

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

May 5, 2025
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Hays, Phan, Rashid
COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Vice Chair White
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Imfura, Gonzalez
STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Donna Adair, Ruth Blaw,
Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community
Services
COUNCIL LIAISON: Mayor Robinson
POLICE LIAISON: Not Present
GUEST SPEAKERS: None
RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

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

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Gonzalez and Imfura.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

March 3, 2025

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

April 21, 2025

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

3. 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.

Maria Hudson raised serious concerns about alleged violations of the Arthur Fleming Administrative Rule concerning policies related to human services and domestic violence. The speaker described a personal experience involving sexual assault, domestic violence, and issues with local authorities, and accused the Bellevue School District and Bellevue Police Department personnel of involvement in harm, systemic racism, and denial of essential services. The specific individuals involved in the situation were named, and the difficulties in accessing domestic violence support were highlighted along with alleged racial discrimination, economic abuse, and coercive debt. There is an urgency for the Commission to address the violations and provide proper support.

4. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

Mayor Robinson acknowledged the Commission's excellent work and expressed gratitude for it.

Mayor Robinson shared having recently met with Congresswoman DelBene for a tour of August Wilson Place, and affordable housing project funded through federal grants. The Congresswoman said there is a need for stories demonstrating the positive impact of federal funding and highlighting the upcoming challenges with federal funding due to changing guidelines, including restrictions on specific terminology and the use of artificial intelligence screening of applications. The Mayor offered to advocate for continued federal funding, and encouraged the Commissioners to submit impactful stories to aid in advocacy efforts during upcoming planned Council visits to Washington, D.C.

Chair Singh voiced the understanding that applications for federal funding are sent through the City Council. Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza said individual departments coordinate with the City Manager's Office in seeking guidance and approval to submit applications for federal funding. With regard to human services, the typical federal funding is the Community Development Block Grant, which requires a lot of different processes, planning and reports.

5. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Chair Singh reported that the number of cars parked at 4Tomorrow is never more than 20 and often is only four or five. The location is good and it is safe and secure, but there is a need to know how many people are being served.

Commissioner Hays reported having attended the LD41 town hall where the focus was on state budgets, local deficits, and new federal regulations. Commissioner Hays also noted having attended the Bellevue Affordable Housing Forum which had a large turnout and triggered a need for additional translators. Commissioner Hays also reported on having participated in a budgeting forum organized by the Disability Empowerment Center.

Commissioner Phan detailed having been involved with the Disability Empowerment Center, an organization that works with caregivers to provide services to children or young persons with disabilities. The services are free and are individualized, and they can be provided one-on-one or in small groups. The organization focuses on independent skills training and advocacy for individuals living in community-based settings. The challenges cited by the organization included funding limitations and systemic barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. Dory Babcock with Valiant Health Solutions spoke and focused on empowering neurodivergent individuals and their families. The organization holds a prom at the end of the school year that is neurodivergent friendly.

Mayor Robinson reported that the city won the Frank Chop Award from the Housing Development Consortium in recognition of extensive efforts in affordable housing. Additionally, four candidates are being interviewed for an open seat on the Commission, and the chair is set to participate in the interview process.

Chair Singh inquired about the timing and results of the online human services survey. Ruth Blaw confirmed that Zelo International was contracted to complete the Human Services Needs Update for 2025. The survey was open until the end of March. Next comes subject matter expert interviews and focus groups. A draft report is expected sometime in the summer, and the finalized report is anticipated in the fall.

Toni Esparza said the final report will be presented first to the Commission and subsequently to the Council. The Needs Update process kicks off every two years.

6. NEW BUSINESS – None

A. Public Hearing: Human Services Needs in Bellevue

Chair Singh explained that the public hearing is intended to gather community input regarding housing and human services needs in Bellevue.

Community Development Block Grant Administrator/Housing Repair Specialist Donna Adair provided an overview of the CDBG funding cycle, explaining that Bellevue annually receives CDBG funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The funds primarily are used to assist low- and moderate-income residents. Federal regulations mandate citizen engagement in developing the Annual Action Plan, with at least two public hearings conducted each year to gather input on CDBG and general human services funding needs. The comments received will help shape the 2026 CDBG Annual Action Plan and the allocation of CDBG funding.

A motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner Rashid. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Phan and the motion carried unanimously.

Estella Williamson with Harborview Abuse and Trauma Center highlighted the critical need for sustained funding for sexual assault and crime victim services, emphasizing the role of the program in survivor recovery and public safety. Harborview's impact lies in the fact that it

provided over a thousand hours of trauma counseling and 300 hours of advocacy services last year alone. There has been a significant decline in federal Victims of Crime Act funding and state supplemental funding, exacerbating the challenges despite an increase in demand for services. Harborview recently received Bellevue city funding, but it was 40 percent less than the prior year, despite patient numbers rising by over 35 percent. The Commission was urged to consider the vital role the services play in survivor healing and overall public health.

Katie Glore, Program Manager at Sophia Way, thanked the Commission for its previous support, which enabled the housing of 146 women experiencing homelessness in 2024. The agency had a successful 2024 that included wage increases for shelter staff, community involvement, and achieving strategic goals. Concerns were voiced about reductions in government funding that will impact the organization's ability to sustain housing solutions. Sophia Way faces additional challenges due to local shelter closures and the premature expiration of emergency housing vouchers originally planned to extend until 2030 but now expiring in 2026. Ongoing support is needed to address the significant consequences for women who risk returning to homelessness without continued funding.

Mona Campbell with Boys and Girls Clubs of Bellevue emphasized the continued need for housing and human services funding. The Boys and Girls Clubs provides critical after-school childcare, educational resources, mental health support, and social services, particularly in response to gaps from reduced school district staffing. The clubs' extensive service to the community include having served over 16,000 members last year. The Commission was urged to maintain and expand funding, especially for affordable housing solutions, which is important for community stability and equitable access to essential services.

Tina Morales with Youth Eastside Services (YES) highlighted the significant positive impact of the Bellevue-funded confidential and free services provided by YES, particularly those for vulnerable youth and families. The speaker detailed specific stories illustrating the agency's integrated services model, including the story of a youth victim of bullying who successfully recovered with YES support, and the story of a grandmother who received comprehensive help to manage a grandchild's care amid familial addiction. YES provides a broad spectrum of support, from mental health counseling and substance use treatment to mentoring and school-based services. There are increasing challenges being faced, such as youth violence, immigrant family stressors, the stigma associated with substance use, the intense needs of youth with autism, and the necessity for safer spaces for LGBTQ youth. The Commission was urged to continue investing in YES in light of the fact that the organizations programs play a strong role in supporting community stability and youth well-being.

Gaggzi Chandorkar with Indian American Community Services highlighted significant gaps and opportunities within Bellevue's human services, particularly concerning the Indian American community. Bellevue's population is 42.1 percent foreign born, and the Indian-American population comprises over 13 percent of the city's overall population. The speakers emphasized five key areas needing attention: seniors, early childhood development, small businesses, women in crisis, and youth. Senior Indian Americans in Bellevue's neighborhoods, including Lakemont, Somerset, and Lake Hills, often face social isolation, limited English proficiency, limited income, and increased risks for depression and chronic illnesses. The city should expand

culturally responsive senior services, including culturally relevant programming, transportation resources, mental health support, and digital literacy training. With regard to early childhood development, the traditional childcare options often fail to meet the cultural needs or affordability for Indian immigrant families. The agency's multilingual childhood classes rapidly fill up due to the high demand. City-backed grants are needed to support bilingual early learning programs and cultural competency training for childcare providers. Many in the Indian-American population face economic struggles and need assistance in terms of operating micro and small enterprises, particularly in food and retail, due to rising operational costs. The Commission was urged to advocate for city-funded micro-grants, financial literacy workshops accessible in multiple languages, and the establishment of minority-focused small business incubators. With regard to women in crisis, the speaker explained that Indian-American women experiencing domestic violence or economic abuse frequently avoid seeking help due to cultural shame or immigration-related fears. The Commission was urged Bellevue to continue supporting trauma-informed services grounded in cultural contexts and formalizing partnerships with trusted community organizations. Bellevue youth from immigrant communities report elevated mental health distress, cultural pressures, identity conflicts, and underrepresentation in social spaces. Funding is needed for peer mentorship programs, culturally competent school counselors, and inclusive youth spaces. Bellevue must prioritize investment in organizations that represent its diverse and rapidly growing communities to ensure equitable services.

Guillermo Rivera with Eastside for All expressed gratitude for the Commission's ongoing commitment and emphasized the need for increased funding to immigrant-led, community-based organizations. Bellevue's immigrant population makes up around 40 percent of the total population, and faces heightened pressures due to changing federal policies disrupting livelihoods and separating families. Community organizations have stepped in to provide critical services such as legal aid, housing support, food access, and mental health services. The organizations currently operate with constrained budgets and limited staffing, and they are struggling to meet increasing demands. The Commission was urged to advocate strongly to the City Council for enhanced funding for the frontline organizations. The Commissioners were invited to connect more deeply with immigrant community leaders and to attend an upcoming short-film event highlighting immigrant experiences.

Jennifer Fisher, Executive Director of Bellevue LifeSpring, expressed appreciation for the city's previous financial support, specifically \$177,000 allocated for emergency rent assistance and \$125,000 for food vouchers, and noted that the funds have already been fully utilized. Bellevue LifeSpring exclusively supports families within the Bellevue School District, so all donations to the organization support Bellevue children and their families. Bellevue LifeSpring will invest \$1.3 million during 2025 to prevent child hunger, and another \$1.3 million to prevent homelessness. There are growing needs within Bellevue, including homelessness among students, which increased significantly from 103 students ten years ago to 708 students currently. Additionally, the number of students on free or reduced-price meals rose from 2300 to 4700. The high cost of living is a challenge for many in Bellevue, especially for single-parent families. The speaker emphasized the essential role of affordable housing initiatives in working toward community stability.

Maria Hudson expressed significant concern regarding the management and allocation of human

services, criticized the existing practices, and alleged that they exploit low-income parents by taking over their parental rights (locus parentis) rather than empowering them directly. The city was accused of misusing federal funds under the Violence Against Women Act and the McKinney-Vento Act, alleging the withholding of essential support services from Black families and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Low-income families require direct empowerment and resources, not merely mentorship or case management. The speaker noted having previous advocacy and direct experience with housing and school systems, and urged the Commission to cease what was described as harmful practices, and warned about potential legal repercussions due to current practices violating caregiver and parental rights.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Phan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hays and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Home Repair Program Presentation & Overview with Panel Discussion

Donna Adair, who oversees the city's CDBG funding and the Home Repair Program, emphasized the importance of supporting local community services.

The panelists were introduced as Kym Poetter, King County Housing Authority (KCHA) construction coordinator, primarily in the weatherization department doing energy audits and quality control inspections; Jessica Schell, a repair project manager for Habitat for Humanity; and Mae Amarine, Repair Program Manager for Habitat Seattle-King County and Kittitas County.

Donna Adair explained that Bellevue's Home Repair Program has assisted low- and moderate-income homeowners since 1978, primarily focusing on health and safety repairs. The repairs enable homeowners, particularly older adults living on fixed incomes, to remain safely in their homes. The program is the sole direction service operation for the city's Human Services Division. Bellevue partners with KCHA for managing home rehabilitation projects. The city is responsible for outreach, applicant screening, loan approvals, the environmental reviews mandated by HUD, and loan management. Deferred loans are provided interest-free and are only repayable upon sale or title transfer. Grants are occasionally utilized when homeowners do not qualify for loans or for minor repairs where loan administrative costs exceed the repair amount. The KCHA screens and oversees the contractors, solicits bids for home repair projects, and inspects projects as the work is completed. During the COVID-19 pandemic there were shortages of both contractors and supplies. Habitat for Humanity was brought in during 2023-2024 to address those gaps, and now operates as a subcontractor under KCHA. The program serves Bellevue residents across a spectrum of needs, from minor fixes to major rehabilitation efforts.

In order to be eligible, homeowners must meet all of HUD's current requirements, which includes low- or moderate-income standards, owning and occupying their homes for at least one year before application, and intending to remain there at least one year following repairs. Federal funding through CDBG requires environmental reviews and lead testing for homes built before 1978. Lead-safe practices or abatement are employed when necessary.

Donna Adair shared that 82 percent of the clients served are aged 62 or older. Over 50 percent of

the homes serviced are led by female heads of household, and 74 percent of the properties serviced were built before 1978. Additionally, 78 percent of all clients fall into HUD's very low-income category, with annual incomes at or below 30 percent of the HUD area median income. A family of four cannot earn more than \$45,200 per year in order to qualify a very low income; for a household of two, the limit is \$36,200, and for a household of one it is \$31,650. About 13 percent of all clients are considered to be low-income, which for a household of four the threshold is \$73,350 for a household of two, \$60,250; and for a household of one \$52,700. For moderate income, which make up only about eight percent of all clients, the threshold for a household of four is \$110,950; \$88,800 for a household of two; and \$77,00 for a household of one. Residents over 80 percent of area median income cannot be served.

Common repairs include roof replacements, which can cost as much as \$30,000; exterior siding plumbing; electrical systems; window replacements; deck and stair repairs; driveway improvements; tree trimming or removal; heating systems; essential appliances, excluding microwaves and dishwashers; and accessibility modifications like walk-in showers, handrails, ramps, and major home rehabilitations.

Kym Poetter said the weatherization component of Bellevue's Home Repair Program is aimed at reducing energy burdens, improving indoor air quality, and increasing comfort levels for qualified clients. Partnerships exist with healthcare providers that specifically support residents suffering from asthma or COPD. A separate funding source is used to reduce allergens and to enhance ventilation systems. The Washington State Department of Commerce primarily funds KCHA's weatherization projects, supplemented by significant contributions from Puget Sound Energy, which covers approximately 40 percent of Bellevue-based projects. Priority is given to those experiencing heating emergencies, older adults, disabled individuals, families with children, and Native Americans. Bellevue clients who are part of the repair program are able to bypass the standard wait lists, expediting significantly their access to weatherization services.

Continuing, Kym Poetter said KCHA has maintained a longstanding partnership with Bellevue since the 1970s. Data collection since 1991 demonstrates Bellevue's prominent share of weatherization work within King County, with substantial activity focused on multifamily properties. Single-family home weatherization efforts have varied annually, influenced by application volume. Weatherization services include insulation upgrades, air sealing, ventilation improvements, heating system efficiency enhancements, combustion safety testing, and specialized interventions for residents with respiratory conditions through the Weatherization Plus Health initiative.

Mae Amarine, Repair Program Manager for Habitat for Humanity Seattle-King County and Kittitas County, explained that the organization has a general repair program that operates in different service areas, notably South Seattle, White Center, Skyway, Bryn Mawr, Renton, Federal Way, and Kittitas County. Prior to forming a partnership with Bellevue, the city was not part of the program's service area. Appreciation was expressed for the partnership with Bellevue, which has allowed Habitat to extend its critical and minor home repair services to more homeowners in the Bellevue area. Habitat's "Capable" program, an aging-in-place initiative designed specifically for older adults aged 60 and above, combines home repair services with integrated health care; the program involves a registered nurse and an occupational therapist who

collaborate directly with homeowners to set personalized goals for improved accessibility and quality of life. Over the past five years, Habitat completed repair projects for 374 homeowners, including 19 in Bellevue through the new partnership. Eighteen of the Bellevue projects received funding through CDBG resources, which significantly aided families who otherwise might not have been served. The “Capable” program is for older adults 60 years old and older. The program is designed to help homeowners set goals to improve their quality of life and access to their homes. The "Capable" program is available to eligible residents across King County, and eligibility includes being aged 60 or older, having a household income at or below 80 percent of area median income, either owning the home or living with the homeowner, and having the ability to participate actively in goal-setting activities with the healthcare professionals.

Jessica Schell, Repair Project Manager at Habitat for Humanity, shared detailed accounts and before-and-after visuals of specific Bellevue home repair projects. She shared that homeowner named Donna Onat was initially scheduled for some minor repairs involving gutter guards installation, moss removal, and minor siding repair. Upon further inspection, however, Habitat discovered significant deterioration caused by carpenter ants, requiring extensive removal and replacement of damaged siding, plywood, vapor barriers, and painting.

Donna Onat noted having purchased the home new in 1981 in College Hill in Bellevue for \$114,400 at a time when high-interest mortgage rates were prevalent; initially the rate was adjustable and started at 11.75 percent before eventually peaking at 13.75 percent. After several refinances, lower rates were secured, finally settling at 3.6 percent through BECU. After 42 years, the mortgage was paid off entirely. There has been a dramatic change in property values and the home is currently assessed at \$1,238,000.

Donna Onat shared having initiated a project called Knitting a Neighborhood to benefit Habitat for Humanity. A beginner-level knitting book was written, compiled and published, and to date it has successfully raised and donated \$1,000 from book sales to support Habitat for Humanity.

The next project described by Kym Poetter involved the Johnson household, the initial repair for which addressed a major tripping hazard caused by a large crack in the driveway, which had led to a near fall. The team repaved the driveway and walkway. In conjunction with Habitat, the roof was cleaned, grab bars were installed in the shower for accessibility, rotting lattice on the fence was replaced, and a handrail was added to the deck stairs. Although not required by code, the handrail significantly improved safety. The homeowner appreciated the aesthetic touch of a small space for flower placement.

A third project described involved a home with a severely deteriorated fence. Jessica Schell explained that one side of the fence was propped up by boards due to rotting and missing planks, creating a safety issue given the drop in elevation. The repair team removed and replaced two-thirds of the fence and reinforced the remaining section with new brackets.

The homeowner, Patty Oliver, expressing deep gratitude for the professional quality of work, which exceeded all expectations. The home, built in the 1950s, housed the owner’s family of six, including two adopted children with special needs. Following her husband's passing due to complications from Agent Orange, the homeowner was left as the sole caregiver, and handling

the needed repairs was not possible. When application was made to the program, the anticipation was that only minor fence board replacement would be carried out, but in fact there was a complete reconstruction, including the decorative lattice work. Appreciation was voiced for the seamless efficiency of Habitat, AmeriCorps and city staff, particularly Donna Adair.

The fourth story highlighted the Pfeiffer Ward household. Kym Poetter said the family's involvement with the Home Repair Program spanned more than a decade, beginning in 2011 with a roof replacement. Over the years, additional work was done, including plumbing and electrical repairs, and a full weatherization package. Recently, an additional roof repair was completed. A lead risk assessment revealed exterior lead paint hazards, triggering a federal requirement for lead remediation, which Habitat is scheduled to carry out. If more than \$20,000 is spent on a home, HUD requires that any lead hazards identified must be remediated. The family also applied to Habitat's CAPABLE program, effectively utilizing all services available from the city, KCHA, and Habitat. The case demonstrates the effectiveness of integrated partnerships in helping residents age in place comfortably and safely.

Jessica Schell said another project featured the home of Linda Mason, which contained carpet from the 1970s that had been heavily soiled by pets, contributing to subfloor rot. The repair team removed the carpet, sanitized and sealed the subfloor, and installed approximately 1600 square feet of new vinyl plank flooring.

The final project highlighted involved the home owned by Martha Chapman, who faced imminent cancellation of her homeowner's insurance due to the deteriorating condition of the roof. The repair team acted quickly, securing an extension from the insurance company with a formal letter from Donna Adair explaining the planned repairs. The team replaced the roof, and replaced a chimney after it was discovered that the chimney was connected to an outdated oil furnace, was cracked, and posed a potential carbon monoxide risk. Although testing revealed no current threat, the team decided to eliminate the oil system and install an electric heat pump, improving both energy efficiency and air quality. The water heater was also replaced given that the homeowner had been without hot water for two months. The case illustrates the severe conditions some residents endure and the critical support the repair program can offer.

Chair Singh thanked the panelists for the presentation and good information. Despite many challenges, it is encouraging to see improvements and progress. The personal stories brought a refreshing and positive perspective.

Commissioner Phan asked what happens when a household clearly needs help but is not initially approved for services. In response, Donna Adair explained that the team does work with applicants who are not immediately eligible. Some are unable to proceed due to legal complications such as divorce or ownership issues, in which case they are advised to reapply once those matters are resolved. In cases involving reverse mortgages, loans may not be an option, but grants can sometimes be provided with approval from the selection committee. Most applicants do eventually qualify or reapply successfully.

Commissioner Hays asked how clients typically find the repair program, and asked how many clients are typically served annually. Donna Adair replied that awareness is built through direct

outreach, such as flyers mailed out periodically, placements at community centers and libraries, and visibility at city service desks. Word of mouth is also effective, with past clients recommending the program to neighbors. During the pandemic, staff members actually conducted drive-by assessments to identify homes in need of exterior repairs when interior access was restricted. The team also participates in a broader home repair network that facilitates referrals among partner organizations.

In terms of client volume, Donna Adair said the number of households served annually varies depending on the cost of individual projects. Repairs can range from \$1000 to \$35,000. On average, between 20 and 30 moderate to major home repairs are completed each year. Minor repairs, which are less costly, allow for more households to be served. The program benefits from program income as well, which is funding returned when homeowners repay loans after selling or transferring their homes. The repayments are reinvested into the program. In 2022, approximately \$450,000 in program income was collected, and in 2024, the total was \$216,000. As a result, the city has consistently maintained adequate funds and has not run out of resources for repair projects. Additional funding sources are also leveraged when necessary.

Kym Poetter pointed out that 17 homes in Bellevue had already been serviced through the repair program during the current year.

Commissioner White raised a question regarding whether there is a penalty if a homeowner sells their home less than one year after receiving home repair services. Donna Adair replied not being aware of any penalty, adding having not encountered any such situations.

Chair Singh thanked the participants for sharing valuable information.

7. ADJOURNMENT

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