

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

May 16, 2023
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Halsted, Piper

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Asma Ahmed, Saada Hiltz, Department of Parks & Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis

POLICE LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: Monik Martinez, 4 Tomorrow; Tina Morales, Daniel Rendon, Youth Eastside Services; Angie Hinojos, Centro Cultural Mexicano

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 by Chair Mansfield who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present except for Commissioners Halsted and Piper.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. May 2, 2023

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Vice Chair Singh. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jain and the motion was carried unanimously.

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Alex Tsimmerman referred to previously submitting a complaint to which the Commission has not responded. At a recent meeting 12 people complained to the Commission, but no answer was given. Having spoken with the manager of the human services department, and with the director of the department, and with the city manager, no one has answered. There have been many discriminatory and minority complaints that have not been answered. In Bellevue white people are in the minority. The Commission's Council liaison also will not answer. The Commission is

supposed to investigate all complaints and give answers to questions like why the City Council will not allow the public to speak for more than 30 minutes. Change is needed in Bellevue.

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

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis reported the unexpected resignation of Marc Dones, CEO of the Regional Homeless Authority. The deputy CEO will step in on an interim basis. The move has put the organization back a little bit.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis informed the Commissioners that at the end of March the Council approved the project principles for a new program called Bike Bellevue. The Transportation Commission brought the program forward with the goal of improving the bicycle network within the city, particularly the east-west routes into and out of the Downtown.

The Council dealt with several appointments during the month of April. Eleven appointments were made in all to the library board and other boards and commissions. Chair Mansfield and Commissioners White and Amirfaiz were all reappointed to the Human Services Commission.

On April 3 the Council heard an update regarding the Eviction Resolution pilot program. The staff estimated that more than 6000 people had been able to remain in their rental homes because of the program. The program is set to officially end, after which the Conflict Resolution Center will continue to address issues that include landlord/tenant conflicts and rent negotiations, all on a voluntary basis.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis remarked that the Airfield Park master plan update was before the Council in April and a recommendation from the Parks & Community Services Board for a design concept for the location was submitted. Extensive outreach to the community has been carried out over the last year. The design concept includes a picnic shelter, sports court, the aquatic center, playgrounds, sports fields, and an amphitheater. Much of the currently existing park space will be retained.

Reporting on the King County Crisis Care Center, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis noted that the director of the county's Department of Human Services Leo Flor on April 3 made a presentation before the Council on the county's proposed crisis care centers levy. The levy subsequently was approved by the voters.

The Council directed staff to prepare the paperwork for an apprenticeship program for certain public works projects. The intent is to encourage growing the local supply of skilled workers.

On the affordable housing front, the Council brought back a six-month ordinance to incentivize and promote affordable housing construction in the Downtown as part of the Next Right Work. The ordinance was approved on May 8. It allows for higher density in residential development in exchange for affordable housing. The Council also received an update regarding the Affordable Housing Strategy and implementation, part of which is the multifamily tax exemption program that to date has enabled 275 units of affordable housing. There is interest in using the program to add 300 more units in future projects. The city is on track to exceed its 2017-2027 target for affordable housing units, in large part due to the city's partnership with A Regional Coalition for

Housing. The Council on May 8 voted to help fund seven ARCH projects that will together either create or preserve more than 800 affordable housing units on the Eastside.

Regarding the ARPA funding recommendations, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis said the Council approved the recommendation of the Commission.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Department of Parks and Community Services Acting Human Services Manager, Christy Stangland, took a moment to introduce Senior Administrative Assistant, Andy Owre, who assists with the behind-the-scenes work for the Commission meetings.

Christy Stangland also reported that staff have begun conducting monitoring visits. Staff will visit all of the agencies during the calendar year. As each visit is wrapped up, a report will be compiled.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Panel Conversation: Services to Hispanic/Latinx Communities, Trends and Program Information

Grant Coordinator Asma Ahmed noted that Bellevue has grown significantly over the last two decades and continues to do so. The population in 1990 was 86,872 and grew to 153,900 in 2022. Along with the population growth has come an increase in diversity.

While the city's demographics are increasingly diverse, opportunities are not equally accessible by all. A significantly smaller share of Black and Hispanic or Latinx households own their own homes. Households that rent face a higher risk of eviction and homelessness, and they move much more frequently, which can impact children's education.

Based on the latest US Census data, Bellevue's ethnicity distribution in 2019 was 50 percent White, one percent Black or African American, 38 percent Asian, one percent other, three percent multiracial, and seven percent Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin. However, in 2022, the breakdown of residents accessing services at agencies has a much different breakdown. Of the 41,933 Bellevue residents served that year through the human services general fund, ARPA, the Housing Stability Program and CDBG dollars, 27 percent were White, six percent were other, six percent were multiracial, one percent were American Indian/Native Alaskan, 23 percent were Asian, 12 percent were Black or African American, 21 percent were Hispanic, Latinx or of Spanish origin, and four percent were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. It was stressed the numbers were not necessarily unduplicated.

Within the Bellevue School District, 62 percent of the students experiencing homelessness are Latinx/Hispanic; 15 percent are White; 11 percent are Black; and 12 percent are Asian, two or more races, and Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis asked how the Bellevue School District data was accumulated. Toni Esparza said the information was gathered from the McKinney-Vento coordinator for the Bellevue School District, a position required by the federal government. In the Bellevue School District, the McKinney-Vento coordinator is also responsible for providing services and connecting with youth in the foster care system with the goal of making sure all families know their rights and what services are available.

Asma Ahmed invited the invited panel members to introduce themselves.

Angie Hinojos reported being the executive director and co-founder of Centro Cultural Mexicano, and chair of the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, a trustee for Cascadia College, and a member of the University of Washington Latino Center for Health Advisory Board. The Centro Cultural Mexicano organization has from the outset been focused on empowerment of the Hispanic/Latinx communities. The organization offers services in both English and Spanish to all communities. The work is structured by looking at the basic needs of the community. For rent assistance, the agency has been able to distribute some \$26 million over the course of the pandemic. Additionally, the agency assisted in providing vaccinations and conducted outreach and education. Regarding education, the organization is focused on increasing post-secondary enrollment in trade schools and colleges for Latino youth and adults. The organization also focuses on small business support given that a huge part of empowerment is financial stability. The medium of engagement with the community is arts and culture and is the means of creating an environment of belonging and inclusion. The organization's work is grounded in culture and art, which brings human connections. Those who attend events go home with all manner of resources, and very often they return repeatedly.

Monik Martinez, executive director and founder of 4 Tomorrow, a Latino youth-based non-profit that started in Bellevue and now is operational in Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond and Sammamish. The main two programs are focused on mental health and life services. The mental health programs provide culturally sensitive therapy and coordination for Spanish speakers, specifically the undocumented and uninsured. The therapy is provided at no charge via telehealth or in person. While all that is being done, the organization coordinates all the various elements that have to do with mental health, including getting clients into activities and programs and sustained long-term therapy. Through the life services program the agency provides coordination for housing stability and eviction prevention, along with resource and cultural navigation. All services are offered in both Spanish and English, and there is also a Portuguese-speaking coordinator. Emergency financial assistance is also offered through the 4 You fund for households experiencing crises, which can include mental health crisis or a death in the family. The available funding is not great but can in many instances prevent certain crises from growing.

Continuing, Monik Martinez said the agency seeks to empower the communities so they can stand on their own and not be reliant on human services and non-profits. One way that is done is through the microenterprise project using CDBG and Washington State Microenterprise Association funding. Technical assistance is provided to encourage the starting or growth of businesses.

Daniel Rendon, president of Latino HEAT, a Youth Eastside Services program, and a high school student at Interlake High School, explained that Latino HEAT is a youth-based group run

by youth and for youth. The program provides fellow Latino high schoolers with learning about the Latino culture and traditions. Having first encountered Youth Eastside Services in sixth grade, the move was eventually made to being a volunteer with the organization serving those in the community, which has led to embracing the Latino culture and learning more about the needs of the community. Various community events are planned and held, including Día De Los Muertos. There are also partnerships with the Lake Washington School District. Latino HEAT lets those who participate be themselves, helps them find their voices, and encourages them to get involved in the community.

Tina Morales, program manager for the community-based programs for Youth Eastside Services, and steward of Latino HEAT, said the connection and the expression of what Daniel thinks and feels is at the crux of the Latino HEAT program. Many partners in the community also work to support the growth, representation, inclusion and pride of the Latino community. All the work is vital. If not for the services, the generational trauma, the dehumanization that has historically occurred, could be overlooked. Latino HEAT started after an episode of racism and violence on a football field that followed many attempts by young people to grab the attention of adults about issues that were happening. By not having issues addressed, they morphed into violence. Ultimately it led to young people saying they wanted to change the negative image of their community that existed, both in and outside of school. In essence, they wanted to affirm their culture and repair the harm. Latino HEAT was made possible through clear leadership and vision. The high school principal invited Youth Eastside Services to come in and conduct a community needs assessment. The needs identified were expressed through truancy, uninvolved parents and students not caring about their education, each of which is a manifestation of oppression and educational injustice. Latino HEAT was and is generated by youth and family ideas. A focus group conducted during Covid identified some key outcomes from Latino HEAT, which included the creation of belonging and acceptance in schools where marginalization had traditionally been experienced and shifting school trajectories. It is vital and key to understand that mental health needs are addressed very seriously in the community and are accomplished through a lot of bridge work with Youth Eastside Services. Latino HEAT is engaged in community organizing with youth and with parents in addressing substance abuse, gun violence and grief. In 2021 the youth organized a vigil to honor four Latino youth who passed away in the span of a single year. Latino HEAT works with undocumented youth and with first- and second-generation youth. There is a key need for bilingual and bicultural outreach.

Asma Ahmed asked what misconceptions/misunderstandings of the Hispanic/Latinx community.

Angie Hinojos said there is a lot of disinformation and misinformation in the media. Much of it is rhetoric that is part of past racist structures and discriminatory systems. There is a clear need to be analytical when looking at how the Hispanic/Latinx community is portrayed. Centro Cultural Mexicano has a live in-house radio station three days per week on KXPA 1540 AM, reaching up to 70,000 people. It offers a way to air topics of interest to the community and to share resources. Part of what happens when communities are not served properly is the tendency to shift the blame back on the wider community. Education, stability and a long-term vision are things all communities want. It is a misconception to believe that the needs are all the same across the Hispanic/Latinx community. It takes going directly to the various communities to find out what their specific needs are.

Monik Martinez added that another misconception is that Hispanic/Latinx persons are stealing

jobs. It is especially hurtful to see work done by immigrants criminalized. A lot of surveys sent out by the city exclude Chicanos and Chicanas who do not identify as being of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin.

Daniel Rendon agreed that it is very common to hear people say Latinos are very lazy and that they do not value education. That may be true for those who choose to be lazy, but many of the youth are Spanish-only speakers, and many are immigrants from other countries, and they do not have access to the same education opportunities. Many are placed in 11th or 12th grade English classes because of their age even though they hardly speak and understand English at the kindergarten level. It takes teachers using their own methods of translation to help them. When a Latino is seen just sitting in a school hallway and not going to class, it most often not because they are lazy or do not care about getting an education. It often is literally that the key to their success is blocked behind a language barrier.

Tina Morales agreed it is a misconception that the Hispanic/Latinx community does not care about education, either the students or the parents. The fact is that parents sacrifice their entire selves to give their children the gift, privilege and right to an education. Youth Eastside Services spends a lot of effort in working with the schools on the need for bilingual and bicultural approaches. It is a misconception that members of the Hispanic/Latinx community are not leaders and are not actively engaged. Most Latin cultures that come from agricultural systems are born to organize, to make things and to create things. It is a misconception that Hispanic/Latinx parents do not value collective decision making.

Asma Ahmed asked the panel to describe the most significant human services needs impacting the communities being served.

Tina Morales answered that the social determinants of health and Maslow's hierarchy of needs are critical, but they are being addressed through bilingual and bicultural efforts. Families often will not engage in asking for support for the deepest needs of their youth, such as not going to school or engaging in substance use. Those issues will not be addressed until there is trust, and trust is built through connection and community, engagement and case management. Belonging and acceptance, and inclusion and equity, are the most critical needs. Human connections are magic in the ability to effect change and confidence building.

Daniel Rendon said the needs of Latino youth include the acceptance of others, along with opportunities to learn more about their own countries, heritage and culture.

Monik Martinez answered that housing stability and rental assistance is a high need in the community, especially with rising rents. Those same rising rents make it necessary for many to simply move every year to places they can afford. Add into the mix not being able to speak the language only complicates matters. Agencies are working to figure out new ways of addressing the issue, through things like temporary and emergency housing and homelessness recovery. When the community does not know their rights, the processes of who to turn to, and the resources they need are not received.

Angie Hinojos commented that almost 20,000 people attended the recent Cinco de Mayo celebration. At the event nearly 500 surveys were filled out and the top concern highlighted was access to healthcare. Over the last four years healthcare, education and housing have been the top

three concerns. Rent assistance and childcare also consistently come in very high on the list. Many Latino families lost all their life savings during the pandemic. Many were frontline workers unable to work from home, and they lost their jobs. When they came back to the workforce, they were not getting offered full-time shifts, which meant they were not eligible for health insurance coverage. Families often drive all over the place working enough hours to amount to a fulltime job, and the kids are working as well, all just to make ends meet. There is a whole generation of Latino students who will not go to college even though they wanted to and planned to. That is a catastrophe for the community and indeed for the country. There must be a focus on education. Centro Cultural Mexicano's Mi Casa is a place for the youth to gather. One part of it is a maker space that allows the youth to make whatever they want, all for free. Professionals are brought in to show how to use the equipment.

Asma Ahmed asked what unique barriers are being faced in the community and the region, and how the agencies are addressing them.

Monik Martinez said having to work multiple jobs and the need to search out opportunities, and navigating the systems, is very challenging, especially for those for whom English is not their first language. Teaching people how to navigate the systems is important, but so is walking with them as they do. Translation services are important but over-the-phone translation does not always work well.

Daniel Rendon said Latino HEAT focuses on helping high schoolers understand where to find and access resources. The students often do not have an official phone number or email address. The program works with them in many ways. Families can also be helped by showing them where they can access resources such as free and reduced lunches.

Tina Morales said one of the negative impacts of systemic inequality is expressed through young people not looking forward to the future. Supporting youth through college readiness, in knowing their rights with regards to housing and immigration, and by walking them through the process of simply asking for help, helps empower them. The agency participated in the school district's Shout conference and the Latino HEAT youth centered on helping others know their rights. When the youth learn to assert their rights, regardless of citizenship, they are empowered.

Angie Hinojos agreed that language is a major barrier. Additionally, the bureaucracy involved in gaining access to needed services can be very difficult, and different for every jurisdiction, creating confusion. It is a lot for people to manage, especially when they are in crisis. Agencies seek to provide basic needs, but they do not always provide for aspirational needs and what it will take to get to their clients to their envisioned future. Families in the middle of just trying to survive find it very difficult to strive toward their bigger visions. Advocacy remains very important at every place and at every level.

Asma Ahmed asked what challenges the agencies are facing that the Commission should be aware of. Angie Hinojos commented that things are done differently in the Latino communities. Asking for help is not done easily. Agencies do things in ways that are designed to best serve their communities, and sometimes that is not necessarily considered when looking at programs and possibilities. Centro Cultural Mexicano sees daily what works and what does not work. Trusting that the community leaders who are doing the work on the ground know what they are doing is very important, and they should be allowed to do their work.

Monik Martinez noted being grateful for the Community Crisis Assistance Team and the co-response model. There have been some instances where young adults, primarily those with parents that do not speak English, went to the hospital seeking help for a mental health crisis but they were not provided with translation services or materials in their language. Some have ended up in an involuntary hold, triggering a lot of family trauma. Other agencies are likely also dealing with similar situations. Sex trafficking and slavery, which many think does not happen in Bellevue, is in fact happening more and more. It is alarming because it takes a coordinated response and a lot of resources to help get someone out. No one agency generally has all the resources needed. More support is needed to figure out the coordination elements. On the organizational front, reimbursements can be challenging when agencies are having to front costs for three to five months.

Tina Morales said it would be great to see more youth employment opportunities and more opportunities for youth to apply for mini grants to carry through on ideas they have for solutions to issues they are experiencing. Agencies are facing a tremendous number of needs, exceeding their current staffing levels. One way to address that is to engage in dialogs with them as a way of seeking to understand the work they do more fully. Continued support for the youth voice is needed. There is value in community organizing, especially when youth are at the center and parents are involved.

Chair Mansfield thanked the panelists for their observations and for all they continue to do for the community. Education is an area that stands out as important. As an educator with Cascadia Connection in ABE and ESL, language is a clear barrier for many. In the ESL program there are over 300 students per quarter turned away due to a lack of funding from the state. The program does not even have the funding needed to translate the intake forms and applications. There may be ways for the organization to work with the agencies on advancing goals.

Commissioner Amirfaiz thanked the panelists for all their work, noting that it is a labor of love to work for a non-profit. The Commission has talked about youth mental health for a long time. The question is what needs to be done to help youth build resiliency, which can lead to better mental health outcomes. Tina Morales said those who struggle learn who they are, and the struggle will only be expressed in safe and brave spaces. Often the best dialogs happen when students are driven home from a group. The way in which the youth support each other is what builds resilience. There must be guidance and support from skilled professionals who have also lived experience. Getting kids away from social media and technology is critical. That is the scenario in the talking circles and when youth are organizing.

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked outside of the funding provided by the city, what other funding is needed to make everything happen. Tina Morales said the power is in staffing. Skilled staffing is needed in order to make it work. A former student who is now at the University of Washington was facing homelessness while organizing an event. The student was faced with having to work to support their family, while also trying to create an individual life. Having access to emergency funding and rental assistance was a level of support that was truly needed to establish some stability for the family. The student now must drive to various schools to pick up siblings. Access to English classes in convenient locations like community centers is needed.

Angie Hinojos commented that funding is often treated as passthrough given that there are

specific things that must be done with the dollars. That is good and it helps build community, but it does not offer sustainability or opportunities for organizations to grow. Multiyear funding is crucial, and some amount of it should be unrestricted. At the beginning of the pandemic the Seattle Foundation awarded Centro Cultural Mexicano \$25,000 without restrictions to pay the organization's rent. It was decided to use the funds instead for mini grants. The program turned into one of the first rent assistance programs in East King County.

Monik Martinez highlighted the need for agencies to have funds set aside to address crisis situations. The cities have done a good job of allocating funds to By and For organizations and that has been very helpful.

Vice Chair Singh thanked the panelists for their comments and observations. It is good to see that the agencies are empowering the communities. Bellevue's diversity is something to be proud of.

Commissioner Jain stressed the need for the community to stand up and do things for people. Too often help is offered to those who look like those offering the help. The system is not set up to help immigrants and others survive and thus there is a lack of infrastructure and empathy in the system. Anyone going to a hospital should be able to receive the language help they need to answer basic questions about their health. The people in power need to do better and so does the community.

Commissioner Jain asked if there is a system in local schools where someone who does not understand English can receive tutoring by the school. Daniel Rendon said there are ESL classes offered, but the classes are often full.

Chair Mansfield added that the Bellevue School District has such a program, but it is extremely limited. A lot of ESL students get labeled as remedial learners and get put into the summer basic English, basic history, basic science and basic math programs. They do not learn the other subjects in the same way as native English speakers. The ELA programs at the college level do not have the necessary funding from the state, which means students are turned away in large numbers. Daniel Rendon said that is one reason why students in the Latino HEAT program help each other out, and noted even as a high school freshman having been assigned the role of mediator and explainer to the students who did not speak English. There is private tutoring available, but for a cost.

Angie Hinojos said there are many cases of misidentification across the United States of non-English-speakers being classified for special education classes, and not being put into accelerated classes when they should be. That data has been around for a long time, and it is very clear that it is happening.

Tina Morales confirmed that there are no tutoring services available for MLL students in the school district. Students are most often put into English-only classes and many of them end up using Google Translate to understand what is said. There used to be a program in which students received all their instructions in Spanish. It required a lot of case management and support, but the program was very successful. Unfortunately, the program has gone away.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis thanked the panelists for their stories and for all they do in the

community. A question asked was about the barriers to intergenerational wealth, economic empowerment and small businesses and what can be done to help overcome those barriers. Time again it has been seen that someone may have a job lined up but must first get their food handlers permit or a bartending certification, but they do not have the money to get that done. If they had the money they could get the job, and once they have the job, they can show proof of being able to pay rent. Unrestricted funds are always challenging but would be a way to address that issue. Questions were also asked about the time it takes for agencies to receive their reimbursements from the city, and about ways for the city to better serve the organizations working in the community.

Angie Hinojos said the innovative approach Bellevue took with ARPA rent assistance made a huge difference. One thing that made it successful was that the funds were provided up front, even to organizations that had only volunteers that could not possibly have operated on a reimbursement basis. On the small business front, Centro Cultural Mexicano is seeing that most small businesses coming to the agency want information and advice in Spanish. The classes include networking and relationship building and taking some of the apprehension out of working with the different governmental agencies.

Monik Martinez said there is a lot of fear in the community around starting a small business due to not knowing what to report, when to file reports, and where to file the reports.

A motion to extend the meeting by five minutes was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jain and the motion was carried unanimously.

Continuing, Monik Martinez said in Mexico a notary can do pretty much everything a CPA does in the states. Many immigrants believe notaries in the states can do what they do in Mexico and often they get scammed and left with debt. Regarding agency reimbursements, it is not just in Bellevue that there is a delay. There can be no reimbursements until contracts are in place, but sometimes with new programming that is very challenging. Having an advance payment would be very helpful, and having monthly reimbursements would also be helpful.

Asma Ahmed thanked the panelists for their participation.

B. Human Services Funding Cycle and Contract Monitoring

The agenda item was tabled.

C. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely

A motion to approve allowing Vice Chair Singh and Commissioner Jain to participate remotely on June 6, and Vice Chair Singh on June 21, was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jain and the motion was carried unanimously.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mansfield adjourned the meeting at 8:04 p.m.