

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

April 15, 2024
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Imfura, Rashid

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner White

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

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Zahn

POLICE LIAISON: Major Mark Tarantino

GUEST SPEAKERS: Joel Leiva Rodriguez, Centering Communities of Color; Darya Anoshei, Lucy Lu, Bellevue Diversity Advantage Network

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner White.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. April 2, 2024

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Singh took a moment to note that under Ordinance 6752, the topics about which the public may speak during a meeting are limited to subject matters related to the city of Bellevue government and within the powers and duties of the Human Services Commission. Additional information about the new rules of decorum governing conduct of the public during meetings can

be found in Ordinance 6752.

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi garbage rats, and called Councilmember Zahn a dirty pig and barracuda and addressed Ordinance 6752. Mr. Tsimerman stated the document is 26 pages but three pages are repeated six times in it. The fraud document was signed by the Mayor and the City Attorney. The document is a fraud by definition in that it repeats six times. Most fraud is for money but the ordinance is just idiotic fraud. The ordinance sets up the city has Nazis who pretend to be bigger than the constitution. It ignores all First Amendment free speech rights, and a dozen court decisions. It is a crime. The Nazi ordinance should be put in the garbage because by definition it is a pure crime. When the Commission upholds the ordinance, it makes the Commissioners also criminals. By definition the Council and Mayor Robinson and the city attorney are also the definition criminals.

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

Councilmember Zahn reported that on April 8 the Council held a budget workshop. A lot of good information was shared about the guiding principles for the upcoming 2025-2026 budget. One of the discussions focused on including a priority for human services grant funding and increasing the funding amount to better reflect the needs in the community.

Councilmember Zahn remarked on serving as the city's representative on the Eastside Human Services Forum and said one thing the group has is an education committee. On April 25 from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. there will be a special education session on providing comprehensive services to asylum seekers and refugees. Then on May 16, also from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. another session will be held to talk about human services data and what to do with all of it.

Councilmember Zahn also informed the Commission that interviews have been held as part of the process of filling the vacant Commission positions. The anticipation is that the Council will vote to confirm three new Commissioners on April 23.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw announced that the Commission will be asked to elect someone to serve as Vice Chair at the May 6 meeting.

Ruth Blaw also called attention that invitations for the Commissioners to attend the Youth Link Leadership Awards ceremony on May 22.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Funding Cycle Training for Commissioners and Community Members

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw informed the Commissioners that a total of 142 applications had been received from agencies seeking funds. The total ask exceeds \$19 million for the less than \$8 million in available funds.

Human Services Planner Andrew Ndayambaje utilized an icebreaker exercise aimed at allowing the participants to get to know each other.

Human Services Planner Asma Ahmed explained that the strategic plan adopted by the Council includes an objective to include diverse voices in the funding recommendation process. To that end, members of Centering Communities of Color, the Youth Link board and the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network will be partnering with human services to review the funding applications. The community members will be present on June 8 to provide input on the funding recommendations.

The seven Bellevue residents who make up the Human Services Commission are appointed by the City Council, and each serves a four-year term. The role of the Commission is to advise the Council on all matters concerning human services planning and funding. The Commission has a Council liaison appointed by the mayor. The Commission makes funding human services funding recommendations to the Council.

Human Services Planner Saada Hilts said the city's role in human services involves developing strategies to create an equitable system of human services that is accessible to all Bellevue residents. The strategies relate to planning, educating, facilitating and funding innovative approaches to address gaps in services or systems that present barriers to accessing human services. The city human services planners work to assess and anticipate the needs and develop appropriate program responses, and to provide agency support through one-on-one technical assistance throughout the entire funding cycle. Planners also monitor agencies by reviewing progress through quarterly reports that are submitted along with invoices, and the annual demographic reports; and by conducting on-site visits. Staff monitor all programs and convenes and engages community members in problem solving and in improving services. As educators, the staff are dedicated to learning about the needs in the community and effectively communicating findings to the Commission. The planning staff also aim to understand any barriers the community members may be facing. Millions of dollars are allocated annually by the City Council to support a network of services that cater to the needs of the community.

Human Services Planner Donna Adair said human services funding is the division's largest pot of consistent annual funding. The Housing Stability Program, formerly the HB-1590 program, is where the city collects a tenth of a percent of sales tax to support affordable housing and related services in the community. The program can be used for the operation, delivery or evaluation of behavioral health treatment programs and services, and housing related services. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is from a federal stimulus bill aimed at public health and economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The City Council allocated \$17 million in ARPA funding to human services. The funding cycle will, however, be ending at the end of 2024, which will leave a gap in funding for the next cycle. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development on an annual basis. Every

five years the city develops a consolidated plan for CDBG funds by assessing and identifying the needs and priorities in the community. The 2025-2029 consolidated plan is currently being worked on; it will be approved by the Commission and adopted by the Council in the fall. The funds are currently being used for the city's Major Home Repair Program, Habitat For Humanity's Moderate Home Repair Program, Sound Generation's Minor Home Repair Program, and three organizations that are providing microenterprise assistance to Bellevue residents who either own a small business or who are planning to develop one with five or fewer employees, including the owner(s).

Chair Singh commented that at the Covid funds were awarded, there was a much greater need for them. Human Services Planner Christy Stangland agreed that the funds were used to address the impacts of the pandemic, but at the same time the pandemic shown a light on the large and increasing needs in the community. Additionally, the impacts of Covid are continuing to impact the community, especially the low- and moderate-income residents.

Christy Stangland said 2023 was the first year in the two-year funding cycle. In that year the need was identified through completion of the Human Services Needs Update and the first-ever human services strategic plan. In the second year the city releases its funding application for the next year in partnership with 15 other suburban cities. A total of 142 applications have been submitted totaling more than \$19 million in requests for the \$7.6 million available to allocate.

The process of forming recommendations for how to allocate the available funding will play out in the coming months. The Commission and community members will spend a full day discussing the applications and determine preliminary funding recommendations, after which the Commission will spend several more meetings determining the finalized funding recommendations using the priorities identified in the Needs Update, the strategic plan and the equity training.

The staff and the Commission Chair will present the finalized recommendations to the City Council for approval and adoption by the Council as part of the city's two-year budget. With that completed, the work of contracting begins for the funded agencies, with the contracts starting in January. In addition to the monitoring work, Christy Stangland staff provides support to the agencies. The desire is for the agencies to be successful because they are needed to serve the community members.

With regard to the Needs Update, Ruth Blaw explained that every two years a comprehensive assessment of the needs in the community, especially the low- and moderate-income residents. A consultant was hired to do the work of developing the current Needs Update, work that traditionally has been done internally. A strategic plan was also developed given the knowledge that the Covid funds would be ending, leaving not enough money to address the huge need. The Needs Update data is collected from surveys, focus groups, qualitative data and reports. Information in the document was gathered from over a thousand residents and 65 agencies.

The data has identified some significant emerging needs, not the least of which is Bellevue's changing demographics and lack of meeting the needs of low- and moderate-income in culturally and linguistically specific ways. There is a disproportionate impact on people based on race and

language, and there is a lack of knowledge about resources on the part of the very people who need those resources. There is a growing challenge for providers in the community to pay a living wage to their staff and still have the funding needed to meet the identified need. It does not help that the cost of living in Bellevue continues to increase.

One key finding was that for the survey respondents, only 49 percent were able to access a service when they needed it, and only 43 percent were able to access a service in their culture or language.

The Commissioners were shown a chart indicating the past four funding cycles and the dollars available for allocation. It was pointed out that in each year the funding increased. The city's allocation to the Human Services Fund has increased only slightly. The city's CDBG allocation has largely remained the same. The Housing Stability Program dollars, which began in 2021, has grown steadily over the last three years. The pandemic funding which began in 2020 will end at the conclusion of the current year, leaving much less money to allocate for the coming year.

The strategic plan outlines some objectives for approaching the challenges. One objective is to expand the focus on equity and to make data-driven decisions. Other objectives include addressing the most significant needs; and expanding access to increase capacity and to raise the awareness people have of what is available.

Senior Administrative Assistant Gysel Galaviz said two special meetings have been slated, the first on May 20 at Crossroads Community Center. There will be no remote option for that meeting so everyone will have to be there in person. The meeting will focus on equity in funding training. The second meeting is set for June 8 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center, and it also will have no remote option. The meeting will focus on review of 25-26 funding applications.

Ruth Blaw said the applications are all available electronically and in hard copy format. It was also noted that the 2025-2026 funding priorities had been printed out and included in the Commission folders. Also included in the folders were the staff reviews produced by staff.

Commissioner Imfura asked what criteria was used in choosing community members to participate in the process. Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza allowed that the funding review process has never before included participants other than Commissioners. The strategic planning process heard from the community a call to have more voices at the table during the process. The strategic plan also calls for involving more community members. In February the Council approved involving community members, leaving only a short time to identify community members, so staff visited with three existing boards or commissions that are intended to represent diverse voices in the community and asked them to join. The three bodies were the Centering Communities of Color, the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network, and Youth Link.

Christy Stangland asked Chair Singh to share any guidance learned during the previous funding cycle. Chair Singh said the best thing is the data from the city staff. While the number of applications is large, in going through them it becomes clear that there are similar things looked

at in each, such as the number of Bellevue residents served. For organizations applying for the first time, it is necessary to review the programs and the operations of the individual organizations. It will be helpful to have community members helping to make funding decisions.

Joel Leiva Rodriguez with Centering Communities of Color asked if organizations applying for the first time will be reviewed alongside organizations that have an established track record. Chair Singh that decision will have to be made in comparing the old and the new organizations and their programs. The Commission has in the past chosen to set aside funds to help new organizations.

Toni Esparza said there are a few differences associated with the upcoming process. Much has been said about the funding gap between the dollars available for allocation and the sum of the requested amounts. There has been Council direction to do things a little differently. In the past, the money was often spread out among the organizations that historically showed they do great work. Because the demand is so high this time around, the Council has directed the Commission to focus on the identified priorities. One of those areas is culturally and linguistically appropriate services. There was a time in Bellevue when the community was not supportive of culturally and linguistically specific services and thus those services were not funded. As those organizations have developed, there is now a need to fund new and emerging agencies in order for them to have a seat at the table.

Christy Stangland stated that in addition to the applications, the Commissioners will be provided with a staff framework containing different approaches the Commission could take. The same approach was taken during the previous funding cycle. The framework is intended only to give the Commissioners a place to start.

Chair Singh stressed that those reviewing the applications can always ask the staff for additional information. Toni Esparza added that the staff will happily share their knowledge as questions arise, but the staff will not be going back and forth with agencies in order to assure an equitable process.

Ruth Blaw explained that the community members participating in the process will be given the same information shared with the Commissioners, specifically the applications and the staff summary page.

Darya Anoshei with the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network asked if the review groups will score the applications as they are reviewed. Christy Stangland said scoring is not necessarily done by agency. The three groups will each recommend a level of funding for the organizations they review. The staff framework will provide some guidance, but that guidance does not have to be followed. The Commission will ultimately review the recommendations for each application in working toward a final funding recommendation.

Ruth Blaw added that each of the three groups will have a staff person and a planner to assist in the conversations. Toni Esparza explained that while there is no scoring guide used, there will be instructions for what is supposed to be considered, specifically the priorities, the staff report, and the views and perspectives each person will bring to the table.

Toni Esparza stated that any person who believes they have a conflict of interest in regard to any organization should tell the staff.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Singh adjourned the meeting at 7:10 p.m.