

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

November 3, 2025
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Gonzalez, Perelman, Phan, Rashid

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Vice Chair White

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Hays

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

COUNCIL LIAISON: Mayor Robinson

POLICE LIAISON: Major Ellen Inman

GUEST SPEAKERS: Meghan Altimore, Mallory Gustave, Hopelink

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

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Hays.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. October 20, 2025

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

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Singh took a moment to remind speakers of the legal prohibition against the use of public facilities to advocate for or against candidates or ballot measures.

Alex Tsimerman recounted grievances regarding a personal legal case and expressed strong

criticisms of city officials, using inflammatory language throughout.

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Mayor Robinson conveyed appreciation for the Commission's work and noted that the City Council may be considering allocating unused Council contingency funds to human services. The Mayor emphasized that any such allocation would likely be one-time funding and should be directed to agencies the city already works with in order to act quickly. The Commission was encouraged to evaluate current priority needs, including support for immigrant and refugee populations and the emerging needs related to food insecurity. The Council will discuss the matter at its upcoming meeting and may call a special session if needed to act sooner.

Major Inman reported continued staffing challenges at the police department. There are approximately two dozen ongoing vacancies. The department is currently updating its dedicated recruiting website and plans a filming session to refresh recruitment materials, as the site has in the past proven effective in attracting applicants nationwide. Once the updated resources are completed, feedback from the Commission will be welcomed.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner Phan shared a few observations from the recent PorchLight site tour. The facility was in active use during the visit with individuals utilizing available services and communal spaces. The PorchLight staff reported an increase in fentanyl overdoses over the past two years; while most incidents were successfully reversed, there was at least one resulting in death. There are logistical challenges associated with having limited parking, making it necessary for the organization to lease additional parking spaces from CBRE.

Chair Singh said there were also neighborhood safety concerns noted during the visit, particularly regarding individuals traveling on foot through the surrounding area. The facility operates as a low-barrier service provider and therefore does not conduct background checks, which contributes to some of the concerns expressed.

Commissioner Phan noted that PorchLight recently lost approximately ten percent of its funding, amounting to roughly \$500,000, due to changes in federal funding.

Chair Singh asked who owns the property where PorchLight is located. Mayor Robinson clarified that the property is owned by a combination of entities, not the City of Bellevue. The city provides operational funding.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza said there are three different operators of facilities: Plymouth Housing, which offers permanent supportive housing; PorchLight; and an entirely separate housing operation offering workforce housing.

Mayor Robinson added that permanent supportive housing includes onsite staffing funded through Bellevue's sales tax revenue allocation, making it comparatively well-resourced. The city also has a Good Neighbor Agreement with PorchLight which was recently revisited to effect

some operational changes in response to increased crime in the surrounding area.

Toni Esparza said PorchLight has implemented modifications to reduce loitering around the facility, including shifting the time individuals sign up for shelter beds to later in the day, and the development of a notification system to reduce the need to wait onsite. The organization is also seeking additional staffing resources.

Major Inman reported that in addition to existing sector coverage a dedicated community service officer and supervising sergeant will be assigned to the area to ensure more focused response and coordination.

Commissioner Gonzalez, who also participated in the recent site visit, spoke positively about the facility's cleanliness, welcoming environment, and the availability of services such as meals and showers even when beds are not available.

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw reported that the ongoing Essentials for All food drive will continue through November 15, with donation bins located at community centers and City Hall.

Ruth Blaw reminded the Commissioners to confirm completion of the Open Public Meetings Act training. An in-person training session regarding parliamentary procedure is scheduled for December 8 from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., and dinner will be included. An upcoming public information session on affordable housing planning was also announced.

The Commissioners were invited to propose potential discussion topics and several were suggested, including a session featuring Sound Generations to discuss services for older adults and trends related to an aging population; a briefing on regional affordable housing development and funding through ARCH; presentations from neighboring East King County cities about shared human services funding processes; discussions with organizations serving youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities; and meetings with community cultural navigators who are working within immigrant and multilingual communities.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Hopelink's 2025 Community Needs Assessment

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland introduced Meghan Altimore, Hopelink CEO, and Mallory Gustave, Vice President of Community Services for Hopelink.

Meghan Altimore explained that Hopelink is a community action agency based in Redmond that serves all of King and Snohomish counties with a full range of programs Hopelink conducts a community needs assessment every three years to guide strategic planning and ensure program decisions are based on current data in light of the fact that available census-based information

lags slightly behind current conditions. The assessment focuses specifically on needs related to poverty, which is consistent with Hopelink's mission and scope. The service areas referenced in the report extend beyond individual city boundaries; for example, the Bellevue service area encompasses not only Bellevue, but also Issaquah, Medina, Mercer Island, and the nearby lake communities, with additional substantial service areas in the Snoqualmie Valley.

The key findings from the community needs update highlight several critical issues. The most significant is around inadequate household income. One in five households in North and East King County cannot meet basic needs, and that calculated to approximately 134,000 individuals. Despite regional affluence, many residents experience poverty that is often misunderstood or overlooked. Housing affordability also remains a major issue, with more than 40 percent of renters paying over 30 percent of their income on housing, which places them at risk of instability. Transit access is uneven across the broader region, though it is comparatively better in Bellevue. Food insecurity has sharply increased along with rising food costs, and benefits such as SNAP have recently been reduced. Barriers to accessing services persist for many residents due to language, disability, age and immigration status.

Commissioner Perelman asked how Hopelink would use additional funds given the space and operational limits. Mallory Gustave reported a significant increase in demand at Hopelink's food markets, with approximately 12,000 individuals enrolled. The organization is expanding home delivery, increasing mobile market stops across East King County, purchasing additional staple foods, and lifting limits on the amount of food clients can take. Additional funding from state and nonprofit partners is being used to help offset the recent reduction in federal nutrition benefits. While storage space is limited, increased trucking frequency allows for the moving of food through smaller facilities more efficiently.

Commissioner Rashid asked about the eligibility for benefits and income thresholds. Meghan Altimore explained that, although the organization must apply certain income guidelines to determine eligibility for federally supplied commodities, the food programs are structured to avoid turning anyone away. Most food assistance is available to individuals up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level, but those who do not meet that threshold or prefer not to sign federal forms may still receive other available items. Mallory Gustave added that emergency bags are also provided to anyone in immediate need. All who come to a foodbank can leave with some amount of food support.

Responding to a favorable comment made by Commissioner Gonzalez regarding use of the word "market" rather than "food bank," Meghan Altimore said the change emphasizes dignity, reduces the sense of stigma, and clarifies to the public that the groceries provided are free.

Meghan Altimore noted that in every city area served by the organization, except for Shoreline, there are segments of the community where the median income is \$200,000. Everywhere but Redmond also has areas where the median income is \$100,000. That is evidence of the fact that the service area contains both areas of concentrated high income and smaller pockets of residents living in poverty, often within the same communities, and that contributes to challenges in locating affordable housing and essential services. Within the needs assessment area, which is North and East King County, 42 percent of the residents are BIPOC; 13.6 percent are over age

65; and approximately 18 percent of households fall below 300 percent of the federal poverty level, which is the approximate threshold required to meet basic needs. Hopelink's service demographics reflect the population experiencing poverty rather than the region's population as a whole. The assessment also shows persistent income disparities across racial and ethnic groups. While incomes rose during recent years, household purchasing power declined due to rising costs. Many households now face ongoing stress in determining how to apply limited resources to food, housing, transportation, and other necessities. Approximately 130,000 people in North and East King County lack adequate income to meet their basic needs.

Housing affordability remains a critical destabilizing factor for the region. Rent increases have moderated somewhat, but rents remain significantly out of proportion to wage growth. Households paying more than 30 percent of their income toward housing are considered to be housing-cost burdened, and those paying more than 50 percent are considered at imminent risk of homelessness. Job loss is stated as the most common cause of homelessness, often triggering a rapid progression into housing insecurity.

Transportation access is another significant barrier, particularly for residents in more rural or the eastern areas of the service region. Individuals with disabilities, older adults, non-English speakers, low-income residents, and rural households face heightened difficulty accessing transportation, services, and employment. The data indicates that longer travel distances to work increase reliance on personal vehicles, which adds cost pressures to households already operating with limited resources.

The needs assessment highlighted the fact that increases in food costs have outpaced wage gains. Households are being forced to prioritize among essential needs daily, and food is often the expense that must be reduced first. The findings set the stage for further explanation of how such pressures appear in Hopelink's daily operations and client experiences.

Commissioner Perelman asked about Hopelink's financial assistance programs. Mallory Gustave explained that the average amount of financial aid currently provided is approximately \$2,200 per household, with a maximum cap of \$3,000 that may be applied across up to two months of assistance to give households temporary stability. Most requests relate to rent, and although support levels have increased compared to pre-pandemic years, emergency relief funding that had expanded available resources during the pandemic is no longer present. As a result, the demand now far exceeds the supply; in the past fiscal year, Hopelink received approximately 7,000 requests for financial assistance and was able to serve only a small fraction of the requests. The eligibility limits apply on an annual basis.

Meghan Altmore noted that unlike some regions that lack physical access to food retailers, there are stores accessible food stores in North and East King County. However, prices are frequently prohibitive. Families often face severe trade-offs, including watering down formula or skipping meals to ensure children can eat. Hopelink partners with organizations such as KidVantage to provide supplemental formula and diapers and focuses on reducing barriers to service access and connecting individuals to multiple benefit streams. No one visits the food markets without having a genuine need, and the organization continues to remove obstacles to ensure households can obtain sufficient groceries.

Commissioner Perelman asked about possible reductions to Section 8 vouchers. Meghan Altimore stated that while they have not yet seen clients lose vouchers, Hopelink is aware of the emerging concerns and expects that changes may be forthcoming.

Malory Gustave described how the needs identified in the assessment manifest in day-to-day operations. The food markets are currently serving approximately 12,000 individuals per month of the more than 22,000 who are enrolled, and that represents a 25 percent increase from the previous year even before the most recent SNAP reductions. Home heating and utility assistance reached 10,000 households in the last fiscal year, and partnerships with the City of Bellevue have enabled the installation of heat pump systems to lower long-term energy expenses. In shelter and housing programs, stays are significantly longer than in past years due to the lack of affordable housing to transition into; average stays have grown from roughly 251 days to over 400 days.

Commissioner Perelman asked about coordinated entry and Meghan Altimore confirmed that all housing units remain within the regional coordinated entry system. There are ongoing efforts to prioritize placements for individuals with existing ties to the community and to partner with local organizations serving people living in vehicle camps.

Commissioner Perelman asked if Hopelink manages any of the tiny home villages. Malory Gustave suggested that limited land availability and the specific needs of families make temporary tiny home villages less suitable locally. Long-term, the best solutions are tied to the development of more permanent, dense, and mixed-income housing to support stability and community integration.

Commissioner Gonzalez asked how Hopelink adapts its services to address the increasing community needs, particularly in the areas of food assistance and housing. Commissioner Gonzalez asked if the recent increases in food insecurity and immigration-related concerns have caused Hopelink to consider expanding food delivery into low-income housing communities for families who may feel unsafe traveling to distribution sites. Meghan Altimore said the organization is limited in its capacity relative to home delivery given that funding for the expanded delivery program developed during the pandemic has since diminished. Despite the concerns, Hopelink has not observed a decline in in-person market use given that the need for food remains so urgent that families continue to come. The employees and volunteers are trained to maintain a safe and protective environment for all who visit. Malory Gustave added that the mobile market services remain active but constrained by staffing. Hopelink is working to increase the number of stops and to identify more centrally accessible locations.

Commissioner Phan asked how community members can advocate effectively on transportation issues. Meghan Altimore noted that King County Metro is in the process of restoring service hours to pre-pandemic levels, but ongoing challenges remain in areas where ridership is low or where steep geographic barriers make access difficult. The most effective advocacy focuses on identifying precise gaps in service, such as last-mile connections, neighborhood access challenges, and specific route needs, and relaying those to Metro through local mobility coalitions. Hopelink's mobility program facilitates such coalitions and maintains a trip-planning resource, FindARide.org, which includes both public and nonprofit transportation options.

Commissioner Perelman requested information on program new programs and any program reductions. Meghan Altimore said explained that the organization recently absorbed 32 units of housing from Attain Housing to prevent their loss, a merger that required significant administrative and financial effort. At the same time, with pandemic-era funding now concluded and reserves constrained, Hopelink undertook the task of intentionally reducing the deficit of approximately \$3.7 million in order to stabilize the core services. That required discontinuing several smaller or duplicated programs, including GED support, digital skills training, the employment program, and reducing the family development program staffing. The decisions were made to preserve resources for programs that are both unduplicated and directly aligned with Hopelink's mission, including financial capability workshops which are now offered in multiple languages. Hopelink is entering a new strategic planning cycle structured around anticipated political and funding uncertainties, particularly in regard to possible future changes to Medicaid and non-emergency medical transportation funding.

Malory Gustave added that the organization has partnered with developers to provide services to residents, but not as the owner/operator of the units. Comprehensive case management support to help families stabilize is something Hopelink does well.

Commissioner Perelman asked why the employment assistance program was discontinued given the apparent current need. Meghan Altimore allowed that while the need remains, the funding needed to keep the program going is not there. The program had relied largely on limited local and housing authority funding. The King County Housing Authority funding was only available to housing authority households, and that left only one other staff position to serve the entire service area, making the program financially unsustainable.

Commissioner Perelman asked about technology and Meghan Altimore said Hopelink is currently engaged in an AI bootcamp in an attempt to better understand where efficiencies can be found in terms of streamlining service delivery, potential online re-enrollment tools and screening systems, and ways to automate first-step eligibility checks while still maintaining a strong personal connection with clients. However, many of the households Hopelink serves are wary of data sharing, especially in light of certain state and federal data access policies beyond the organization's control. Hopelink has therefore prioritized transparency about data use and has made its privacy policy easily accessible and translatable in many languages.

Meghan Altimore encouraged the Commissioners to review the full community needs assessment report, noting that it contains significant qualitative data gathered from focus groups conducted in partnership with culturally specific organizations. The sessions allowed residents who do not currently use Hopelink services to describe barriers and needs in their own languages and in supported settings.

B. Continued Review of the 2027-2028 Funding Percentages

Ruth Blaw stated that the task before the Commission was to recommend percentage allocations across identified areas of need. The contingency plan allows the Commission to adjust those percentages by no more than two percent up or down where the volume or nature of the

applications differ significantly from the expectations. If additional funding becomes available after the Commission finalizes its recommendations, the contingency plan as proposed would divide any additional funds equally among shelter, financial assistance, and food, all of which were identified in the Needs Update as the most critical current community needs.

Chair Singh suggested adjusting the contingency distribution so that food and basic needs would receive a larger share and proposed a 40 percent allocation to food and 30 percent each to shelter and financial assistance instead of an even three-way split.

Commissioner Perelman asked what the definition of basic needs is. Ruth Blaw said it is programs and services that provide access to food and essential daily needs for individuals and families experiencing economic hardship. The services may include hygiene items such as diapers and toiletries.

Commissioner Perelman questioned the relative benefits of directing more funding to food assistance versus financial assistance. The notion of evenly splitting any additional funds would give households the flexibility to make decisions about their own needs, such as whether to purchase food or pay utility bills.

Commissioner Phan agreed, noting that shelter programs also frequently provide food, meaning that additional food support may be indirectly delivered through shelter funding.

Commissioner Gonzalez indicated support for retaining the even distribution as outlined in the draft contingency plan.

Commissioner Phan raised the notion of whether or not to include in the contingency plan an explicit reference to the Commission's priority categories of youth-serving programs and culturally and linguistically specific services. Recent input from Eastside for All regarding the previous funding cycle expressed concern that one-time funding had not been aligned with the established priorities.

Commissioner Perelman argued that keeping the language as proposed would be the simplest approach.

Commissioner Phan said the same issue was raised during the previous funding cycle, and there has been public comment offered on the issue.

Chair Singh agreed the uncomplicated equal split contained in the draft contingency plan should be retained.

Commissioner Phan favored adding a general statement that the priority categories should be noted in the contingency plan.

Commissioner Perelman said that could be done by including a statement calling for considering the categories when allocating any additional funds.

Ruth Blaw pointed out that the current targets of no less than 23 percent for culturally and linguistically specific programs and no less than 26 percent for youth-serving programs are written as targets rather than requirements because the final awards must respond to the actual applications received. Commissioners agreed that similar target-based language could be extended to the contingency plan.

Commissioner Perelman said the pot of additional funds, if any, will be relatively small. If language is added to the contingency plan, it should simply state that the Commission will strive to retain the percentages without locking the Commission into any specific action. Ruth Blaw stressed that it would not be possible to state that any additional funds must be awarded in line with the targets given that the final awards must respond to the actual applications received.

There was consensus to direct staff to revise the language of the draft to state that contingency funds will be allocated evenly among the three critical needs areas, and to add language noting the Commission's targets of 23 percent for culturally and linguistically specific programs, and 26 percent for youth services.

Ruth Blaw said the revised contingency draft will be brought to the next meeting for review and a vote.

Ruth Blaw confirmed that the Commission had previously agreed not to combine certain categories, and that approach was incorporated into the updated materials.

The Commissioners took a moment to review the proposed percentage allocations shown on the funding worksheet.

Commissioner Phan stated that while the new approach may not be perfect, it is good that it does maintain flexibility. Adjustments of up to two percent may be made later after the applications are received. Ruth Blaw clarified that the two percent adjustment allowance is part of the draft contingency plan, which will be presented for a separate vote at the next meeting. The two percent figure was chosen arbitrarily and can be changed at the discretion of the Commission before voting on the contingency plan.

Ruth Blaw said the Commission's recommended percentages by category can be voted on separate from the contingency plan, though both will be presented to the Council together.

Commissioner Perelman did not agree with the reasoning for not merging categories.

Chair Singh voiced agreement with the recommendation of the staff.

Commissioner Phan raised the issue of how the funding framework accounts for services benefiting older adults in light of the fact that the needs assessment indicates that older residents often feel overlooked. Ruth Blaw explained that while some agencies specifically serve older adults, many others serve mixed-age populations, making it difficult to assign a precise percentage to older adult services. The Commission would therefore need to elevate that consideration during its review of the applications rather than by adjusting the category

percentages up front. Demographic data is collected annually, though it does not distinguish frequency of service use. Additional data analysis can be explored, but doing so might be complex relative to the practical impact.

Toni Esparza emphasized the need for the Commission to remain mindful of the unique needs of older adults during the scoring and deliberation phase so that smaller-scale programs serving fewer individuals are not automatically deprioritized if they meet significant needs, even if their service numbers are lower than those of larger programs.

A motion to approve the 2027–2028 funding percentage recommendations as presented was made by Commissioner Phan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rashid. The motion carried 5-1, with Commissioner Perelman voting no.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Singh adjourned the meeting at 7:53 p.m.