

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION  
MINUTES

November 15, 2022  
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Amirfaiz, Commissioners Mansfield, Singh, White

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Piper

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

GUEST SPEAKERS: Dan Lassiter, Gazel Tan, Bellevue Network on Aging; Lalita Uppala, Nanda Tewari, Indian American Community Services; Natasha Grossman, Bellevue Fire Cares; Olga Nikitina, Chinese Information and Service Center; Dale Hoover, Sound Generations

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Singh, who arrived at 6:05 p.m., and Chair Piper.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Manager Leslie Miller announced that there would be no Commission meetings in December and noted that both January meetings would be on Wednesdays.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza informed the Commission that the City Council was slated to take final action on the budget at its next meeting.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

## A. Services, Trends and Issues for Older Adults

Dan Lassiter, supervisor of the North Bellevue Community Center, and oversees the Bellevue Network on Aging, noted that older adult programs are offered at all of the city's community centers, but the majority of them happen at the North Bellevue Community Center. After reopening following Covid, the first programs offered were exercise programs. The lockdown was not a good time for older adults, and it resulted in a lot of atrophy both mental and physical. The various groups, including the Indian American Community Services and Chinese Information and Service Center groups, ramped up slowly. Social programs were reintroduced after the exercise programs. By July 2022, all programs were going full blast, many offered by community partners. The term "older adults" replaced the word "senior" in 2006 because many felt they were too young to come to a senior center.

The North Bellevue Community Center has an advisory board and also works closely with the Bellevue Network on Aging that started in 2006. During Covid, the Network worked to get information to people who were isolated. Currently the focus is on putting together more programs focused on dementia and memory using both King County veterans and seniors funds and local dollars. Families that must seek in-home caregivers for their elders can face costs of up to \$40,000 annually just for eight hours a day. The North Bellevue Community Center dementia programs offer families a little relief. Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death among older adult, and burnout for those caring for family members dealing with memory issues is very high.

Gazel Tan reported being a member of the Bellevue Network on Aging for five or six years, serving as a member of both the outreach committee and the housing and transportation committee. During the pandemic, the outreach committee did all it could to distribute information to older adults, especially those who are not familiar with being online. Information was distributed via partnerships with the Bellevue School District and Meals on Wheels.

The Network's transportation and housing committee is now focusing on the issue of affordable housing. Currently, 18 percent of Bellevue's residents are 65 years old or older; that is about 21,000 seniors. About eight percent of older adults in Bellevue aged 55 and older have incomes below the federal poverty level. There are only 400 below-market rental units in the entire city. Housing prices in Bellevue have risen dramatically, while the area's median income has risen much more slowly. In 2022, the area median income stands at \$134,600. Income for seniors has remained basically flat. At least 60 percent of seniors are below the percent of area median income and have been for the last ten years. Many of them are property rich and cash poor. Some of the workforce housing that is being proposed may not be suitable for people who want to continue to age in the community. Bellevue offers plenty of high-end assisted living facilities, but they cost as much as \$10,000 per month. There is only one place in Bellevue, Evergreen Court, that offers assisted living at a reasonable cost, but they only have 200 units.

Commissioner Singh asked how the Network reached out with information to seniors. Gazel Tan said for a while, cards were handed out for people in need of help to fill out. Those cards were then forwarded to Dan Lassiter who reached out to them. Information with a list of resources in terms of useful phone numbers and websites was printed out and then handed out, primarily through the Bellevue School District family resource center. Currently a lot of the outreach is conducted at the farmers market.

Natasha Grossman said Bellevue Fire Cares started in 2012 as a partnership between the fire and police departments to address high utilizers of the 9-1-1 system. The program is based on a

program out of Spokane that operated as a partnership between Eastern Washington University's graduate school of social work and the Spokane fire department. Students who were working toward their master's degrees in social work were assigned to work with the fire department in order to complete their practicum placement hours. Working alongside social workers, as the fire department saw people repeatedly, the students were tasked with going to their homes, interviewing them and developing assessments, and then connecting them with resources appropriate to their needs. From the beginning in Bellevue, referrals were taken from both the police and fire departments and MSW students would conduct the follow-up. In following up on focus groups with police officers and firefighters, the program was crafted to not just focus on frequent callers and to make referrals as early as possible. The goal of the program is to connect people with the right services at the right time. The student social workers are all about meeting people where they are and building trust. They go out unannounced to avoid being turned down on the phone. The response unit that was set up in 2017 is staffed only by professional social workers, seven days per week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; they can be called when fire or police feel it would be helpful to have them on scene. Referrals for ongoing case management and support are often made back to the students.

Some 200 cases are open at any given time. The cases are open for an average of 100 days, and the clients are seen about an hour per week while the cases are open. In addition to the Cares 101 unit, there are student advocates who come from eight to ten different universities. Depending on their programs, they spend between eight and ten months working in Bellevue. At any given time, there are some 12 to 16 students working with the program. All of them have at least a bachelor's degree, but the only students accepted are those working toward a master's degree in social work.

When someone calls 9-1-1, the dispatcher determines if it is police or fire that is needed on the scene. Where the responders determine that a social worker is needed, a call is made to the Cares 101 unit. Every contact is referred to the students for follow-up. Referrals are made for a variety of reasons, including substance abuse, mental health, medical concerns, falls or mobility limitations, being unhoused, an inability to self-care or an advocate being overwhelmed, domestic violence abuse or crime victim, and poor living conditions. Many but not all of the referrals are for older adults.

In 2016 there were a total of 195 referrals made to the program. In 2021, that number increased to 996. More than a thousand cases will be referred once 2022 is tallied up. The program never stopped responding to the needs in the community during the pandemic, and the students even delivered for food banks on top of all their casework.

In 2021 a co-responder pilot program was staffed with the police department. The special unit was staffed by self-selected officers who received additional training in mental health, and one of the social workers. The unit responded to mostly non-criminal calls. Called the Community Crisis Assistance Team (CCAT), the unit provides a coordinated community response to assist individuals in crisis by offering individuals a higher level of service. The program is budgeted to staff five units for 20 hours per day. Taken together, the Cares 101 and CCAT programs offer a robust community wide response through joint operations of the police and fire departments.

The issues being seen that involve older adults range from aging in place to not having enough money to hire caregivers but making too much to qualify for Medicaid; caregivers overwhelmed by taking care of their loved ones; mental health issues; and transportation issues. King County Public Health has provided a grant for the fall prevention program that funds an evidence-based tai chi-based program called Moving for Better Balance. The program is funded at Evergreen Court and Sage Brook.

Natasha Grossman said there remains the primary goal of reducing the number of 9-1-1 calls. Once contact is made by the team, the clients are asked to call them directly rather than calling 9-1-1.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland asked if the social workers are available during the evening for calls. Natasha Grossman said the paid social workers are on duty from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and the students usually come in about 9:00 a.m. and stay until 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. The CCAT team, however, is in service 20 hours per day, seven days per week. The teams are available through 9-1-1, but those clients who have already been contacted can make direct calls and texts to the teams.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz asked how many of the caseload clients are non-English speakers. Natasha Grossman allowed not having that information in hand but added that the language line is relied on when there is no one on the team that speaks the necessary language.

Lalita Uppala, executive director of Indian American Community Services, introduced senior services coordinator Nanda Tewari then went on to say the organization has been serving the Indian-Asian community for more than 30 years and came of age over the last ten years. The Commissioners were reminded that 37 percent of Bellevue residents are foreign born, and of that number about 60 percent is Indian Asian. As a community services organization, the focus is on providing intergenerational services from early childhood to seniors.

Specific to senior support services, the organization operates as a pop-up centers. Bellevue was the first city to invite the organization to have a presence at Mini City Hall. The outreach team is at that location every Wednesday afternoon but also operates from the Crossroads farmers market, the Downtown farmers market, in grocery stores and strip malls. The seniors reached out to are partly those who have worked and retired in Bellevue, and partly those who spend eight or so months in Bellevue before going back to their home countries during the winter months. At the core of what is offered is wellness services. Seniors and aging adults easily become isolated, resulting in a lot of mental health issues. Many live with multigenerational families, but even so with other members of the family having jobs and other pressures, they often find themselves alone. The popup services are offered at the North Bellevue Community Center and in Northshore, Redmond and Kent. Plans are being made to include Mt. Si Community Center.

The most comprehensive programming occurs at the North Bellevue Community Center, where there the organization also funds an early childhood program and women's services, which taken together gives the approach of a community coming together. By contracting with South Asian mental health counselors, the mental health and wellness services are culturally nuanced. The mental health services are not about sitting in a room and having a conversation. Rather, the services include meditative art workshops, horticulture therapy and field trips. The system really works for the community.

Caregiver services is a huge need in the community. Many seniors, whether living in multigenerational families or alone, often are caregivers to their adult children with mental health issues. The organization works with seniors who are struggling with supporting their families, particularly when they themselves need a surgery or something. Volunteer care givers can stop by to see how everyone is doing and can deliver food. The organization does not, however, have the capacity to connect caregivers with seniors or families that need them.

Transportation is always an issue for seniors, particularly given that waiting for Access and DART can take a long time. Many must start from their homes at 7:00 a.m. to make it to the North Bellevue Community Center by 10:00 a.m. They must sometimes wait until 7:00 p.m. to

be picked up, making a very long day for them. The Sound Generations pilot program Rides and Smiles seems to be working, but it is only one small part of the transportation picture. The Asian Indian immigrant community is subject to stereotyping. Not every member is a tech worker, not every member is well off. There are crises that face the community. Free pantries were set up in 2020-2021 because food can be a matter of shame in the community. They were set up outside grocery stores and places of worship offering rice and lentils and they were refilled every other day.

Vocational training is the highest need of aging adults in the Asian Indian community in Bellevue. The seniors are not looking to retire, they are looking for jobs so they can work. A senior was recently hired to manage the bread center. Affordable mixed-use housing is also a challenge for seniors. The Sound Transit Overlake transit center on 152<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Redmond should be mixed-use housing, with a percentage reserved for seniors. The model includes affordable child care, which seniors would love to be involved in. There are also retail spaces. El Centro de la Raza in south Seattle is a perfect model. Other challenges include companion care and caregiver services; isolation which leads to mental health issues; transportation; multigenerational living; and a continued need for gathering spaces.

Commissioner White asked how many people attend events at gathering spaces. Lalita Uppala said on a typical day space to accommodate 200 people is needed. The banquet hall at North Bellevue Community Center holds that many people and includes a kitchen in which cultural lunches are provided. In another room that holds 45 people is where the early childhood programming occurs. Women's career services are held in yet another room. In all, between 250 and 275 people attend.

Commissioner Singh noted that there are many different languages spoken by Asian Indians and the question asked was how that is addressed. Lalita Uppala agreed that the community is layered by language, religion and socioeconomics. The organization has staff that speak the major languages, and there are volunteers who speak some of the other languages.

Olga Nikitina, case management supervisor for the Russian-speaking team of the Chinese Information and Service Center, and supervisor of the Russian-speaking senior day program, said the mission is to bridge cultures, communities and generations. Not all members of the Russian-speaking senior day program are Russians; they come from the 15 different former Soviet Union countries and their native language may not be Russian, though most participants speak and understand Russian.

The program started in January of 2020 just before the pandemic began. The program was halted in March as the lockdown began and a transition was made to Zoom for meetings and continuing with the program. Some money was identified and used to purchase tablets for the seniors who then had to learn how to use the platform. Many were scared as a result of their isolation and the program was the only resource for them to hear about what was happening and where they could obtain things like masks. Most of the seniors were ultimately registered to get their vaccinations. All of the participants had some type of health condition, and most were either limited-English speaking or non-English speaking. The program, which had been held once a week on Tuesdays at the North Bellevue Community Center, was able to expand to Fridays as well, funded by Amazon.

The main goal of the program was to reduce isolation and incidents of depression. A variety of speakers are brought in, and various activities are offered, including arts and crafts, exercise classes, and holiday celebrations. There are a lot of discussions, especially given the situation in Ukraine where many of the participants are from. Mental stimulation games are very important. Members can be referred to mental health specialists and can be assisted with access to healthcare. A recent speaker talked about various transportation options, and another

addressed computer literacy. There is a nurse on staff who also makes presentations on preventive healthcare and first aid.

All of the resources are provided to the participants in their native language via Russian speakers or interpreters. The members can ask their questions and receive written materials in Russian.

Transportation is a barrier for many. Getting to the North Bellevue Community Center requires having friends or family to drive them or taking the bus. There are those, however, with physical impairments who require special transportation, which the program cannot provide.

The members also need additional days to spend together. During the pandemic they became very close and built strong friendships. Those who are active spend time together outside of the program, but those with physical limitations cannot do that.

Gazel Tan shared having attended one of the sessions. The room was full of Russian-speaking seniors. In walking around talking with the members through an interpreter, a gentleman was encountered who looked more Asian than Russian. It was interesting to learn the man is a second-generation Japanese American who attends regularly and really enjoys it even without speaking Russian and needing an interpreter.

Christy Stangland asked if the various programs continue to utilize Zoom in addition to in-person services. Nanda Tewari said Indian American Community Services has continued offering Zoom programming because it has proved to be so successful. Many seniors who face transportation challenges love the flexibility of joining all the sessions. Three wellness classes are offered every week along with two social sessions. There is full Zoom programming in addition to the in-person programming.

Dan Lassiter said in coming out of isolation, the virtual realm was used. It was found that many older adults were scared of virtual. Many, even after being given a laptop, did not have internet service in their homes. It was very difficult to make it happen. Some groups were successful, and some were not. The groups that really knew each other pre-pandemic did well together virtually. The number of Zoom participants for North Bellevue Community Center programming is falling, but there still is a need.

Olga Nikitina reported having only one coordinator, so all programming is offered in person. At first the programs were offered both in-person and online, but it proved to be too difficult.

Lalita Uppala said it was an uphill climb for the Indian American Community Services participants to transition to using Zoom. Even with the funding received to purchase and distribute tablets, there was a need for good wi-fi and access to it. There were struggles during isolation and many of them continue. A digital literacy class is offered weekly to teach seniors how to use the various systems, and the hybrid program is thriving.

Dale Hoover with Sound Generations said the organization operates under four pillars: food security, transportation, health and wellness, and assisted services. The Meals on Wheels program will during 2022 deliver between 14,000 and 15,000 meals in Bellevue alone. The recipients are seniors aged 60 and over who have medical conditions. In Bellevue there are some 90 people who are served weekly, while countywide the number served weekly is closer to 2600. Eighty-one percent of the people on the program have been recommended through a medical facility. Clients can have 14 meals per week delivered to them. Each meal is frozen and there are 30 meals from which to choose, including vegetarian and vegan meals. The clients receive a call asking for their order.

Sound Generations also operates five or six community centers where a chef provides meals. While the menus are not always fine dining, the gathering together is what is important. Senior adults need to be with people roughly their own age who have had common experiences.

Transportation is always the top issue for senior adults. The pilot program operating in Bellevue is proving to work very well. Hundreds of people ride the Hyde shuttle, which operates primarily on the west side of King County. The volunteer transportation program utilized volunteers who drive people to medical appointments, wait for them, and drive them back home. During the pandemic, many chose not to volunteer for obvious reasons. With the return to in-person services, the program is once again building up. Where necessary, Uber and Lyft services are utilized to get people to and from their medical appointments. Social workers are clear about how important the volunteer transportation services are.

The information and assistance programs, called Pathways, are very important. Over 7000 resources are included in the database. Many facing issues have no idea where to look for solutions, and the program offers them guidance and connects them with services.

The caregiver program, which is part of Pathways, offers guidance to family caregivers on how to go about being a caregiver while maintaining their own sanity. Respite care is vitally important to them. The health and wellness programs are offered in various locations. It is important to keep people moving and energized.

Sound Generations has been operating since 1967 and it offers its programs because it cares about the seniors in the community.

Christy Stangland asked how much the Hyde shuttle pilot is being utilized and what length of time someone calling in for service must wait to get a ride. Dale Hoover said clients used to have to call the Hyde shuttle service three days in advance of an appointment. That has been reduced to only one day, and in some instances rides can be achieved the same day. The pilot program is still new and ramping up, but the goal is to offer same-day service. There is no charge for the rides.

Commissioner Mansfield thanked the panelists for sharing their experiences and for providing much-needed services in the community.

#### B. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely

Commissioner White requested to participate remotely for the January 4 meeting, and Commissioner Singh for the January 18 meeting.

A motion to approve Commissioner White participating remotely on January 4, and to approve Commissioner Singh participating remotely on January 18, was made by Commissioner Singh. The motion was seconded by Commissioner White, and the motion carried unanimously.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATION – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

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

Commissioner Mansfield adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.