

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

March 2, 2026
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Phan, Commissioners Hays, Perelman, Rashid, Singh
COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Gonzalez
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None
STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Camron Parker, Donna Adair, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hilts, Andrew Ndayambaje, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services; Karen Phu, City Attorney's Office
COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Robinson
POLICE LIAISON: Major Dave Sanabria
GUEST SPEAKERS: Sarah Peterson, Department of Social and Health Services; Monik Martinez, 4 Tomorrow; Mohamed Ugas, East African Community Services
RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 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 Gonzalez, who joined at 6:05 p.m., and Commissioner Rashid.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Katie Childers with Northwest Education Access explained that their organization had recently been a first-time grantee from the city. Founded in 2002, the organization emerged from volunteer work with young people experiencing homelessness in Seattle's University District. The founder had observed that many young people who had not completed high school possessed the aptitude and qualities necessary for higher education but lacked access to

appropriate college preparation services. Most college access organizations serve students enrolled in traditional high schools. Northwest Education Access focuses on individuals who did not complete high school or who have educational gaps and therefore cannot return to high school to receive such services. The organization serves approximately 1200 students annually across King County, Pierce County, and South Snohomish County. Services are provided to individuals ages 16 to 29 who follow non-traditional educational pathways, including those who have experienced homelessness, are parenting, or are immigrants, refugees, or first- or second-generation students. The organization supports students across a wide spectrum of post-secondary options, from apprenticeships and technical degrees to doctoral programs, and maintains long-term relationships with participants from initial exploration through program completion. In Bellevue, referrals typically come from institutions such as Bellevue College and Lake Washington Institute of Technology, particularly from GED and similar programs, as well as through self-referrals via the organization's website. The speaker noted being an education advocate dedicated to the Eastside and a former student of the program who works directly with local participants.

Alex Tsimerman voiced strong criticism of the city's procedures and leadership, alleging violations of constitutional rights and objecting to changes in public comment rules that reduced the total number of speakers. Such rules were implemented to limit participation and can be characterized as being unconstitutional. A reference was made to prior trespass actions and arrests, including an arrest on January 7, and alleged misconduct by Bellevue police. The comments concluded with additional critical remarks directed at City governance and law enforcement.

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Councilmember Robinson thanked the Commission for its recent work and commended the members for effectively conveying a message to the Council regarding the intent to address the emerging needs of a particular population. The Council ultimately supported that intent. Councilmember Robinson emphasized the importance of clarity in staff communications to ensure a shared understanding of policy objectives, and highlighted the Council's commitment to being nimble and responsive to emerging community needs.

Councilmember Robinson reported that the Council recently held a retreat with its newly constituted membership and expressed optimism about the strength and collaborative spirit of the body. The coming year will focus on preparations for the upcoming biennial budget process. The preliminary indicators suggested the possibility of higher-than-anticipated revenues, including potential real estate excise tax revenues from a large building placed on the market, and increased permit activity associated with missing middle housing development. The Councilmember expressed appreciation that contingency planning was in place should additional funds become available.

Councilmember Robinson addressed support for small businesses in Bellevue, particularly for newer enterprises and those operated by individuals who may speak languages other than English and who might lack traditional support networks. The City has been focusing on strengthening its small business program to ensure it supports both for-profit businesses and

nonprofit organizations. An announcement was made earlier in the day regarding Startup 425's first bilingual program in partnership with the Centro Cultural Mexicano. The program represents an important step in expanding access to support services. Startup 425 has been in place for some eight years and continues to evolve. The Commissioners were encouraged to direct prospective applicants or community members in need of assistance, whether for-profit or nonprofit, to Startup 425 for small business support.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Chair Phan reported that Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza had taken on a new role in another jurisdiction. Additionally, Major Inman had accepted a new role and would no longer be the ex-officio representative from the police department.

Camron Parker noted having previously served as staff liaison to the Human Services Commission and currently serving as an assistant department director working with the groups that do long-term planning for the design and construction of the parks system.

Major Dave Sanabria with the Investigations Division remarked on taking over for Major Inman as ex-officio to the Commission.

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw reported that students from the Bellevue School District's Big Picture School recently received instruction from staff about human services funding and they conducted research using the Commission's needs update. The students prepared testimony and are scheduled to present their perspectives on March 9 at approximately 10:15 a.m. at City Hall. The Commissioners were invited to attend but were reminded that if more than four Commissioners attend the meeting will need to be documented as a special meeting.

Lyrn asked if the students might also summarize their findings in a three-minute public comment presentation before the City Council. Ruth Blaw said the students had already been encouraged to testify before the Council and would be reminded again.

Ruth Blaw informed the Commissioners that beginning with the next meeting the Commission will begin formally adopting the agenda as part of the procedures. The practice will be incorporated into the Commission's bylaws.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland provided the Commissioners with a packet containing the three applications in the teen after school support category. There is \$86,000 available to allocate.

Ruth Blaw distributed to the Commissioners a tentative schedule for the next few months. It was noted that the March 16 meeting will be a special training session focused on equity and funding. The first review of the teen after-school applications will occur on April 6; and consideration of the convening applications will be reviewed on April 20. The first batch of applications will be distributed at that meeting, and the areas of need assignments will be made. A public hearing is on the calendar for May 4 following which there will be group deliberations in held in special meetings. The public deliberations will occur in July.

Commissioner Singh indicated not being available to attend the meeting in April 6.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Perelman, Christy Stangland explained that two RFPs are not part of the Human Services Fund or the Housing Stability Fund. Those RFPs will be addressed ahead of the main funding cycle in order to ensure that the applicants are aware of the separate funding opportunity before applying for other funding streams. The separate process serves as a useful preparatory exercise ahead of the significantly larger funding cycle which is expected to yield between 150 and 200 applications.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Direction for Bylaws Update

Assistant City Attorney Karen Phu explained that City Council-appointed boards and commissions are required to adopt bylaws consistent with city ordinances. Two recently enacted ordinances necessitated updates to the Commission’s bylaws.

Ordinance 6864, revised the rules of decorum for public comment. Under the updated ordinance, individuals whose conduct results in exclusion from meetings may now be excluded for up to 180 days, an increase from the previous 60-day maximum. The change provides greater flexibility in regulating meeting conduct and aligns with the practices of other local governments. The ordinance also clarifies the appeal process for individuals contesting an exclusion. The updates are reflected in Article 7 of the Commission’s bylaws.

Ordinance 6865 amended the membership rules by limiting service to two consecutive terms on any Bellevue advisory board or commission. Service exceeding two years counts toward the limit, and terms across different boards or commissions are aggregated for purposes of calculating consecutive service. After completing two consecutive terms, individuals must observe a two-year interval before becoming eligible to reapply. The stated purpose of the change is to expand opportunities for public participation in advisory roles. The revisions are reflected in Article 3 of the bylaws.

In addition to the substantive updates, several minor revisions were proposed to correct dates, adjust the order of business, add approval of minutes to the agenda, and remove unnecessary gendered pronouns.

Adoption of the revised bylaws requires a two-step process: notice of the proposed changes, which the current meeting provided; followed by a vote at the next regular meeting. A two-thirds majority of members is required for adoption.

Chair Phan asked what happens if the proposed bylaws are not approved by the Commission. Karen Phu explained that the Commission would then technically be out of conformance with city ordinances. However, the City Code and duly adopted ordinances would continue to apply. In such a circumstance, the bylaws would simply be out of alignment with governing law.

B. Current Challenges in Human Services for Immigrants and Refugees

Human Services Planner Andrew Ndayambaje noted that recent federal policy shifts have significantly affected immigrant and refugee populations nationwide, the result of which has been tangible impacts on families and systems at the local level. Insights from frontline leaders and practitioners are critical to understanding the immediate and long-term implications of the policy changes.

Panelist Mohamed Ugas was introduced as the Programs Director for East African Community Services. Mohamed Ugas described the organization's work as primarily supporting East African immigrant and refugee families across multiple domains, including youth mentorship and leadership development; education support and STEM enrichment; sports and wellness programming; early learning and parent engagement; family stability and resource navigation; and culturally grounded programs that strengthen identity and intergenerational connections. As a community-based organization, the role played extends beyond service delivery to serving as a bridge between immigrant families and broader systems such as schools, housing providers, workforce programs, and health services. By working with families across life stages, the organization gains a comprehensive understanding of how economic and policy shifts affect the community.

Panelist Monique Martinez was introduced as the Executive Director of 4 Tomorrow, an East King County-based, by-and-for organization serving primarily Latino youth and families while remaining open to all who seek assistance. Monique Martinez said the organization offers culturally responsive services in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and additional languages including Vietnamese and Tagalog. The core services include mental health support delivered by therapists and coordinators; housing stability assistance coupled with case management; and a microenterprise program supporting Latino-owned businesses in launching or sustaining operations. The organization also provides teen services, including art and music programming; homelessness support through a hotel-motel program and a nearby safe parking program; crisis response and stabilization services; and food and basic needs assistance. All services are trauma-informed and are culturally grounded and focus on centering dignity, building trust, and relationship building. The organization also has innovative community-driven efforts such as volunteer-led tamale-making events to provide meals to families affected by recent immigration enforcement. There is a growing fear within the immigrant and refugee communities due to increased enforcement activity. There are specialized programs offered, including legal navigation, education about individual rights, and support in navigating a complex and shifting immigration landscape.

Panelist Sarah Peterson was introduced as the Director of the Washington Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance within the Department of Social and Health Services. Sarah Peterson explained that the office, established in the early 1980s to support refugees from Southeast Asia,

serves as the state-designated agency coordinating and administering services to promote economic stability, social integration, and basic needs for refugees and immigrants. The office invests federal and state funding into local community organizations that provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services. In 2025, over \$100 million was invested in more than 100 organizations statewide. Programs include employment and English language services; career pathway re-entry support; refugee medical screenings; mental health services; immigration-related legal assistance; citizenship services; early learning programs; school impact partnerships with districts and community organizations; youth mentoring; and services for older refugees. In 2025, the programs reached over 24,000 eligible individuals. The Washington Migrant and Asylum Seeker Support Project was launched in 2024 in response to increased arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers in Tukwila and King County who faced housing instability and challenges navigating the immigration system. Supported by approximately \$25 million in state funding for fiscal years 2025 and 2026, the initiative provides rental assistance, legal services, and case management. The importance of collective collaboration in responding to unprecedented changes in immigration enforcement and federal policy was emphasized.

Asked to elaborate on the most significant barriers facing immigrants and refugees, as well as the challenges confronting service providers, Sarah Peterson explained that rapid and dramatic federal policy changes, particularly in regard to immigration status and work authorization, have created confusion and uncertainty among community members who previously believed they were following lawful pathways. Sudden shifts have left some individuals unable to renew their work authorization or access assistance, which has generated widespread anxiety. Heightened immigration enforcement has further contributed to fear, discouraging individuals from leaving their homes or seeking essential services, including health care and public benefits. Providers have adapted by increasing home visits and expanding service models to meet the evolving needs, even as communities experience significant stress and mental health strain. One major challenge involves supporting individuals when there are limited solutions available, requiring providers to offer presence and reassurance even in the absence of definitive answers. Underscored was the importance of supporting frontline community leaders and service providers themselves who are often deeply embedded within the affected communities. The state has sought to provide technical assistance, including mental health resources, training in mental health first aid, and guidance on navigating difficult conversations, in order to sustain the well-being and capacity of those delivering services.

Monique Martinez affirmed that staff burnout has become a persistent and serious concern. 4 Tomorrow has had to continually reassess service delivery as the community's needs and the broader environment have shifted dramatically over the past two years. Devising innovative crisis solutions under constrained budgets and limited resources is difficult, particularly when communities are operating under trauma and acute stress. To illustrate the lived experience of community members, the panelist described a recent incident captured in an online video depicting an immigration enforcement detention on 148th Avenue. The individual involved had previously participated in the organization's safe parking program and had since moved into stable housing. The event was highly traumatizing for the broader community as a minivan was blocked in, a window was broken, and the individual was forcibly removed from the vehicle. Because the vehicle was left in the roadway, standard protocol required it to be towed as a traffic and safety hazard. Since the detained individual was the sole name on the title, the panelist

reported that the individual was unable to retrieve the vehicle while detained and thereby effectively lost it, creating severe hardship given the vehicle's importance for employment and family support. The individual was transferred first to Tacoma, and then, after legal counsel filed a habeas petition challenging the detention as unlawful, was moved to detention facilities in Texas and Arizona before being returned to Tacoma to contest the case locally. By the time the individual was returned, the person had gone several days without sleep and had eaten very little. The conditions in detention were harsh, and the detainees must purchase everything they need, including basic necessities, through a commissary. They must also pay for phone calls by the minute, making it difficult to remain connected with family members, including children. The food supply was inadequate and of poor quality. The detention occurred without a removal order or criminal history and appears to have lacked a clear basis, resulting in significant financial and emotional costs for a community already experiencing poverty and instability. The incident has intensified fear and reinforced the perception that similar enforcement actions could occur broadly, contributing to mistrust of institutions and a growing concern about whether it is safe to seek help from local law enforcement despite repeated messaging encouraging people to call 9-1-1 when in danger.

Muhammad Ugas described the present time as being especially challenging for the East African community which is facing heightened fear and increased reliance on community-based organizations for support. East African Community Services has served the community for many years and has adapted programming over time to meet changing needs. The staff are often overburdened and the funding levels do not match the volume and intensity of work required. While organizations may be funded for specific program areas, sudden economic shifts, such as reductions in nutrition benefits, rent increases, and job instability, quickly produce urgent needs for rental assistance, food support, and crisis response. Under the circumstances, organizations feel unable to turn community members away, even when the services requested fall outside the scope of funded programming.

The panelist also emphasized that burnout is compounded by the nature of community-based work, describing that there is effectively no separation between professional and personal life because staff routinely encounter community members in everyday settings and are approached for assistance outside of work hours. While this reflects strong trust, the panelist stated that it creates sustained emotional and mental strain. The panelist additionally expressed concern about insufficient communication and engagement from government partners at the local level, stating that community-based organizations sometimes learn of changes affecting their communities only after the fact, which forces a reactive posture rather than proactive collaboration. The panelist further noted that data reporting has become more difficult because participants are increasingly reluctant to provide information they previously would have shared. Although organizations work to build trust and assure confidentiality, the panelist stated that recent federal developments have heightened fear about sharing personal data, while funder reporting requirements remain unchanged.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked how service providers are navigating circumstances in which staff members themselves feel targeted, and how that affects operations and morale. Monique Martinez responded that discrimination has been increasing and that 4 Tomorrow has experienced discriminatory incidents in recent weeks and months that were unexpected,

particularly given the organization's role in assisting community members. That is challenging both professionally and personally. The importance of reinforcing a message of community solidarity and mutual support was emphasized as neighbors helping neighbors. Bellevue's prior "hate has no home here" messaging is in need of a renewed effort.

Andrew Ndayambaje noted that the Human Services Needs Update for 2025 had documented clear feedback about the need for more culturally and linguistically responsive services. The panelists were asked what meaningful language access and culturally responsive service delivery should look like for immigrant and refugee communities.

Mohamed Ugas emphasized the importance of direct language capacity within service organizations, rather than relying solely on interpretation services. Funding dedicated coordinator roles with both cultural expertise and language skills can improve service quality and reduce the barriers created by an additional interpretive layer. Stressed was the value of flexible programming, including weekend offerings, to accommodate family responsibilities, school schedules, and childcare constraints common in larger families. The importance of locating services within community neighborhoods to reduce transportation barriers was stressed. The EACS offices in New Holly and SeaTac are examples of placing services close to where community members live. Also highlighted was intergenerational and culturally affirming programming. To that end the organization hosts a monthly gathering that brings parents and children together for culturally relevant food, dance, and celebration, fostering pride in identity and strengthening family connection. Also emphasized was the need for accessible, trauma-informed mental health support tailored to immigrant and refugee populations. Many community members have experienced significant trauma and require culturally appropriate counseling and healing resources.

Sarah Peterson affirmed the importance of partnering with ethnic community-based organizations and agencies that prioritize hiring staff with lived experience or direct familiarity with the communities they serve. While translation and interpretation services are important, they are often insufficient. During the influx of Afghan arrivals following the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, there were not enough interpreters nationwide to meet the language needs. Similar gaps exist for languages such as Farsi, Dari, and Pashto. There are even challenges in serving indigenous language speakers from Latin America, explaining that individuals may speak languages such as Mixteco or Mam rather than Spanish, complicating the traditional service delivery models. Underscored was the need for culturally responsive services to account for differences in cultural values, religion, and lived experience. They must also be trauma-informed and accountable. The panelist described efforts to provide technical assistance to smaller ethnic community-based organizations, noting that while many nonprofit leaders are motivated by a desire to serve their communities, nonprofit management requires specialized administrative and financial skills. Balancing culturally grounded service delivery with strong organizational capacity and compliance is an ongoing challenge.

Monique Martinez added that resilience-building and strength-based approaches are essential components of culturally responsive work. Despite widespread fear and negative experiences, communities possess inherent strengths that can be mobilized. The panelist described the importance of trauma-informed and trust-based engagement, as well as community-informed

program design. Rather than imposing predetermined programs, 4 Tomorrow engages community members in co-creating services and maintains a continuous feedback loop. Toward the end of 2024, rising fear in the community prompted the organization to convene support groups to collectively assess needs. Those conversations subsequently informed the development of legal navigation and rapid response programs. Without trust and sustained engagement, organizations will struggle to adapt effectively to rapidly changing laws and enforcement practices.

Andrew Ndayambaje asked about statewide enforcement trends. Sarah Peterson acknowledged the complexity of the issue and referenced the national attention being given to enforcement developments in other states, such as Minnesota. Many jurisdictions have sought to learn from the emerging best practices. Under Governor Ferguson's leadership, Washington State has taken steps to prepare communities, including the issuance of Executive Order 25-09 establishing an immigration subcabinet to coordinate cross-agency responses. The panelists noted having participated in executive cabinet meetings to ensure alignment between ground-level observations and higher-level policy decisions. Emphasized was the importance of collaboration among state and local governments and community-based organizations to avoid duplication of services and to ensure that administrative requirements imposed on nonprofits remain feasible. Data collection and protection is also a significant concern. The importance of safeguarding community trust while collecting necessary information for legitimate purposes was stressed.

Andrew Ndayambaje invited the Commissioners to reflect on what they had learned regarding the current realities facing immigrant and refugee communities. Commissioner Perelman observed that human services work has always been difficult, and added that the discussion illuminated how conditions have grown more complex and challenging in specific ways. Appreciation was expressed for the concrete examples shared.

Commissioner Singh reflected personally as an immigrant and described the prolonged and complex nature of immigration processes and the importance of accountability. Immigrants must learn to navigate civic systems responsibly. Misinformation within communities can lead to unintentional errors that may jeopardize immigration cases or harm the broader community. The Commissioner stressed the importance of educating immigrants about available services while also underscoring the Commission's responsibility to steward taxpayer funds wisely and equitably.

Commissioner Gonzalez expressed gratitude for the work of the panelist and acknowledged the significant strain on communities, particularly in relation to the high cost of legal services.

Commissioner Hayes stated that the presentation highlighted the downstream impacts of federal policies on families and communities, and remarked that while public discourse often focuses on the individual detained, the broader consequences, such as the loss of a vehicle, disruption to employment, and hardship for children, are less frequently acknowledged. The account of the 148th Avenue incident was particularly powerful in illustrating the ripple effects.

Chair Phan commented that while the issues discussed were not new, it was encouraging to observe the increased collaboration among community organizations as compared to earlier

years. It was meaningful to hear organizations speak about working collectively to avoid duplication and to strengthen the coordinated efforts.

Commissioner Perelman asked the panelists about the observed increase in demand for direct financial assistance resulting from reductions in benefits such as SNAP and other vouchers, and whether the panelists could quantify the shift in requests for assistance compared to the previous year. Sarah Peterson was specifically asked to clarify whether the Washington Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance administers both federal and state funding streams. Sarah Peterson explained that Washington State has a distinctive model in which the State Refugee Coordinator submits an annual state plan to the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. Through that plan, the state receives federal funding to support refugees and eligible immigrant populations, historically including individuals fleeing persecution. In recent years there have been significant arrivals from Ukraine, Afghanistan, and East Africa. In addition to federal funding, the office administers state-funded programs serving low-income immigrant communities, including assistance for individuals receiving public benefits who need support with employment or citizenship processes. Specifically referenced were the pandemic-era programs such as the Immigrant Relief Fund, which provided direct cash assistance to undocumented individuals, and the more recent Migrant and Asylum Seeker Support Project.

In response to a follow-up question asked by Commissioner Perelman regarding the status of federal funding, Sarah Peterson reported that between 2021 and 2025 the population eligible for federal programs increased by approximately 400 to 500 percent, while federal funding increased by roughly 700 percent. The Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance currently has approximately a year and a half of funding remaining and is funded through the federal fiscal year 2027, with allocations for subsequent years dependent on federal appropriations. The office is presently stable but future allocations are being monitored carefully. The number of individuals served has grown significantly, from approximately 7000 in 2021 to more than 24,000 in 2025. Eligible individuals may access services for up to five years after their arrival.

Monique Martinez estimated that requests for assistance had increased by approximately four to five times compared to prior years. The volume of inquiries was described as so significant that 4 Tomorrow redesigned its intake process at the beginning of the year. Although the organization has always used prioritization criteria, staff had to refine their questions and gather more detailed information in order to make equitable funding decisions and prioritize the highest-need cases. For those who could not receive direct financial assistance, the organization has sought to provide alternative support, such as informational sessions to address concerns and clarify available resources. The funding, however, will never fully meet the level of need.

Mohamed Ugas added that while exact numbers are difficult to quantify, attendance patterns at programming events serve as an indicator of changing conditions. In the current climate, some families are hesitant to attend programs or to visit community centers due to fear, even when services are needed. Based on experience, it was estimated that requests for assistance have increased by three to four times compared to prior periods.

Commissioner Gonzalez indicated familiarity with the providers and expressed appreciation for their work.

Commissioner Hayes posed a question regarding collaboration, asking how the city might improve coordination with state agencies and nonprofits, and what policies could reduce barriers and strengthen communication. Monique Martinez responded by describing participation in a collaborative effort known as Safe Haven and East King Rise, which was characterized as a rapid response network where organizations share information about emerging needs and coordinate solutions. Community members who are wanting to help should be directed toward the appropriate organizations to donate resources such as food or by offering specialized professional skills. Clear referral pathways from government entities to community-based organizations are especially helpful.

Sarah Peterson noted that local governments can play a significant role by sustaining and stabilizing funding for community organizations, and emphasized the value of awareness of state policies, such as the Keep Washington Working Act, and encouraged continued dialogue between state and local entities to ensure that funding is distributed equitably across regions. It is important for governmental roles and boundaries to be clear. Some policy areas, such as work authorization, fall under federal jurisdiction. The panelist encouraged mapping out what authority exists at each level of government and fostering collective civic engagement to address the shared challenges.

Mohamed Ugas added that ongoing communication and shared dialogue are essential and stressed the importance of convening in shared spaces to better understand the services being delivered and to identify opportunities for collaboration. Highlighting community-based organizations' strengths in engagement and outreach, the panelist suggested that leveraging those strengths could help showcase the city's diversity and improve service coordination.

Commissioner Hayes asked a question about policies that might mitigate community fear, referencing the possibility of limiting federal enforcement activities on city property. Sarah Peterson responded cautiously and indicated that such policy decisions may be more appropriately addressed by legislators, and stressed the importance of listening directly to community members to better understand their specific concerns before crafting specific policy responses. The Washington State Legislature is evaluating potential measures to strengthen protections. Careful consideration of authority and balance is required.

Monique Martinez recalled that in 2019, through participation in the Safe Haven group, advocates engaged school districts and cities regarding the designation of sensitive locations and safe zones. At that time, community members expressed that such designations would provide reassurance. A state-level bill exploring protected locations had been under consideration, though it is unclear whether it advanced. Cities, school districts, and private property owners possess the authority to declare certain spaces as protected or sensitive locations. Support should be expressed for such measures, particularly in highly sensitive areas. The panelist also raised questions about the enforcement of state-level measures, such as mask-related restrictions, and suggested that dialogue is needed regarding how new laws would be implemented and what responses are appropriate when violations occur. Such questions are currently circulating within the community and cities and organizations should be encouraged to engage in similar discussions.

Chair Phan asked Sarah Peterson what the state’s grant process for organizations looks. The answer given was that Washington State has procurement laws that require certain competitive processes. Direct client services are not mandated to follow procurement in the same manner. Nevertheless, the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance has adopted competitive and transparent practices as a best practice. In recent years, the office has issued open requests for applications to expand capacity, particularly during the significant increase in Afghan and Ukrainian arrivals. Those processes included targeted outreach to ethnic community-based organizations. Looking ahead to state fiscal year 2027 and the corresponding federal fiscal cycle, the panelist stated that the office plans to use a continuing application process for existing partners to renew budgets and confirm continued participation. In addition, a new open request for applications is anticipated in the spring, likely in April or May, with a focus on expanding services in areas such as legal navigation, healthcare access, and emergency response to meet evolving needs.

Christy Stangland asked how organizations can be added to the distribution list for funding announcements, and whether any providers in East King County currently receive funding from the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance. Sarah Peterson responded that there are organizations in East King County that are receiving funding and offered to provide specific details at a later date. Parties interested in being added to the distribution list can subscribe via a form available on the agency’s website, which allows users to select relevant topics and receive notifications.

Chair Phan thanked the panelists for their participation, and the staff for putting the panel together.

Chair Phan reminded the Commissioners that every two years the Commission conducts an equity in funding training exercise in preparation for the funding review process. The training will occur at a special meeting on Monday, March 16, in Room 1E-120. No remote participation option will be available.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Phan adjourned the meeting at 7:40 p.m.