

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

March 1, 2022
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Piper, Vice Chair Amirfaiz, Ma, Mansfield, McClure, Phan

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Mercer

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Department of Parks and Community Services; Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis; Major Tarantino, Bellevue Police Department

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Mercer who was excused.

Chair Piper stated that this evening's meeting and future meetings will be held remotely via Zoom.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None

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

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis reported that during the month of February the Council made decisions on several planning topics that will be important for the city's future, including the Countywide Planning Policies. At a future meeting the Council will act to ratify the Countywide Planning Policies and the growth capacity report. The long-range planning policies were last revised in 2012. Thirty percent of the jurisdictions in King County representing at least 70 percent of the population must ratify the policies. The Countywide Planning Policies serve as the framework for each local jurisdiction's comprehensive plan with respect to land use planning efforts. Bellevue will be updating its Comprehensive Plan by June 2024 and that work item has already kicked off.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis informed the Commissioners that in mid-February the Council voted to direct staff and the Transportation Commission to start development of a curb management plan, including supporting policy language, as part of the 2022 annual Comprehensive Plan amendment program. The curb management plan will establish

deliberate policies, practices, and guidance on how curb areas should be designed, maintained, and operated over time. The use of the curb areas has grown in recent years as new and unique uses came to the fore, particularly during the pandemic in terms of dedicated food delivery drop zones. The public will be invited to provide feedback during the process.

The Council is researching an apprenticeship utilization program. The program would require apprentices to be used for certain public work projects and contracts in the city. The proposal recommends initiating a program that would require minimum participation of the work done on public work projects valued at more than one million dollars, and the aim of the program is to create unique employment opportunities, especially for members of the community potentially earning lower wages, to allow for learning skills that could lead to a stable living wage.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis said the Council on February 28 discussed a proposed amendment related to the city's noise ordinance and amplified sound. The proposal was made by the economic development division. In a nutshell, the amendment would allow small events, particularly those related to the arts, to have amplified sound. The proposed change would expand the exemption days and the hours to include other business hours and holidays.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza reminded the Commissioners about the Unity Through Diversity event on Friday, March 4, hosted by Youth Link. The program celebrates Bellevue's cultural diversity. The event will be held virtually and will include cultural performances.

Ms. Esparza updated the Commission regarding 1590 funds that can be used to support newly developed or acquired affordable housing or behavioral health facilities for certain populations within a certain income brackets. The funds can also be used to fund ongoing behavioral health- and housing-related services. The Council acted to adopt the tax for the city, and King County is collecting the tax for all areas where local jurisdictions did not locally elect to enable the tax. King County's approach is to purchase hotels and convert them into emergency or permanent supportive housing with on-site services. In 2021 the county purchased the Silver Cloud hotel in Redmond which is close to the border with Bellevue. Redmond is partnering in outreach to the local community. An RFP has been released for a provider, but no selection has yet been made. The county is also in the process looking to purchase the La Quinta hotel in Kirkland that is also proximal to a border with Bellevue.

Ms. Esparza noted that the Commission will hold a public hearing on March 15 relating to Community Development Block Grant dollars. The wording of the notice for the hearing indicates it is on housing, community development and human services. She said she can envision some community members attending the hearing with questions and observations about the purchase of hotels to be used for housing. She said there are conversations with Kirkland about how to support Bellevue residents in those facilities. Following the public hearing, staff from Department of Community Development will share with the Commission the process of updating the city's Comprehensive Plan.

Major Tarantino commented that both the La Quinta and the Silver Cloud hotels are on Bellevue's borders. Police and fire have reached out to community members and neighborhood groups in regard to both locations to answer questions and to serve as a sounding board.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. Planning for the Upcoming Funding Process

Ms. Esparza briefly reviewed with the Commissioners the city's policies relative to human services. She noted that Comprehensive Plan policies provide direction to fund the continuum of services and emphasizes the importance of prevention services. The policies name several values that are important to the city relative to human services, including welcoming, safety, justice fairness, equity, cultural competency, dignity, self-determination, and self-sufficiency. There are policies that talk about the removal of barriers, both physical and systemic. The policies specifically identify the need for affordable, accessible, and quality childcare; support for workforce development; and support for families, youth and single adults experiencing homelessness.

The city's Diversity Advantage Plan also drives the work of the Commission, particularly in regard to equity and ensuring accessibility for all residents. The Diversity Advantage Plan emphasizes the importance of culturally competent and easily accessible services for all; prioritizes year round shelters; identifies priorities related to diversity, equity and inclusion in human services, including: translated documents; bilingual and bicultural services; the need for agencies to receive support in training for staff and developing culturally competent services; and the need for diverse representation in those who provide services, both staff and volunteers.

The City Council's adopted vision and priorities for 2021-2023 call out education and equity as core values. They also call out the need for: outreach to be inclusive and culturally sensitive; the entire community to experience equitable access to services; implementation of the Diversity Plan; a permanent location for men's shelters; the development of a safe parking program. City boards, commissions and other advisory groups are to assist the City Council in providing superior leadership by representing the diverse interests of the City and providing thoughtful and creative ideas that ensure sound policy direction and decisions.

The city's 2022 adopted state legislative agenda recognizes the need to address racism and implicit bias and supports systemic reforms that are timely, reasonable, and effective. The document also supports the expansion of mobile integrated healthcare and services for those experiencing mental and emotional crisis on an emergency basis; supports increased assistance to tenants, landlords and homeowners as the statewide eviction moratorium ends; and opposes cuts to programs that serve the city's most vulnerable populations, including funding for treatment and prevention programs that focus on the root causes of homelessness, mental and behavioral health services, addiction, domestic violence, diversion programs such as community courts to keep people out of the criminal justice system and reentry programs for previously incarcerated people.

Ms. Esparza transitioned into a discussion of the potential for the Commission to consider funding priorities and how to use them to guide conversations about funding recommendations. She noted that the demand for human service funding will likely outstrip the human service dollars available. For the upcoming cycle, approximately \$5.5 million will be available, some of which will be from the continuing Amazon investment in human services. Owing to the increased demands from the pandemic, there is currently about \$13 million in human service contracts available in the community, which includes increased allocations from the Council. The agencies will be evaluating the need to continue the same level of services in 2023-2024 and that will potentially lead them to seek that level of funding from the city. This would then trigger the need for the Commission to make some very challenging decisions. The demographics in Bellevue are changing according to the data. Numerous agencies and services have emerged in direct response. Specifically, there are many agencies that hold cultural expertise and responsiveness to the community. It has, however, historically been difficult for new agencies to access human services funding.

Ms. Esparza said the emerging themes identified by staff from the 2021-2022 Needs Update included continuing increasing needs post-pandemic; the high cost of living in Bellevue; the lack of access for certain groups; and the challenges experienced by human service agencies in terms of demand, staffing, and paying staff sufficient to retain them. The areas of significant shifts in need noted by staff included behavioral health services; homelessness; racial and ethnic discrimination; domestic violence; and legal services.

Ms. Esparza provided the Commission with a brief recap of the Commission's February 15 meeting and the information that was shared.

Chair Piper said it made sense to consider both the emerging themes and the significant shifts identified by the staff in assessing applications. He asked if there were additional elements that should be considered.

Commissioner Ma noted that the Commission had been in consensus against adopting publishing specific priorities, but to have them in hand to inform the Commission's discussions. Chair Piper said he agreed with that as well.

Commissioner Phan asked for some background information about funding the continuum. Ms. Esparza explained that the continuum involves a range of services, including prevention, intervention, and enhancement. The prediction is that the numbers will exceed the city's capacity and the guidance relative to funding the continuum is intended to avoid diverting all the dollars to one place on the continuum.

Commissioner Phan asked if funding new agencies has been difficult because of the Commission's focus on funding the established organizations that are addressing the needs in the community. Chair Piper said it is always a challenge to take money away from organizations that have been funded. Another challenge has been funding organizations that have not applied in the past for a variety of reasons, including the application process and the boxes that must be ticked. The Commission has also over the years felt that there should be a minimum funding level for a variety of reasons.

Commissioner Ma agreed that it is a challenge to fund the continuum and at the same time fund emerging needs. Given limited funding, focusing on new areas often means reducing funding for established areas. Funding new and untested organizations is always a challenge in light of the fact that the Commission needs to know the city's dollars will be well spent.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz referred to the staff memo included in the Commission packet and the statement regarding agencies reporting reductions in revenues. She stressed the importance of having some context in light of the fact that many organizations received a lot of money during Covid. It would be good to know which agencies are making those reports, and which of their funding sources are seeing declines. Human Services Planner Christy Stangland commented that during the community conversations fundraising losses was a highlighted topic. During Covid many fundraisers were canceled. Dollars raised through fundraising are far more flexible and can be used to fill in staffing cost gaps that are not necessarily funded by other sources.

Ms. Esparza added that one challenge around the way agencies submit information is that they are asked to submit by program rather than by the overall agency. As a result, the Commission does not always see the overhead costs. Fundraising helps to fill those gaps. She agreed that some agencies were inundated with funding during Covid, but at least in Bellevue not all agencies had the same experience. Covid funding was very targeted to the areas experiencing the deepest crises, such as housing and food. Agencies offering services to older adults and

the disabled did not necessarily receive added funding. The services of some agencies were restricted due to the pandemic and as a result they may have lost Medicaid funding and the like, yet to maintain their stability they needed to maintain their staffing and infrastructure.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz commented on the staff shortage in terms of behavioral health services. She asked if the providers have mentioned any strategies for bringing more behavioral health professionals online even if they have more funding. She also noted that low-income families eligible for Medicaid can receive free mental health services and asked what income category is being referenced when talking about children and youth needing behavioral health services. Ms. Esparza said she was not able to address the issue of staffing. With regard to children and youth, there are several factors in play. For those that do receive state funding there are extensive wait lists to obtain services. The demand for youth mental health services is very high across all income brackets. Many do not qualify for state funding but that does not necessarily mean their families can afford to pay for private care.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz said it will be critical for providers to address the lack of therapists. The lack of therapists makes it very difficult for organizations to provide quality mental health services. For low-income families, service providers must by law respond to persons seeking mental health services within 72 hours. They cannot simply be put on a waiting list for three months. It all comes down to staffing.

With regard to homelessness, Vice Chair Amirfaiz said the umbrella is large and it incorporates the range of people who are homeless because they have lost their jobs or because they have serious mental health issues or drug addiction problems. It would be helpful to know which group of people will be focused on in terms of housing stability. She suggested that employment is a key component for moving out of homelessness, and that may require education and vocational training. She also referenced the comment made that some refugees are refusing services and disengaging from other public or private systems because of their status.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz asked staff to comment on how they see the five overarching goals tying into the emerging and funding needs. Ms. Esparza said the five goal areas are loosely used for grouping funding applications and addressing coverage of the continuum. Ms. Stangland explained that behavioral health falls under Goal 4; homelessness falls under Goal 1; racial and ethnic determination and domestic violence falls under Goal 3; and legal services falls under Goal 2. She stressed that the overview only highlights the emerging new issues. The full document needs to be read in order to get the full picture. Covid triggered a lag of services in the Goal 5 area, but education and job training are very important elements and programs in both categories have been funded.

Ms. Esparza stressed that it has been a challenge for the Commission to determine how to use the funding priorities to guide the conversation. The priorities have come into play largely when requests outpace the available funding, but they have not prevented funding the continuum of services.

Chair Piper agreed that the Commission has historically funded programs in all five goal areas, but too often Goal 5 has not received the same focus as the other goal areas.

Commissioner Phan confirmed that there is a three- to four-month wait for mental health services. She said in recent calls to agencies she was told that new youth clients are not being accepted. The agencies added that suicidal youth or those with suicidal ideation could probably be bumped up to priority.

Commissioner Ma agreed with placing a high importance on behavioral health given that it is

an emerging theme from the Needs Update. He agreed that one-on-one therapy services are inundated with requests and are unable to address provide services to all who ask. He voiced his interest in promoting group coaching, not necessarily therapy, as a service. Severe mental health and mental health in general goes beyond just illness. Many could be served, and more affordably so, with group coaching. He disagreed with Chair Piper and Vice Chair Amirfaiz about Goal 5. He said while it is important as part of the continuum, it is not currently an emerging theme according to the data. Wages are stagnant, many are quitting their jobs, and general affordability is an issue. There are many who are highly qualified for jobs who cannot find work. Education and job training is not an emerging theme and as such should not be a priority. There are other issues of more strategic importance.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz said she has led organizations that provide mental health services. Until Title XIX, the waiting period cannot be more than 72 hours. Those who inquire about services should raise that issue with agencies. It may be a different issue where private insurance is involved. When a new client calls, an agency must respond or refer within 72 hours.

With regard to Goal 5, Vice Chair Amirfaiz commented that people with college degrees have different options. There are a slew of people who need job training. Those people are making minimum wage. Education and vocational training can offer them the opportunity to increase their skills and obtain higher-paying jobs, and that will help address the issue of homelessness.

Chair Piper echoed the thoughts expressed by Vice Chair Amirfaiz and said he looked forward to a spirited debate during the funding process. He said there is no better environment than the current one for those who are skilled; there are more open jobs than there are people to fill them. It is those who are unskilled who are struggling to find gainful employment.

Commissioner Ma said he would support funding programs under Goal 5 as part of the continuum. He voiced support for adopting the staff-recommended priorities.

Chair Piper said he strongly believed Goal 5 should be carefully considered by the Commission. He allowed that the document presented by the staff will not preclude that.

Commissioner Ma reiterated his desire to see group coaching promoted as a way of getting more people the support services they need. Group coaching can be provided by non-licensed therapists.

Ms. Esparza said the staff document was intended for internal use by the Commission. The next step of the conversation would be to address how the document could be used. One approach would be to adopt the recommendations as funding priorities. Another would be to incorporate the edits proposed by the Commission before adopting it.

Chair Piper said he viewed the document as providing guideposts for the conversation but is not necessarily aimed at limiting the Commission's discussion.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz said in addition to group coaching, peer counseling has been proven to be effective. The Commission might be well served by looking for innovative services in regard to addressing mental health.

A motion to adopt the funding review process guidelines as provided by staff was made by Commissioner Ma. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Phan and the motion carried 6-0. Vice Chair Amirfaiz abstaining owing to her desire to have more information regarding behavioral health and homelessness.

Turning to the issue of mutual commitments, Ms. Stangland noted that the Commission dedicates time during meetings and outside of Commission meetings during the funding and application review process. She said the suggestion of staff was to adopt a mutual commitment to provide clarity on what the Commission feels is necessary to ensure new Commissioners will be informed and oriented. As drafted, the document read: 1) Commissioners will read the Human Services Needs Update to inform recommendations; 2) all commissioners commit to reading all applications and all meeting materials in advance of meetings; and 3) Commissioners commit to meeting at least one time with their “partner” outside of the regular meeting schedule to review assigned applications on a more in-depth basis.

Chair Piper suggested the mutual commitments made sense to him. He asked what process would be used to divide up the Commissioners into groups to review the applications. Ms. Stangland said in the past staff has put two to three Commissioners together and assigned them a certain number of applications. During the funding review portion of the process, the individual groups lead the discussion of the applications assigned to them.

A motion to adopt the mutual commitments was made by Commissioner Ma. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Phan and the motion carried unanimously.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None
9. NEW BUSINESS – None
10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None
11. ADJOURNMENT

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

Chair Piper adjourned the meeting at 7:18 p.m.