

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

February 22, 2023
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-126

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Mansfield, Commissioners Amirfaiz, White
COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Piper
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Singh, Commissioners Jain, Halstead
STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Leslie Miller, Asma Ahmed, Andrew Ndayambaje, Department of Parks and Community Services
COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis
POLICE LIAISON: Major Mark Tarantino
GUEST SPEAKERS: None
RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Chair Mansfield who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Piper, who participated remotely. Vice Chair Singh and Commissioners Halsted and Jain were absent.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 7, 2023

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Jain. The motion was seconded by Commissioner White and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioner White abstained from voting.

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Alex Tsimerman reported that after speaking for only five seconds at a recent Bellevue School District board meeting, he was escorted out of the meeting and issued a ban of six months on returning. Bans have been issued against attending Seattle School District board meetings as

well. That is discriminatory and complaints were filed, but there has been no answer. A public request for information was also filed, but again there has been no answer. Bellevue does not have a human rights commission like Seattle has, so the Human Services Commission was requested to investigate the issue. The City Council was asked to do the same. The United States constitution allows for freedom of speech, but the school districts apparently have their own constitutions.

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

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis reported on the briefing the Council received on establishing BelRed as an arts district. The BelRed Arts District Association is a non-profit partner that will be working with the city to make the area to the east of the Downtown the epicenter of arts and culture, creativity and innovation of the Eastside. The Culture and Economic Development team reported that the Association has been working to recruit a lot of different community partners. The effort goes back to 2009 when a subarea plan was adopted to include Land Use Code changes to facilitate the transformation of the area from a light industrial zone to a transit-oriented urban village. Dozens of art organizations and businesses now are housed in the BelRed area, including the Pacific Northwest Ballet school, the Evergreen Arts Collective, the Bellevue School of Rock and Theater 33.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis also reported on the city's remembrance of Japanese American internment. The Council proclaimed Sunday, February 19, as a day of action and remembrance for the internment that occurred during World War II following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The Council also acknowledged Black History Month during February and the city did a tremendous job on a number of different events, including Living Voices, an amazing walk-through history.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS – None

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. Applicant Agencies for ARPA Funding

Human Services Manager Leslie Miller noted that an RFP for \$3.1 million was issued to address a number of critical areas. The Commission will be reviewing the 46 applications received over the next three meetings. The Council provided the additional funding in recognition of the fact that requests for general funds during the last funding cycle was exceeded by amount of funding available by almost two times. The applications received as part of the RFP also exceed the amount of funding available and by a higher percentage. The applications will be reviewed in three batches: 1) behavioral health services, civil legal aid, and domestic violence and sexual assault survivor services; 2) basic needs, food insecurity, and child care; and 3) fostering well-being in the face of racial and ethnic discrimination, and homelessness services. The recommendations from the Commission will ultimately be approved by the City Council.

Leslie Miller briefly outlined for the Commission the amount of funding available for each

category in the first round, the agencies that submitted the applications, and the total requested amounts per category.

For behavioral health services, \$277,154 available: 4 Tomorrow, Attain Housing, Boys & Girls Club of Bellevue, Catholic Community Services of King County, Harborview Abuse & Trauma Counseling, International Community Health Services, Youth Eastside Services. Total requested: \$650,613.

For civil legal aid, \$83,903 available: Family La Casa, Eastside Legal Assistance Program. Total requested \$125,421.

Commissioner Piper noted serving as a volunteer for Family La Casa King County. The program involves a court-appointed special advocate to represent children in dependency. In Washington state, until the age of 12 children are not automatically entitled to attorney representation and the program steps in to serve as advocates for children.

For domestic violence and sexual assault survivor services, \$228,594 available: Consejo Counseling & Referral Service, Indian American Community Services, Lifewire. Total requested \$266,420.

B. BIPOC By and For and Local Agency Funding Analysis for 2023 Human Services Funding

Leslie Miller stated that the city has increasingly recognized the need to support local grassroots organizations that have grown over time. The need was highlighted during the pandemic and the Council encouraged and the Commission recommended funding for the Eastside's increasingly diverse agencies. There are advocates on the Eastside interested in making sure that agencies created to serve culturally specific populations get funding. Many of the agencies were created because communities faced challenges in finding mainstream organizations able to meet their needs in culturally specific ways. The list of agencies includes Indian American Community Services, 4 Tomorrow, Centro Cultural Mexicano and Community Resource Center.

There have been advocates, who are passionate about making sure all of the community is served, who have stepped forward asking for data to see how the Eastside cities are doing in funding culturally specific organizations. A full funding analysis has not yet been completed, and the ARPA funding will affect the bottom line. The data thus far indicates that 79 percent of funding requests came from non-BIPOC agencies, and 21 percent from BIPOC By and For agencies. The funding allocations mirrored those percentages.

Commissioner Amirfaiz stressed the need to take into account the longevity of the organizations that have provided services and therefore have receive more funding. New agencies cannot be expected to be on par with mainstream agencies. Funding for BIPOC By and For agencies is likely to increase going forward. Leslie Miller allowed that there are some complexities that must be addressed. Many of the BIPOC agencies are small grassroots organizations. A large amount of the overall funding goes to homelessness services providers, none of which are strictly BIPOC. 4 Tomorrow is seeking funds to serve those in the Latinx community who are

experiencing homelessness, and some funding is provided to Muslim Community Resource Center for its housing program.

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked who the advocates are, and if it were possible to get data on the number of bilingual staff the mainstream agencies have hired to provide services to specific ethnic communities, and in what languages. Leslie Miller agreed to follow up in providing that data. The advocates represent a number of Eastside organizations. Eastside For All is an organization that supports a number of BIPOC organizations, including with advocacy on the Eastside.

Major Tarantino called attention to the references to non-Eastside funding and asked if the funding goes to organizations that are outside the Eastside but serve those in the community. Leslie Miller said that is exactly the case. Some of the agencies are located in Seattle but provide services to people on the Eastside.

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked what happened after Communities Rise was funded last year. Leslie Miller said two Seattle organizations providing legal assistance and other services to small grassroots BIPOC organizations merged to become Communities Rise. The organization received funding to provide support to a cohort of small organizations to help with capacity building. That work is ongoing, and a number of agencies are participating in it.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza reminded the Commissioners that the funding for Communities Rise came from a donation from Amazon.

8. OLD BUSINESS

A. Creating A Culture of Equity for the Commission's Work – Part II

Grant Coordinator Asma Ahmed reminded the Commissioners that a presentation was given at the last meeting on the city's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. The presentation included an outline of the city's Diversity Advantage Initiative, why DEI matters, working definitions, and the relevance of DEI in the Commission's work.

By way of reflecting on the presentation, Asma Ahmed asked the Commissioners to comment on their primary takeaways. Chair Mansfield said it was good to see how much the DEI framework matters, and that there is so much more work to do in terms of engaging organizations and individuals. Being more informed by having more training sessions will advance the Commission's ability to review grant applications more equitably.

Commissioner White noted having enjoyed the interactions of the group discussions and expressed appreciation for adding "belonging" to diversity, equity and inclusion. The timing was excellent in setting the tone for 2023 and getting more involved with the funding cycle.

Commissioner Amirfaiz commented that the work and concepts of DEI are very important. When it comes to delivering on the intent, there are too often discrepancies. The talk is there but the walk is not. DEI, while it sounds new, is not really new.

Commissioner Piper agreed. There is a clear need to walk the walk and not just talk the talk. Equity is a very important lens through which the Commission looks in doing its work. It is exciting that the city has the resource in-house. While there have in the past been other equity training sessions, they have been far more disjointed.

Asma Ahmed focused on the community agreements and group norms shared as part of the presentation and asked if the Commission was interested in adopting them as grounding principles, and if so, if any additions or changes should be made to them.

Chair Mansfield welcomed the idea of the Commission adopting them as a way of providing a safe space and a framework in which to work.

Commissioner White agreed they should be adopted, adding that they should be shown at the beginning of each Commission meeting. Item three on the list is the only one not stated in the positive and that should be changed.

Commissioner Amirfaiz suggested the Commission already adheres to the group norms.

Commissioner Piper concurred but suggested adopting them and formalizing them into the Commission's meetings would be a way of leaving something for future commissions.

Chair Mansfield also agreed the Commission for the most part adheres to the norms. However, having them adopted as a formal agreement and framework would be a good thing.

Leslie Miller agreed to work on changing item three into positive language and bringing the matter back to the next Commission meeting for additional review.

Toni Esparza said the agreements and norms are valuable in that they point to something everyone already agrees on, providing space for conversations that might otherwise be hard to start.

Leslie Miller noted that past efforts at equity training have been short-term affairs, generally right before an application process. By creating a culture of equity, there will always be the opportunity to connect the agreements and norms and integrate them with the Commission's work.

Asma Ahmed asked the Commissioners to suggest ways in which the human services funding could better support equity, inclusion and belonging. Chair Mansfield highlighted the need to continue working with BIPOC By and For agencies and to be cognizant of groups that are not necessarily represented to make sure the Commission is being inclusive and equitable.

Commissioner White said the Commission needs to get to know the agencies better. That means going beyond just taking their word for what they say but doing independent research into who they are helping and what their mission is.

Commissioner Amirfaiz said what happens often is that resources are allocated to the visible community. There are a large number of ethnic groups, but everyone gets subsumed into four or five categories. When it comes to funding equitably, the Commission needs to be clear about who the residents of Bellevue are.

Commissioner Piper cautioned the Commission against resting on its laurels, but suggested the Commission has been doing a pretty good job in terms of looking at the applications. That is not to say the work is done, but the Commission is starting from a positive position. There still is, however, a need to keep in mind there are other communities that do not always come to mind that need to be considered.

B. Application Review Process Debrief – Part II

Chair Mansfield noted that on November 1, 2022, meeting the Commission debriefed the 2023-2024 application review process and shared with the staff what worked well and where there are opportunities for improvement.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland noted that during the debrief the comments made about the application binders were positive both in terms of having the applications printed and having access to the digital format. Commenting on what did not work well, the Commissioners pointed out that the applications were compiled before it was determined how the applications would be reviewed, necessitating some switching and reshuffling. Going forward, the staff will simply determine the application order and will not make any changes.

With regard to reviewing application by subgroup under each category, the Commissioners allowed that it was helpful to review by subgoal while reviewing the applications at the same time.

The Commissioners comments on the staff framework were that it was helpful to have a starting point for the funding review process, and appreciated having had the funding priorities incorporated into the staff framework. Some Commissioners pointed out that there was some confusion about the rationale for the staffing framework. In the future staff will make sure provide more thorough written explanations and will revisit them during the long process.

The comments with regard to the review teams were uniformly positive, noting it was helpful to review the applications in small groups.

It came as no surprise to anyone that all Commissioners stated it would be helpful to have more time to review the applications, and that the review process should be started earlier. More applications than ever before were submitted during the last round and there was a lot to go through. Staff have asked the partners from the other suburban cities that are part of the application process to consider moving the application timeline up, possibly releasing the application in late January or early February.

With regard to the opportunity for objective rating, the Commissioners highlighted a need for consistency and being objective. Staff is considering rating tools that would include reviewing

the application narratives, budgets, and alignment with priority areas and an equity lens.

All Commissioners pointed out that many application program budgets were incomplete. A number of agencies submitted incomplete budgets and the staff took the time to reach out to agencies for their budget information, but when uploaded to OneDrive there were some issues in accessing the information. Printing out the information and adding them to the notebooks would have been helpful. For the ARPA application process, staff is thoroughly reviewing each application and sending to the agency requests for additional information. Going forward, staff will continue to communicate with agencies the importance of submitting complete and accurate budgets.

Leslie Miller said the increase in the overall number of applications has staff hitting the limits of what they are able to do by way of spending the time reaching out to agencies asking for additional information. One approach would be to provide the agencies with a detailed checklist of everything that needs to be in each application, and ask each agency to have someone with fresh eyes review the application against the checklist before submitting it.

Commissioner White asked if the electronic format of the application could be written to prevent an applicant from advancing to the next section without first completing the current section. Christy Stangland said for general fund grants, applicants use the ShareOne application. The application does not require filling out each and every section, partly because agencies may want to work on Question 8 before working on Question 3. City staff do review the applications once they are submitted to make sure all the components are present, but the sheer number of applications submitted means it takes a lot of time. The question has been asked about making sure applicants cannot submit an application without completing certain components, such as percentage outcomes.

Toni Esparza said application completeness is one place where there has been an intersection observed between accountability and equity, both of which are important. As new agencies emerge, they are not always as skilled or equipped to deal with government funding, which can be more stringent than community-based funding. As such, there is a desire in bringing new agencies along to strike the right balance.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Amirfaiz, Toni Esparza allowed that agencies are provided with training on how to fill out the applications. All of the suburban cities participate, and the training sessions are filmed and posted for additional referral.

Commissioner Piper asked about making the training sessions a requirement for all applicants. Toni Esparza said for the ARPA applications, in part because specific areas of the continuum are targeted, agencies have been required to meet with a staff member before applying. That approach is sustainable given the lower number of applications for the ARPA funds, but it may not be sustainable for the general fund process where the number of applications is much higher.

Leslie Miller added that agencies often mix up outcomes and outputs. Staff will be working with the agencies that are funded in making sure there will be meaningful data.

Turning to the need for more agency content and information, Toni Esparza said the Commissioners reported needing more context to understand the full impact of programs beyond the numbers in the outcomes. For the coming year, an item will be added to Commission agendas for sharing program updates, outputs and narrative reports, and reports on monitoring visits. Successes and program challenges will also be shared.

Finally, as part of the previous debrief some Commissioners held the view that all voices in the room had been heard, that the Chair ensured a rotation of comments. Others felt that in fact not all voices were heard and that it did not always feel like a trusting space, and that there was a pressure to align with the group norms. In part that goes back to the notion of adopting group norms or building rapport and trust among Commissioners through something like a retreat.

All of the Commissioners voiced positive comments about having hybrid meetings and requested allowing them to continue.

Centering equity in funding decisions was a category around which there was not complete agreement. Some Commissioners stated that the equity training and the rating tool was very helpful. Others expressed challenges with the equity training and said there is a need for an equity lens in the overall funding. Possible changes for future funding include having staff involved in any future equity training and making sure the trainers are vetted, and holding more frequent equity training sessions.

On the topic of incorporating public comment, the last funding cycle included a lot more oral communication and public comment. Agencies never heard from before stepped up to the mic. In the Commissioner responses it was stated that it would be helpful to have agencies provide comment either right before or while applications are being reviewed. Some agencies offered testimony on a number of occasions. There is a need to make sure there is time to allow for diverse voices in the time allotted. Staff could recommend that agencies only speak on behalf of their programs once. Staff could also recommend the best time for agencies to provide oral communication.

Chair Mansfield voiced appreciation for all the work done by the staff in getting correct information out to the agencies and delivered to the Commission.

Commissioner Amirfaiz said the support of the staff has always been excellent. With regard to the training, Commissioner Amirfaiz suggested the Commissioners should be asked to weigh in on elements of the agency training sessions.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked to be allowed to participate remotely on March 7, and Chair Mansfield asked the same for April 4.

A motion to approve both requests was made by Commissioner Piper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner White and the motion carried unanimously.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

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

Chair Mansfield adjourned the meeting at 7:21 p.m.