staff arrived at their recommendations. At times the Commission was all over the map in terms of what was taken into consideration. Some reviewed the agency budgets, some did not. At times it felt as though there was some pressure to go along with the staff recommendations rather than the Commissioner's recommendations, especially in regard to organizations that serve multiethnic groups. There was an unspoken agreement that such organizations needed to be funded whether or not their budgets made sense and in spite of other concerns. There were at times many questions regarding the budgets of some organizations, and the Commission did not have enough time to fully explore the concerns and get the needed answers.

Commissioner Mansfield indicated support for dividing the applications into areas but noted having an issue with the fact that while reviewing the applications in person the process involved applications in multiple areas rather than all the applications within a single area. With different teams assigned to different areas, there was some confusion in going back and forth between areas.

Chair Piper suggested the Commission lacked a common language in terms of what should be emphasized. Everyone came to the table with different focus areas, with some looking more at budgets and others looking more at outcomes. While a scorecard or rubric is not necessarily the answer, it would be good to identify a common way to approach the review of each application.

Responding to that point, Commissioner Mansfield said the fact is human services are in many areas very subjective. It is necessary to consider the people at the various organizations and their backgrounds in determining what they are able to produce. Just how to establish an equal footing for all agencies remains an unknown.

Chair Piper agreed but stressed that what is needed is some sort of minimum threshold for the Commission to focus on in the most fair and objective way possible.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz voiced a desire to see funding recommendations made on the merits of each application rather than on the equal footing of each agency doing great work. That provides a solid basis for defending the funding recommendations at the end of the process.

Commissioner Mansfield stressed the need to look at things equally. One student, the child of educated parents who speak only English, and another student, who did not grow up speaking English or have educated or supportive parents, may be equally bright and capable, but the latter will not put things down on paper as well. That does not mean the child that can deserves more than the other. Vice Chair Amirfaiz said the problem is that most of the applicants are well-seasoned non-profits. As such, they should be able to provide all of the necessary information. The staff should ensure that the budgets are complete and accurate in a timely manner for the Commission's review.

Next they debriefed on the meeting and conversation structure, specifically ensuring that all voices are heard equally. Chair Piper commented that rotating the order in which Commissioners speak is important. Often the first voice is the loudest and those who speak last tend to simply agree with the previous speakers.

Commissioner Singh commented that during the review process all Commissioners were given the opportunity to speak and their voices were in fact heard.

Commissioner Mansfield agreed. The training on equitable practices and bias offered to the Commission was appreciated and helpful.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz also agreed that for the most part all voices were heard during the review

process.

Chair Piper said one thing that worked well was the teams approach to reviewing the applications prior to Commission meetings.

With regard to how to improve the meeting and conversation structure, Commissioner Mansfield commented that the Commission benefits from having a variety of opinions and viewpoints in order to make good decisions. Even where there are disagreements, the statements of each Commissioner need to be considered and valued by all the Commissioners to the degree possible.

Commissioner Singh agreed that listening to the opinions of all is very important. It is true that the more seasoned and experienced Commissioners have the most information, but those with less experience also have opinions and observations that should be heard.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz suggested there should be some ground rules in terms of how to enter into dialog with each other regarding the applications and making recommendations. It is certainly okay to disagree with others, but it should be done without being disagreeable. Additionally, Commissioners should trust that they should speak up if they disagree with a recommendation.

Chair Piper noted that in past funding cycles more time was spent on individual Commissioners actually presenting applications. Due to the sheer volume that approach was curtailed for the current iteration, even though it is one way for all voices to be heard and for the conversations to be set up.

Turning to the question of whether or not the Commissioners felt prepared for every meeting, Commissioner Singh said it was helpful to have the agendas beforehand, and to be kept updated as needed.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz commented that reading through all the applications took a lot of time, but that is what it takes to be prepared to comment, discuss and make recommendations. The willingness of the staff to seek answers from the agencies where questions arose was very helpful.

Chair Piper highlighted the fact that with each funding cycle the application is getting more streamlined, making it easier to have the necessary information in hand. Past applications have been heavier on the narrative side of things, making it more challenging to tease out the key points.

Commissioner Mansfield voiced appreciation for the staff summaries, allowing that they are often read before the actual applications. For the most part Commissioners came to the meetings fully prepared.

On the question of what could be improved about Commissioners being prepared for every meeting, Vice Chair Amirfaiz said it would be helpful to have more time to read the applications. Also, it would be helpful for staff to work with the agencies ahead of time to let them know the Commission wants to see robust outcomes and complete budgets.

Chair Piper allowed it would be helpful to have a little more clarity as to which specific applications will be covered at any given meeting. Additionally, it appeared that the desired data was housed in multiple areas; the old-fashioned binder makes that easier.

Christy Stangland noted all budget data was it was updated was posted to OneDrive and asked

if the Commissioners would also like to have hard copies. Chair Piper said that was not necessarily needed. It could be as simple as sending around a spreadsheet to improve accessibility to updates.

Commissioner Mansfield echoed that comment. Staff did an excellent job of getting updates in a timely manner, but the Commissioners were not necessarily informed updates had been posted until actually in a Commission meeting.

Commissioner Singh suggested it would be helpful for the Commissioners who miss a meeting to have a brief email from staff outlining what happened in the missed meeting and the points that were discussed.

Commissioner Mansfield commented that in addition to having more time to review the applications, it would be helpful to lengthen the review time to avoid the feeling of being rushed. It would also be good to coordinate with agencies to have their oral communications presented at the meeting prior to discussing their applications.

The Commissioners commented next on the number and length of Commission meetings. Chair Piper said the staff framework allowed the Commission to keep to a somewhat normal cadence of meetings. The meetings, while fully packed, were thoughtfully carried out and overall, the schedule was not overly taxing.

Commissioner Mansfield voiced appreciation for the fact that all Commissioners were willing to stay longer and get things done rather than opting for additional meetings. The number of meetings was just right, not too few and not too many.

Commissioner Singh said the meeting times and their organization was good, but because they occurred during the summer months, there were competing interests.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz said the number of meetings was fine, and said it was good that adjustments could be made as needed.

Commissioner Singh noted having a schedule that during the summer would allow for meeting twice per week, something that could open some weeks to not having meetings at all.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz commented that having complete applications would help a lot. The back and forth required where additional information is needed takes up a lot of time. Some applications had to be read two or three times to gain a full understanding of the proposal.

Commissioner Mansfield said in future cycles more time should be planned for in-person speakers. As competition for funding continues to increase, there is likely to be more persons coming in person to address the Commission.

Chair Piper said there were times during the review process where there was a need to allocate more time to discuss the applications. In some instances, there was only a couple of minutes available, which is not enough time for a full discourse.

Commenting on what worked well and what could be improved in regard to incorporating public comments into the funding recommendations, Commissioner Singh welcomed having the public speak during the meetings as a means of providing additional information and highlighting examples of how their programs are addressing the needs in the community.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz agreed that comments from agencies provide details and nuances regarding their applications. It should not, however, be necessary to allow three people from a

single agency addressing a single application all speak at the same meeting. That should be limited to save some time. Vice Chair Amirfaiz voiced some concern about the agencies that choose not to come forward because it does not put them on equal footing.

Chair Piper said there certainly was a lot of enthusiasm on the part of the agency representatives. Agencies electing not to address the Commission can in and of itself sway the decision making. In most cases, the speakers essentially make a sales pitch to the Commission. It would be better if they could focus on areas of differentiation, outcomes, and things of real relevance to the Commission as it struggles to allocate funds.

Commissioner Mansfield agreed it was good to see so many from the public involved. At the same time, however, it felt as though some agencies monopolized the time over others. It would be nice to include in the review schedule an opening public statement session before the in-depth application review process gets under way.

Commenting on the hybrid meeting structure, Christy Stangland noted that the Commission had completely remote meetings beginning in June before transitioning into the hybrid structure.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz stated that virtual meetings are difficult. The chair did an excellent job, however, of guiding the conversations and structuring the dialog. Given the circumstances, the hybrid approach has worked well.

Chair Piper shared that for many, the hybrid approach has made scheduling much easier. What has not worked well, however, is the rules in terms of who must attend in person and the requirement to seek permission ahead of time in order to participate remotely.

Commissioner White commented that the hybrid format is in many ways much easier, noting being able to participate even from long distances. While in-person meetings are preferable, it is good to have the option of participating remotely.

Commissioner Mansfield said flexibility is the obvious benefit to the hybrid structure. The difficulty lies with the rules that limits the number of remote participants. Having to request one of the three remote spots does not work where emergencies arise. In-person meetings are much preferred because of the nuances that can be missed when participating online.

Commissioner Singh agreed that the hybrid structure gives the Commissioners more flexibility, but in-person meetings are preferable, particularly during the funding reviews.

Toni Esparza clarified that the remote participation rules were established by the City Council. Under the rules, remote participation must be approved in advance, and up to a maximum of three Commissioners can participate remotely at any given meeting. At least one person must be present physically at City Hall at each meeting, and the person chairing the meeting must be physically present.

Staff asked the Commissioners to comment on what worked well about the staff framework and what could be improved. Chair Piper said the framework served as a very helpful starting point. It essentially saved the Commission from going through Round 1. The rationales given in the framework were not always clear, however.

Commissioner Mansfield said the staff did a very good job of explaining where the framework came from, and for the most part the rationales were clearly based on the priorities from the Needs Update, the Commission's priorities, and the percentages. Where the staff did not provide a recommendation, there was a clear explanation.

Commissioner Singh voiced appreciation for all the staff work and recommendations. The framework was helpful, especially for the newer Commissioners.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz stressed the need for the framework to give more rationales, particularly in regard to recommended funding amounts.

Turning to equity in funding decisions, Commissioner Mansfield noted appreciation for having received the training and the opportunity to learn more about equity. For next time the Commission should take the time to look at its outcomes in terms of equity in the decision making. The focus on equity was not taken to heart to the degree it could have been, especially in regard to some of the newer and grassroots organizations. It takes everyone working together and listening to each other to reach good decisions.

Commissioner Singh admitted to still learning how things are done and having a lot of questions.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz said the training provided last year was more helpful than the training provided this year. The Commission in fact work hard to accommodate agencies that are new, even where the outline of their projects and their budgets do not make sense. Many agencies not previously funded were funded this time around. If those agencies apply again in the future, many of them should put more thought into drafting their applications.

Chair Piper said it was helpful to start from zero rather than with an eye on the agencies that had previously been funded. The previous training session was indeed far more useful; the current year training was in fact problematic on several levels in terms of going off topic, being overly political, mentioning defunding the police, and talking about Marxist principles.

Toni Esparza said the items specifically highlighted by Chair Piper were not part of the outline materials provided to the staff in advance of the training session. None of those ideologies are endorsed by the city or the staff. The comments were in fact off topic. The responsibility for securing a trainer rotates among the cities and Bellevue staff were not charged with vetting the speaker for this year.

Chair Piper thanked Toni Esparza for the clarification.

Finally, comments were sought regarding the funding application, which is shared with 15 other cities. Vice Chair Amirfaiz said while there are economies of scale associated with sharing the application with other cities, what often gets lost is what is specifically applicable to Bellevue, such as the number of Bellevue residents served by previously funded applications from the agencies.

Chair Piper commented that each iteration of the application is more streamlined and easier to use, but it remains a heavy lift for agencies.

Commissioner Mansfield agreed with Chair Piper, and with Vice Chair Amirfaiz about the need for more Bellevue-specific information. Leslie Miller allowed that that theme is common among the funding cities that use the application.

Commissioner Singh asked how the agencies determine the diversity percentages that they put down in the application. Christy Stangland said the application has checkmarks based on diversity percentages for agency leadership, staff, and individuals served. The agencies are required to submit to the city demographic information. Leslie Miller said consideration has been given to providing quarterly reports to the Commission in regard to serve units, the

number of people served and some highlights from narratives provided by agencies. That could help the Commission feel more connected to the work being done by the agencies and the impact they are having on the community.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz suggested the numbers themselves are less helpful than information about the difference the various programs are making.

Chair Piper commented that while the post-mortem exercise was intense, it was also useful.

## 9. NEW BUSINESS

### A. Planning for 2023 Agency Tours and Presentations

Grant Coordinator Asma Ahmed said the intent is to create a list of agencies the Commissioners would like to tour, and a list of presentations the Commission would like to have during 2023. Both the tours and the presentations help to build the knowledge of Commissioners about the services provided in the community, the agencies that provide them, and the needs of Bellevue residents.

Commissioner Mansfield asked when the new Congregations for the Homeless is set to come online. Leslie Miller said it will be March or April. Commissioner Mansfield asked to put that facility on the tour list along with Youth Eastside Services and other mental health organizations.

Commissioner White suggested including on the list the Plymouth housing development in Eastgate, which is also nearing completion.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz expressed an interest in learning more about the recently funded behavioral health agencies.

Commissioner Singh noted wanting to visit any funded agency but particularly the new ones.

Chair Piper wanted to tour shelter facilities and Kindering Center. With regard to some of the medical and dental community health facilities, and agencies that serve children and provide child care, it would be helpful to have some presentations.

Christy Stangland stressed that tours would need to include no more than three Commissioners to avoid quorum issues. There was general consensus that tours should be slated after 3:00 p.m.

Asma Ahmed noted that in the past the Commission has been provided with presentations on topics such as older adults, behavioral health, the LGBTQ community, child care and homelessness.

Chair Piper reiterated the desire to have presentations on community health and child care issues, as well as a presentation on the role transportation plays in human services.

Commissioner Mansfield agreed a presentation on transportation would be good, especially given the new Orca cards for anyone under the age of 18.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz noted the previous presentation by a youth panel and suggested it would be helpful to have the same team give another presentation to highlight what has changed.

### B. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely



No Commissioners requested to participate remotely for the November 15 meeting.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Mansfield. The motion was seconded by Commissioner White, and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Piper adjourned the meeting at 7:52 p.m.