

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

January 20, 2021
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Ma, Commissioners Kline, McClure, Mercer, Piper

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Amirfaiz and Mansfield

STAFF PRESENT: Alex O'Reilly, Dee Dee Catalano, Toni Esparza, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

Chair Kline stated that the meeting was being held remotely in order to comply with the Governor's emergency order concerning the Open Public Meetings Act which prohibits in-person meetings.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Amirfaiz and Mansfield, both of whom were excused.

Chair Kline welcomed new Commissioner Shari McClure.

Commissioner McClure said she has lived in the Bridle Trails area of Bellevue for about eight years. She said she works at Evergreen Health as director of the cancer center. She said she has been actively involved in various organizations, including most recently Parent Trust for Washington Children, a non-profit that helps at-risk parents, and the Jubilee Women's Center, a transitional housing program based in Seattle.

The Commissioners took a few minutes to introduce themselves.

Chair Kline stated that because in-person meetings are prohibited by the Governor's emergency order concerning the Open Public Meetings Act, the Parks and Community Services Board and the Human Services Commission is holding and will continue to hold meetings remotely for an unknown period of time. The bylaws of the Parks and Community Services Board and the Human Services Commission regarding remote participation and the order of business have been suspended until such time as meetings are no longer being held remotely.

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 – None

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. Debrief of Reviewing Applications With An Equity Lens

Grant Coordinator Dee Dee Catalano noted that in April 2020 the Commission received some virtual training from Sarah Tran on how to look at applications through an equity lens. As a follow-up, Ms. Tran submitted a list of questions for the Commission to review to trigger an in-depth discussion of how looking at applications through an equity lens went for the Commission during the application review period.

The first question focused on the interconnections observed between Covid-19 and racial inequity and how did it impact the funding decisions.

Chair Kline said she saw a definite connection between Covid-19 and racial equity in terms of the populations being most affected. One overwhelming point in the discussions focused on the housing programs, which ultimately drove many of the Commission's funding decisions.

Commissioner Mercer said she felt there were many connections between Covid-19 and racial equity. She said overall the impacts of Covid-19 drove much of the Commission's discussions. In many ways the pandemic simply exacerbated existing issues and made everything more acute, including racial inequity and housing. That overwhelmed other aspects of the human services continuum and made it hard to evaluate things beyond basic needs.

Commissioner Ma commented that racial inequities have historically existed in terms of access to healthcare and economic opportunities. Covid-19 has only made those inequities worse. People of color have generally been hit harder by Covid-19 and they will generally have a more difficult time receiving from the fallouts of the pandemic. The pandemic intensified the level of need overall.

Commissioner Piper said he saw clear connections between Covid-19 and racial inequity. He stressed that everything the Commission looked at during the review period was set against the backdrop of Covid-19. He said the equity lens had a strong impact on the Commission's funding decisions, even more so than the interconnection with Covid-19. The Commission did a good job of being attentive to taking an equity view.

To the question asking the Commissioners to describe any funding decisions made or advocated for in which equity played a key role in giving support to an application, and how and why, Commissioner Ma said all of the Commissioners tried to get new programs in, especially programs aimed at persons of color. A lot of time was spent on applications in Goal 1, but time was also spent discussing programs for the various population groups, including the youth. The Commissioners were fully aware of the racial inequities and worked to fund the appropriate programs.

Commissioner Mercer said her view was that the entire Commission tried to identify and think through all of the different populations each application targeted. That led to everyone being clear about how each application played in terms of equity. Over the last several years the Commission has worked to shepherd new organizations as they came in and tracked their programs as they built out. She said she would like to see even more emphasis put on how to

get money to smaller organizations that target additional populations. For the most recent funding cycle, the huge level of need in Goal 1 was almost overpowering, making it necessary to give primary focus to those programs, particularly housing.

Chair Kline noted that Commissioner Amirfaiz had been particularly focused on the equity lens piece throughout the process and helped to guide the Commission in many regards. She said the most direct application of an equity lens probably was in regard to the Families of Color application. The Latino navigator program filled a need that has been in evidence for some time. The Commission set aside some dollars to pool with other Eastside communities to address the identified gap in service. The Commission chose to increase funding for a couple of recently funded organizations, namely India Association of Western Washington and Muslim Community Resource Center. There were not an overwhelming number of applications received that were targeting specific populations, and application of the equity lens drove the Commission to focus more on the composition of boards in additional staffing and language coverage.

Commissioner Piper said the equity lens focused attention on the populations served as well the composition of the boards of the agencies, in addition to facilitating opportunities for the individual and smaller agencies.

Commissioner Ma said there were a couple of challenges that continued to stand out in his mind in regard to trying to be equitable. First is the inertia of programs that are already funded. Once a program is funded, it carries with it a momentum to fund it again in the next cycle. In trying to shift the focus in order to address equity, that can be a challenge. There are established organizations that have done great work, and many of them are at the very least using the jargon of equity, which tends to muddy the water and make funding decisions more complicated.

Commissioner Mercer emphasized the need to find ways to fund smaller organizations to do development work. She said she fully supported setting aside some amount of money to fund a program for less than \$5000 and to relax the reporting requirements. That would make it possible to get smaller organizations funded and to help them grow into what will be useful to the city. Often the organizations that will best address equity are still developing and the Commission should do what it can to help bring them to fruition. She said she also wanted to see the Commission spend more time focused on funding the continuum of services and setting priorities.

Chair Kline commented that the priorities primarily flow from the Needs Update, but she agreed with the need to more directly tie the priorities to the funding process and the decisions made.

Commissioner Ma concurred with the need to have a set of agreed-to strategy in regard to linking the Needs Update to the funding process. One strategy for freeing up some funding during the funding process would be to not immediately and up front earmark previously funded applications for a cost of living increase, saving that discussion to the end.

Commissioner McClure said she found the discussion to be clarifying and helpful, particularly in light of personal experiences and thought processes. She said she had not previously understood the paradigms used to make decisions.

Chair Kline shared that the application for programs to be funded by Bellevue used to be for Bellevue only. Now the application is shared by a number of Eastside cities, and that approach impacts the level of influence the city can have on the application process.

Ms. O'Reilly added that the application when it was released for funding included the Commission's priorities, but those priorities were determined prior to the pandemic started drastically changing lives. Those prioritizes undoubtedly would have been different had they been published after the pandemic took hold.

Ms. O'Reilly asked the Commissioners what other types of equity training they might want to have, either for the Commission only or in conjunction with the other human services commissions in east King County.

Commissioner McClure asked if there had been a conversation with the different groups in the city about using the needs assessment and the equity lens, whether or not the needs assessment was used in any way to identify all the different groups in the city, and whether steps were taken to make sure each group received some level of funding for services. Commissioner Ma explained that staff divides the applications by goal area and the Commission reviews them by goal area. The issue of equity is discussed within each of the goal areas. The continuum of service includes each goal area, each need, and all the residents of Bellevue.

Commissioner Mercer said the Commission's initial review involves having all the Commissioners reading all of the applications. At that top level the Commission is focused on whether or not to move the specific applications forward. Commissioners are then assigned to go deeper on specific applications and to lead the second round of reviews. The second review includes the application of different lenses and initial consideration as to what level of funding each application should have. The third review involves grouping like applications together, such as all those for rental assistance, and that is where the Commission's final funding decisions are made.

Commissioner McClure asked if the Commission anticipates making changes to the application given the evolution that has occurred around the issue of equity. Commissioner Ma said the Commission discussed how to frame the application. There are different ways the Commission seeks to approach equity. One was involved simplifying the application to make it easier for applicants that do not have English as their primary language to apply. Many of the questions in the application are framed in regard to equity.

Chair Kline pointed out that the Commission is to a large degree limited by the applications that are submitted. The most recent application of an equity lens has been on eliminating the barriers to the application process. The Commission has always solicited a fair amount of information which if used properly gives insight into the equity lens of the individual agencies. It is looking outward to the population to see how the funding distribution is addressing issues of equity is where the bigger piece of development needs to be.

Answering the question that asked the Commissioners about the ways in which they would like to learn more about equity/inequity, and how it impacts the city, the residents and the organizations, Commissioner Ma stressed the need to seek out and solicit information from specific population groups, or the organizations serving those populations, especially those that do not typically seek government support for reasons of culture or because they lack an understanding of what is available.

Ms. O'Reilly noted that several years ago a panel of agency representatives was pulled together and invited to address the Commission during an off funding cycle. She said the same could be done again to provide the Commission with specific information about how their communities are experiencing needs.

Commissioner Ma noted that demographically the Asian population is quite large and is

served by the Chinese Information and Service Center. Historically there has been a problem in finding a cohesive organization to serve the LatinX population. African-Americans and Black families in general, as well as eastern Europeans, are not overly well served.

Chair Kline suggested someone from the Eastside for All organization could provide the Commission with some insight regarding population groups.

Commissioner Piper stressed the need to expand and be cognizant of the definition of equity. Of the multitude of populations that could be served, many have been identified, but there needs to be better connections with them, and there very likely are additional populations the Commission is not even aware of. Chair Kline agreed that population groups are not limited to cultural backgrounds.

Commissioner Ma said the Commission certainly would benefit from understanding the perspective of the applicant as part of a debriefing exercise. Ms. O'Reilly pointed out that in the past there were follow-up surveys of applicants, with a focus was on finding out what they thought about the application process. Commissioner Ma said his interest was in hearing from the applicants their views of the process within an equity lens.

B. Discussion of Future Agenda Topics for the Human Services Commission in 2021

Ms. O'Reilly noted that the Commission works throughout the year on various issues, including discussing or voting on CDBG items. The second meeting in February will be focused on discussing recommendations for the CDBG-CV3 RFP that is currently out. She commented that throughout the year the Commission seeks information concerning specific subject areas and operations and she asked the Commissioners for suggestions for the coming year.

Commissioner Piper said behavioral health is an area for which the Commission always benefits from having updates. The Commission would also benefit from having an update regarding other populations in Bellevue, in particular the elderly population. Ms. O'Reilly agreed and proposed including an update regarding the trends and issues facing the youth.

Commissioner McClure said she would be interested to know if the city's internal workings have any interaction with the school district, particularly with at-risk and homeless students. Ms. O'Reilly said the Commission has in the past had staff who work with the McKinney Vento program come and share information. She added that the city funds a number of programs that are offered in the school district.

Chair Kline pointed out that it has been quite a while since the Commission received a presentation by the school district. Ms. O'Reilly agreed and said the last update was on homelessness in the school district and was given by staff working with the McKinney Vento program. She suggested it would also be good to hear from the city staff who work with the school district on the Wraparound program. While students are not meeting in person in the schools, there still are people who are working with children and families and the Commission would benefit from hearing about what they are experiencing.

Chair Kline suggested that by way of moving along the concept of funding smaller agencies, it would be good to have a panel including someone from the city's legal department and others to talk about the hurdles to funding smaller agencies in terms of oversight, lack of 501(C)(3) status, and funding only small amount in light of the reporting requirements. Ms. O'Reilly said staff have been doing research on the topic both with the legal team and the finance department. She said she hoped to have information to present to the Commission in

early February. Assistant Director of the Department of Parks and Community Services Toni Esparza suggested that if the staff presentation leaves unanswered questions on the table, additional staff could subsequently be brought in to help answer questions.

Commissioner Ma said he would find it helpful to hear from first responders who have been seeing the uptick in domestic violence and mental health issues. Ms. O'Reilly said a panel could be put together with someone from the Police Department and the Bellevue Fire Cares team, and added that she could arrange for presentations from the Eastside Legal Assistance Program and/or the King County Bar Association.

Commissioner Mercer commented that many local businesses, including Amazon and Microsoft, have pledged money for different aspects of homelessness and affordable housing. She asked if the Commission could be given an overview of the various programs and how they are impacting the region from someone in the city. Ms. O'Reilly said that could easily be arranged, possibly from a representative from the City Manager's Office. Commissioner Mercer said it would be good to include representatives from the larger companies to talk about what they are doing. Ms. O'Reilly said she would explore that.

Ms. O'Reilly stated that in the past the Commission has had presentations from King County staff who are instrumental in working with the Committee to End Homelessness, an entity which has transitioned into the Regional Homelessness Authority (RHA). The organization is in the process of hiring an executive director. She said once the organization becomes a little more settled, it would be good for the Commission to hear directly from one of their representatives, particularly about the regional component.

Commissioner Mercer said it would be helpful to have some follow-up in regard to the transportation work done by the Commission a couple of years ago. Ms. O'Reilly agreed it would be good to have an update regarding the Crossroads Connect program.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. O'Reilly reminded the Commissioners that on January 5 Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis gave the Commission an overview of HB-1985, which allows local government to assess a one-tenth of one percent sale tax for the purpose of affordable housing and behavioral health services. It was stated that the Council had voted in November to approve such a tax to begin collections in January. She said she was invited to be part of a small committee working to develop the protocols and plans that will need to be in place prior to making decisions about how the funds will be spent; Ms. Esparza serves on the team as well as a policy advisor. She said the committee has met three times and has, among other things, worked to develop an interest statement focused on bringing into one place all of the city's pertinent policies. The legislation that created the sales tax is very specific about the way the funds are to be spent, and accordingly one of the working teams has representation from the City Attorney's Office. The intent is to be ready to roll as soon as the funds are available.

Chair Kline asked if the money that has been allocated towards homelessness and mental health issues from the human services fund will be considered in the process of deciding how the funds will be spent. Ms. O'Reilly said the discussions have not progressed that far yet, but potentially having the additional money could impact the decisions made relative to the human services fund. She said she would keep the Commission in the loop as things progress.

Ms. Catalano reported that she had received half a dozen inquiries about the CDBG-CV3 RFP since its release a week ago. For the most part folks were seeking additional information and details, mostly about rental assistance. She said she had not yet received any applications. The RFP will close on February 1.

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 Commissioner Piper and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Kline adjourned the meeting at 7:36 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date