

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

May 17, 2022
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Piper, Vice Chair Amirfaiz, Commissioners Ma, Mansfield, Phan, Singh

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Leslie Miller, Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Asma Ahmed, Department of Parks and Community Services; Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis

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.

Chair Piper stated that meeting and future meetings would 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 the City Council is moving forward with the programming for a cross cultural center and looking at different places in which to offer it. The go-ahead was given to staff to look at partnerships aimed at creating a permanent standalone structure cross cultural center. Having a private/public partnership will be key. One option might be to work with PACE to have some of the performing arts center space dedicated to a cross cultural center. Another option would be to provide a Land Use Code incentive to locate a center in the Wilburton neighborhood. The Council is moving as quickly as it can in addressing the issue.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis also reported that the Council is moving forward with the concept of allowing some remote participation for commissions and boards. The number of remote participants will be limited to three and approval must be obtained prior to a meeting. The desire is to make participating as accessible as possible. A presiding officer will be required to attend in person. The Council will review the approach within a year to make sure the policies are not being abused and that there are no unforeseen consequences.

Commissioner Ma asked when the hybrid model would take effect. Department of Parks and Community Services Assistant Director Toni Esparza said it has been alluded that the new hybrid approach would start with the first meeting in June. That will be confirmed, and all relevant guidance will be forwarded to the Commissioners.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis took a moment to formally welcome Commissioner Singh to the Commission.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Manager Leslie Miller introduced Human Services Planner Asma Ahmed who was hired to replace Dee Dee Catalano's FTE. Asma Ahmed comes from United Way of King County where she did exciting work with community engagement for communities of color.

Leslie Miller reminded the Commissioners about the invitation to attend Youth Link's 32nd Annual Community Leadership Awards ceremony on May 25. Toni Esparza added that Commissioners are invited to present some of the awards.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. 2023-2024 Human Services Fund Applications – Round 2 Options

Leslie Miller reported that following the Commission's last meeting there had been conversations about the workload facing the Commission due to the unprecedented number of applications received. During the previous funding cycle a total of 100 applications deemed qualified to receive funding were received. For the current funding cycle, 135 applications deemed qualified to receive funding have been received. Collectively, the total ask exceeds \$10 million. The Commission has always been the body to recommend funding to the Council, and there is no proposal to change that. Round 1 and Round 3 are the rounds in which the Commission makes decisions, while Round 2 has traditionally been a preliminary round. The Commission previously established the need to conduct weekly meetings, except for the week following the Memorial Day weekend, to get through Round 1. No change to that approach has been proposed. One option relative to Round 2 would be to have staff conduct some behind-the-scenes work to develop a draft preliminary funding recommendations utilizing the funding priorities established by the Council and the Commission. The Commission could then use those preliminary recommendations as a starting point for its decision-making Round 3 where actual funding recommendations are determined. The approach would keep the Commission from having to meet weekly.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis voiced appreciation for the fact that some Commissioners were concerned about the workload, and for the staff in looking at potential ways to lighten the load. Staff was asked how many total meetings would be eliminated from the schedule under the option as outlined. Leslie Miller said the total number of meetings would be cut roughly in half. Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis indicated the suggested option is viable and expressed comfort with having staff reviewing and making some appropriate recommendations. He added that ultimately all recommendations to be forwarded to the Council will be made by the Commission.

Commissioner Ma said having staff facilitate a starting point in terms of numbers would be very helpful. Front-loading the meetings still makes the most sense in that if the review process gets too spread out, discussion details can get lost. The meat of the work gets done in Round 3.

Commissioner Phan voiced support for the Commission's previously reached conclusion to have more meetings, particularly if the meetings will be held virtually which is far more convenient. Having to meet weekly in person could possibly color the decision to meet so many times in one month. Commissioner Phan agreed with the proposal to have develop preliminary recommendations.

Leslie Miller pointed out that if staff's proposal is accepted, some time will need to be left open on the calendar for the staff to do the work. In order to achieve that, and to avoid pushing into late July, having a meeting on May 24 would help to facilitate staff's work.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz asked how the staff proposal would help given that the Commissioners will still be required to read all the applications. Leslie Miller said past approach has been for the Commission to develop preliminary funding recommendations in Round 2, and to refine them in Round 3. The staff recommendation would eliminate from the Commission's schedule the time needed to come up with preliminary recommendations. Instead of a blank slate, the Commission would start with a set of preliminary recommendations.

Commissioner Ma suggested that under the staff's recommendation the Commission would want to extend Round 1 somewhat to allow for more clearly expressing the Commission's interests.

Toni Esparza added that no matter what is done with the meeting schedule, the Commissioners will still need to invest significant amounts of time outside of Commission meetings to read through all the applications. Under the proposal, staff would develop recommendations from more of a strategy level based on feedback provided by the Commission.

Commissioner Mansfield suggested the staff approach would offer the Commission with a helpful starting point but would not necessarily save all that much time for the Commission. Invariably the Commissioner will still have the same discussions about each agency. Cutting out meetings at the front end could result in shortchanging the Commission in the long run. Leslie Miller said the idea would be for the Commission to discuss each application only once instead of twice.

Chair Piper admitted to being one of the Commissioners who raised concerns about being able to attend ten meetings over the summer. The work staff has done in coming up with a possible solution is commendable. Having fewer meetings and thus being time bound would add some discipline to the process.

Toni Esparza summarized the understanding that the Commission was generally comfortable with the staff proposal, and that there was still a lack of clarity about adjusting the meeting schedule going forward.

Chair Piper asked if meeting dates removed from the calendar could still be held as possible meeting dates should they be needed. Toni Esparza said the Commissioners previously indicated a desire to know meeting dates as far in advance as possible and discussed allowing for each meeting to be longer than two hours. Leslie Miller allowed that concerns were expressed about meetings lasting beyond 8:00 p.m.

Commissioner Mansfield said fewer meetings would be preferable to having longer meetings. It would be better to get the work done up front than to run later into the summer.

Commissioner Ma expressed a preference to having longer meetings but fewer of them, especially if the meetings are going to be held in person.

Commissioner Singh indicated having a flexible schedule that will accommodate either more meetings or longer meetings.

Commissioner Piper also said longer meetings would be preferable to additional meetings.

Commissioner Ma noted support for the staff proposal but suggested adding at least one additional front-load meeting to the schedule should it be necessary. Leslie Miller said the extra meeting would have to be either May 24 or June 2.

The Commission expressed a preference for May 24.

Leslie Miller recalled the statement of Commissioner Ma to allow for extended conversations for Round 1 to provide more guidance to the staff, which would argue in favor of having meetings both on May 24 and June 7. Commissioner Ma said the extra meeting on May 24 may be sufficient.

A motion to accept the proposal of staff to take on Round 2 of the process was made by Commissioner Ma. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mansfield and the motion carried unanimously.

A motion to authorize the extension of regular meetings by a maximum of one hour was made by Commissioner Ma. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Singh and the motion carried unanimously.

A motion to include an additional meeting on May 24 was made by Commissioner Ma. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mansfield and the motion carried unanimously.

B. 2033-2024 Human Services Fund Applications – Round 1 Review

Commissioner Piper clarified that during Round 1, the focus would be whether applications should be moved forward for additional consideration, without any discussion of funding amounts.

Leslie Miller suggested identifying all no and maybe applications, then prior to the May 24 meeting the Commissioners could go back and read those specific applications and come prepared to have a definitive and focused conversation. The Commissioners agreed with that approach.

Goal Area 1 - Applications 1 to 42

Vice Chair Amirfaiz flagged Application 5, Congregations for the Homeless: Outreach.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz flagged Application 12, MAPS – MCRC: Housing for Single Women, indicating that the application is not clear in terms of serving more residents, and in terms of partnering with Sophia Way to share beds. The budget numbers are also confusing.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz also flagged Application 13, Snoqualmie Valley Shelter Services: River Street Shelter given some confusion regarding both the ask and the program budget.

Commissioner Ma flagged Application 13 because of the geographical region and the number of Bellevue residents served. Both Commissioner Mansfield and Commissioner Singh also flagged Application 13 for the same reasons.

Commissioner Singh asked why some agencies submit multiple requests for funding. Leslie Miller explained that each funded agency signs a single contract with the city, but the separate programs are funded individually. That allows the Commission to decide which of the programs should be funded and which should not.

Chair Piper and Commissioner Phan said they would recuse themselves from Application 31 due to conflicts of interest.

Goal Area 2 - Applications 43 to 88

Vice Chair Amirfaiz flagged Application 46, Bellevue College: Parent Education. For low-income families it is difficult to get parents involved, and the outcomes do not resonate with the rest of the application. There are no staffing costs attached to the budget.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz flagged Application 54, Eastside Legal Assistance Program: Medical-Legal Partnership. Listed as a partnership, there are no funds in the budget from any partners. Additionally, the pro bono work regarding housing is funded through other programs.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz flagged Application 59, Kinderling Center: ParentChild+. The program is funded by United Way.

Chair Piper flagged Application 63, Tenants Union of Washington State: BIPOC Tenant Empowerment Program. On its face a tenants union seems to be outside the scope of something the Commission would normally fund given its more political bent.

Commissioner Ma flagged Application 75, Congolese Integration Network (CIN): CIN Health Board Program. The focus is on south King County African American services and not so much on Bellevue residents.

Commissioner Ma flagged Application 82, CAN Noticias Program: Noticias en Espanol Para Familias en BSD & LWSD. The program appears to be a television program with media in Spanish to educate viewers with educational news. It does not seem appropriate and does not seem it would reach all that many Bellevue residents.

Commissioner Phan indicated having a conflict of interest with Application 82.

Commissioner Ma flagged Application 85, Mission Africa: Mission Africa, primarily because the program is focused on south King County. Commissioner Mansfield flagged the application for the same reason.

Goal Area 3 - Applications 89 to 94

Chair Piper noted having a conflict of interest relative to Application 89, Business Ending Slavery & Trafficking: Not Alone Human Trafficking Outreach Program.

Commissioner Mansfield indicated having a conflict of interest with Application 92, King County Sexual Assault Resource Center: Comprehensive Sexual Assault Advocacy Services.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz stated a conflict of interest with Application 94, Refugee Women's Alliance: Domestic Violence Program.

Goal Area 4 - Applications 95 to 117

No applications were flagged.

Goal Area 5 - Applications 118 to 135

Commissioner Ma flagged Application 126, Indian American Community Services: Small Business Support Program. The program assisting businesses is not one the city should pursue with funding.

Toni Esparza noted that when there was pandemic funding available, business support was provided through economic development.

Commissioner Ma highlighted the fact that with the total ask outweighing the total funding available, some difficult decisions will need to be made. One area to pay attention to would be programs that offer overlapping services.

Chair Piper expressed the understanding that the Round 2 work to be done by staff would involve putting preliminary numbers to the various applications. Any decisions to not fund certain applications are up to the Commission to make. Toni Esparza confirmed that staff will not put a zero in the funding column for any application advanced by the Commission.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz noted that the Commission had previously concluded that previously funding programs will not necessarily be funded going forward. Toni Esparza said that was correct, adding that all programs will be starting with a blank sheet, except that the 24/7 emergency shelter programs currently in operation will be treated differently because the city recognizes them as critical infrastructure.

Commissioner Ma raised the notion of earmarking preliminary amounts for the different areas by way of informing staff's Round 2 work. While serving Bellevue residents should be given priority, it should not be the only priority.

Toni Esparza clarified that the city only funds services to Bellevue residents. The only time that delineating factor is not considered is regarding shelter programs. Agencies not serving any Bellevue residents cannot be funded by the city.

Commissioner Ma suggested going through all the applications again and having the Commissioners indicate their hard yesses to serve as a starting point for better shaping priorities. Toni Esparza reiterated that during Round 2 staff will be recommending an allocation to all applications except for those the Commission has indicated are a hard no.

Chair Piper said it would require going deeper into each application in order to know which would be given a hard yes. The conversation would be appropriate as part of the May 24 meeting.

Commissioner Mansfield agreed, noting the difficulty associated with getting into higher-level discussions without being able to discuss each application on an equal footing after having fully read through them all.

Toni Esparza allowed that it would be useful for the Commission to discuss allocations by topic without being agency specific. Leslie Miller added that at a previous meeting the Commission discussed the need to look at the applications to determine if any of the Council and Commission high priority areas are not represented in the applications. That discussion included the idea of setting aside funds for a separate RFP to address priorities not included in the applications.

Regarding using a rubric, Chair Piper voiced opposition to doing so, noting that the

Commission has traditionally focused on being discussion based. Leslie Miller allowed that the Commission's previous discussion had considered using a rubric as a means for highlighting questions but not to determine funding.

Turning to the topic of emergency financial funding, Commissioner Ma commented that previously the Commission chose not to fund some agencies in order to fund other agencies a bit more instead of just spreading out the funds. The climate is different from what it was during the previous funding cycles, and it may not be possible for the financial system to keep up with all that is going on. Financial assistance may not need to be given the same level of high priority as it was before.

Commissioner Mansfield said the importance of emergency funding is understandable given that it is aimed at getting people out of financial situations as quickly as possible. However, more emphasis should be placed on organizations with programs that go more to the root cause of emergency financial situations.

Chair Piper commented that people have had to go to multiple agencies to piece together what they need to keep from getting evicted. To the extent there are agencies that serve as a one-stop-shop, they should be given preference when it comes to funding. Also expressed was a desire to see a focus on Goal Areas 4 and 5.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz reminded the Commissioners that some agencies have multiple applications for substantial amounts of money. That should be kept in mind. Funding one organization will mean there is less funding for others that may also provide valuable services to the community.

Commissioner Phan reminded the Commissioners that in trying to shift focus to Goal Areas 4 and 5 it should also be remembered that the pandemic is not yet a thing of the past. Food insecurity and the like are still very prevalent. Emergency funds that might be needed for things like vouchers should not be overlooked.

Commissioner Ma suggested it might be worth asking the general organizations that are dealing in emergency services about the degree to which there continues to be a backlog of tenants in arrears on their rents, and if the financial emergency services allocations are sufficient to address the need. Leslie Miller said it would also be important to talk to providers about ARPA funds aimed at that issue. The regular financial assistance providers might have signed up for that program, which is focused on families and households that have months of back rent due and need several months going forward. The ARPA program will be extending through the summer months.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland asked the Commissioners to keep in mind that the funds to be allocated will not be dispersed until 2023, which is still seven months out. It is not known what the community will be like by then. The recent Human Services Needs Update highlighted the fact that the pandemic has removed the safety net for households in the community, thus a single crisis can send households deeper into housing insecurity or homelessness.

Toni Esparza also pointed out that there have been and still are communities that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including residents with disabilities and many communities of color. Pairing that impact with household incomes, potential backlog rents and the skyrocketing rents, if assistance is not available, there is a high likelihood that some households will need to leave Bellevue.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

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

Chair Piper adjourned the meeting at 7:51 p.m.