

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

June 29, 2021
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Kline, Commissioners Amirfaiz, McClure, Piper

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Ma, Mansfield, Mercer

STAFF PRESENT: Alex O'Reilly, Dee Dee Catalano, Christy Stangland, 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 6:09 p.m. by Chair Kline who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

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

Chair Kline stated that because in-person meetings are prohibited by the Governor's emergency order, the Commission will be holding its meetings remotely for an unknown period of time. As a result, the Commission's by-laws regarding remote participation and the order of business were suspended until such time as meetings were no longer being held remotely.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Grant Coordinator Dee Dee Catalano read into the record several statements received via email.

Ms. Jennifer Curtis, director of development for NAMI Eastside, wrote to say the organization appreciates the opportunity to briefly address our application for assistance from Bellevue for behavioral health and housing-related services. NAMI Eastside serves people struggling with lived experience of mental illness, and their caregiver by providing support, education via classes and seminars, information and referral services, and legislative advocacy. The organization is the local affiliate of a national organization, and all 77 volunteers are professionally trained to deliver programming objectively demonstrated to be effective in helping people struggling with mental illness. Over the course of a year, the organization provided services over 13,000 times. NAMI Eastside wants to bring its services to people with lived experience of mental illness who are also dealing with housing insecurity. Our application to the City of Bellevue is part of this new "shelter expansion" program that the

organization hopes to implement in Bellevue, Redmond and Kirkland over the coming year. The impetus for the program expansion is the simple fact that the incidence of serious mental illness is much higher for people experiencing housing instability than it is for people who have housing. Homeless people suffer from a greater prevalence of psychiatric diagnoses including schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, with a magnitude ranging from 25% to 50% across several studies. NAMI's peer support groups, which are designed for people living with mental illness, would be appropriate and helpful for people who lack permanent housing, and the organization wants to establish new support groups and classes specifically for these people, located in and in partnership with local shelter providers and housing activist coalitions such that consumers will not need to travel to obtain NAMI services. The organization is also enlarging its referral capabilities by adopting the new local community information exchange, Unite Us. The organization would like its program manager to work actively with shelter providers to ensure that people living in shelter have maximum access to community behavioral health resources on the Eastside. The organization is very excited about the prospect of delivering new, targeted services to people living with housing insecurity in the City of Bellevue. The budget request is focused on building up the organization's programming capability, including increasing its cultural responsiveness by hiring a Spanish-speaking program assistant, providing a minimal stipend for the trained volunteers who deliver the programming, and investing in existing program management staff.

Ms. Cindy Druschuda wrote that Imagine Housing is currently going through an enormous transition period. The CEOs are interim, the social service director just came on board June 14, and the organization historically has had high turnover in case management staff. If Imagine Housing is awarded grant money, the organization should agree to spend the money not on case management but on services already in place in the city. The approach would be a better use of city funds to benefit the tenants of Imagine properties in the city. One alternative would be to spend funds to have the Community Crisis Assistance Team and Bellevue Behavioral Health and housing-related services on-site with office space at the properties for some 15 hours a week to follow through to actually get services to the tenants who need them desperately based on 9-1-1 calls. A second option would be to subsidize the rent for the tenants who are rent burdened. According to the Washington State Housing Commission, prior to Covid tenants were allowed to move in with rent burdens in direct conflict with the agency's policies. A third option would be to purchase on- or off-site counseling from the YMCA, offer some of their family programs, or see if they can modify the program on violence and youth and bring it to 30 Bellevue, in addition to asking them to conduct workshops on conflict resolution between tenants, and have the YMCA facilitate the mediation and conflict resolution. Tenants need to not be dealing with the effects of extreme rent burden and need to have the opportunity to learn coping and problem-solving skills. By next year Imagine may be more stabilized and have directions and goals for the type of service and case management that can better serve the tenants they provide housing to. Imagine needs no rental assistance. Bellevue should use the funds to provide shallow rent subsidies to the tenants that were allowed to move in extremely rent burdened, which was against Imagine's policies. The city should have a program managed directly with tenants. Tenants should be empowered. Tenants need behavioral health services and case management. Imagine has no proven history of ever providing such services in a professional and appropriate way through contracts with King County. Bellevue should purchase the services for them and should not give Imagine the money because it will be wasted.

Ms. Saki Litoff with Eastside Men's Shelter wrote to say she has been involved in the issues related to the creation of the Eastgate Men's shelter since 2016. She said she is also a member of the Good Neighbor Agreement Advisory Committee mandated by the LUCA in 2018, and volunteers as a member of CFH's Shelter Advisory Group. She said she is not familiar with what grants have been submitted but implored the Commission to fully fund any grants

requesting funds for licensed mental health counselors to be available to either CFH and/or Plymouth Housing, both of which will be operating facilities serving some of the most vulnerable of the community. Neither organization currently has adequate support from licensed mental health counselors, if at all, let alone around the clock. There have been challenges resulting from this significant lack of adequate mental health support services in what routinely happens in Seattle, and Plymouth Housing lost an employee last year to a tragic event that happened in one of their Seattle locations. The funds recently made available by the passage of House Bill 1590 allow up to 40% of those funds to be spent annually on "operation, delivery, or evaluation of behavioral health treatment programs and services." That could be as much as \$3.4M annually. There are recommendations being made that these facilities should have licensed mental health counselors available 24/7. Considering this is not in either organization's current budget. Those experiencing homelessness are facing mental health crises and support is needed to address those needs. The funds are critical to the safety of the population being served but also for the staff of these organizations as well as the members of the community, who are at heightened risk due to this new campus for the homeless. Licensed mental health care counselors have specific training and are licensed by the State to work with those with mental illness. That should not be confused with staff members of these organizations who are "case managers" and are tasked with doing what should be done by licensed professionals but without specific training other than what they may receive from their organization during training. Because of their additional education and licensure, employees meeting these requirements will be more expensive for the organizations, which is why most organizations choose to forgo hiring people with these credentials since the costs are so much less. It is the responsibility of the city to ensure the egregious mistakes happening regularly in Seattle are not mirrored in Bellevue.

Mr. Doug Wheeler with Congregations for the Homeless wrote to express his deep appreciation for the time and effort the Commission gives in helping to make the human services sector work well for the whole community. He thanked the Commission for its consideration of CFH's proposal to expand the mental health support offered to its clients. By way of clarification of the organization's application for funding, he allowed that a mistake had been made by accidentally checking the box indicating the organization offers medically assisted treatment. He stressed that the organization will not be providing medical treatment for substance use disorders. CFH is not a licensed mental health provider even though it employs licensed mental health therapists. In the application, it was stated that the organization would track its one-on-one and group sessions in 15- and 30-minute units. He clarified that CFH's mental health model will offer 60-minute sessions for one-on-one, and 60- and 90-minute sessions for group work. The 15- to 30-minute increments were chosen to help cover phone calls, provider connections, and the like that do not take 60 minutes. The majority of our interactions will be 60- to 90-minutes. CFH works with a highly traumatized population that struggles with significant mental health issues. The organization would like to set up a time with the Commission to share more about the needs and how the funding from 1590, and other funding, is crucial in helping the organization make a meaningful impact on those served. He said he looked forward to the opportunity to share more with the Commission about what the organization has discovered and how it will be using the funds awarded. He said the organization is grateful for the Commission's support.

Ms. Michelle Billing, an Imagine Housing resident, wrote that she has lived at the Velocity property since it opened seven years ago. She urged the Commission to hold Imagine Housing accountable for how it treats its tenants. Tenants are not heard or listened to. Imagine Housing may tell all of its funders that everything is great with all 15 properties, but that is not true. There is poor management and case management. Management has been outsourced to a company called Allied Residential, which is one of the worse management companies over the last seven years. Imagine Housing is a non-profit company, but Allied is a for-profit management company. The two companies do not go together well. The tenants are to follow

Allied's rules and policies, but the tenants are not allowed to see such rules or policies. Imagine Housing backs Allied a hundred percent when it comes to issues and concerns, while the tenants are mostly ignored. If the Commission is going to provide funding to Imagine Housing, the organization should be supervised to make sure it does the job, which they currently are not doing. There is a big human services crisis with Imagine Housing. The Commission was urged to listen to the tenants. She said she could provide more information regarding issues and concerns, but for the present just wanted to get the word out about Imagine Housing.

Carol Ryan with Attain Housing wrote to say families in Bellevue who are struggling with mounting rental debt resulting from the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to seek financial assistance from Attain Housing. In June alone, 45 percent of all rental assistance requests submitted to Attain Housing's Stable Home program, specifically 18 out of 40, were from Bellevue households. As of June 23, Attain Housing's 2021 assistance to Bellevue totaled 42 families and as a result 139 dads, moms and kids have remained housed. Assistance provided to these families totaled \$63,089 for an average of \$1,502 per household. Stable Home team members do much more than simply write a check, opening nearly twice as many applications as those we actually close. Applicants may start the process, then disappear, despite our efforts to follow up. Upon opening an application, we provide case management via phone, email, fax and USPS mail with applicants, walking them through each step of the process. Applicants include folks like Joe, a single parent with three children. In January he and his entire family came down with COVID. The children have all recovered, but Joe has developed long-term COVID, leaving him unable to work or care for his family. His oldest child who had worked part-time had to stop working as well in January, and has not been able to return as she has assumed care of the household and younger children. Attain Housing's Stable Home team helped Joe navigate various channels available to help: the King County Dispute Resolution Center, to create a payment plan for their household's past debt; King County EPRAP (Eviction Prevention & Rental Assistance Program), for possible debt relief; and Stable Home, for July rent assistance, giving the family more time to recover and allowing the oldest child to return to work. Stable Home Rental Assistance clears the rental debt of Bellevue families who are struggling to recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19 and our team guides applicants to the help they need. Stable Home is an ongoing program and the need for rental assistance remains high.

Whitney Whittemore with the YMCA wrote to thank the Commission for the opportunity to apply for eviction prevention and rental assistance funding. She said the project will focus on young adults and families in Bellevue who have fallen behind on rent at least one month, providing them with rental assistance for Bellevue residents at-risk of eviction, and funds to assist with move-in costs for people experiencing homelessness who are transitioning into housing in Bellevue. According to the National Equity Atlas, 11 percent of renters in Washington State are behind at least one month on rent. That amounts to 237,000 households behind on rent at an average of \$7,800 per household. According to the King County COVID-19 Data Dashboard, since March 2020 young adults ages 18-24 have experienced the highest unemployment rate in King County at 39 percent. The 2019-2020 Bellevue Human Services Needs Update identified lack of affordable housing as a consistent issue across all segments of the city's population, with 40 percent of the city's low-income households being severely cost-burdened. In 2019, Bellevue had the highest apartment rents in the Pacific Northwest. High housing costs are particularly difficult to repay, even for households only behind one month. Since 2015, The YMCA Social Impact Center has been the largest provider of homelessness prevention funds to young adults in King County, offering eviction prevention, move-in cost, and rental assistance support to young adults at-risk of becoming homeless. Under the CARES Act, in September 2020 the YMCA Social Impact Center was awarded \$3.2 million from Commerce to help with eviction prevention by providing rental assistance specifically for young adults who have been impacted by the pandemic. The requested rental

assistance for Bellevue residents will ensure vulnerable community members who have already experienced the trauma of lost wages and unemployment will not face the additional trauma of eviction and homelessness. Funds to assist with move-in costs will help young adults and families transition from homelessness to housing. Many individuals experiencing homelessness would be able to pay rent, but are unable to pay the hefty move-in costs associated with rental housing, including application fees, first and last month rent, security deposits and additional deposits for low or no credit.

Kara Latchinian, an Imagine Housing resident wrote that it was her understanding that Imagine Housing was seeking an additional \$360,000 of funding for behavior support services, rental assistance and behavior health services. She said while Imagine Housing residents are in need of services and housing stabilization, Imagine Housing has consistently failed many of them. For example, the behavioral supportive services that are currently being offered are inconsistent, insufficient and ineffective. A change to a whole new service delivery and provider needs to occur. Imagine Housing residents require and deserve quality and consistent services, and she said she was asking the city to consider a third party to monitor the choices in providers and outcomes. The funds should go to an appropriate and trustworthy entity and there should be increased accountability for how Imagine Housing uses the funds.

5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS – None
7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION
 - A. Second Review of Bellevue Behavioral Health and Housing Related Services Applications

Ms. Catalano noted that on June 25 she sent the Commissioners an email with four attachments. One was the spreadsheet from the June 15 meeting with new columns added to show funding percentages and prior funds the programs have received from the city, including 2020 Covid-related funds and 2021 general funds. The second attachment was a new spreadsheet called Application Analysis created by Megan Farwell that showed Bellevue's total current investments in the three 1590 service areas, as well as the proportion of applications requests and recommendations for agencies that are run for and by BIPOC populations. The third attachment included answers to the questions for agencies that were previously asked by the Commissioners, and the fourth was the draft minutes from the June 15 meeting.

Chair Kline asked for more detail with regard to the Application Analysis spreadsheet. Human Services Manager Alex O'Reilly explained that Ms. Farwell looked all of the additional general fund, CARES Act, CDBG-CV3 and the 2021 general funds allocations. She looked specifically at the services that fit under the behavioral health, supportive services and financial assistance categories. With regard to agencies run for and by BIPOC populations, Ms. O'Reilly noted that there were eight applications from six agencies totaling \$710,525, which represents 21.44 percent of all the requested funds. Preliminarily, the amount of funding recommended for those applications was \$282,000, or almost 18 percent of all of the recommendations.

Assistant Director of the Department of Parks and Community Services Toni Esparza said the analysis was in part aimed at determining how much of the overall funding goes to by and for BIPOC communities, specifically in terms of their total requested funding. She said the

information is not the only data to consider in reaching conclusions.

Ms. O'Reilly noted that Bellevue is a minority majority city by a slight margin, which means that by a small percentage there are more people who are not White.

Chair Kline asked what specifically is meant by “led by” someone from the BIPOC community. Ms. O'Reilly said the description typically refers to organizations founded by people of color for a particular population, and to organizations that have as a large percentage of their leadership teams persons of color, particularly persons from the communities the organization purports to serve.

Commissioner McClure asked if the “other” groups on the spreadsheet are known to have no BIPOC individuals in leadership roles, or if it is simply unknown. Ms. O'Reilly said staff did not do an analysis of the number of BIPOC persons in leadership roles in the “other” agencies. She said there likely are BIPOC individuals in those organizations.

Ms. Esparza clarified that the “By and For” category largely speaks to the origination of organizations along with a broader representation among their leadership.

Ms. Catalano noted that some questions were asked by Commissioners on June 15 about what would happen to services should an agency be awarded less than its full funding request. She said agencies have the right to propose their own budgets and service levels according to their service models for their programs. Generally, where funding is less than the requested amount, service units are reduced commensurately. Sometimes funding reductions can trigger other program adjustments, but the agencies work out those revisions in the negotiations with the city over the scope of work.

Chair Kline commented that in a couple of instances a portion of the requested amounts did not meet the application criteria. Ms. Catalano said those details would need to be worked out in negotiating the scope of work, but in each case the portions of the applications that do not fit the application criteria will simply be eliminated and the funding amount either would be reduced accordingly or applied to other eligible services.

Commissioner Amirfaiz pointed out that the to fully fund all of the eligible services would exceed the funding available to allocate.

Ms. Catalano clarified that all Covid-related additional funding received by agencies in 2020 or early in 2021 has been totally spent down, except for the CDBG-CV3 funding which is just getting under way. She added that once funding recommendations are identified, it will be necessary to include rationale statements for each application.

Ms. O'Reilly reminded the Commissioners that the Council has set as a priority for human services funding to remove barriers for small and diverse agencies that provide culturally competent services for disproportionately impacted communities. She stressed the need to consider the impacts of funding recommendations on the underserved populations in the city.

Commissioner Piper noted that following the June 15 meeting, there was still some \$79,000 on the table yet to be allocated. Chair Kline confirmed that number.

Commissioner Amirfaiz suggested that the June 15 meeting draft minutes do a good job of outlining the rationale for funding or not funding each application.

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked how the Commission should respond to the comments made regarding Imagine Housing, noting that it is not often to see people coming forward with

claims that an agency is not doing what it is supposed to be doing. Ms. O'Reilly said it is true that Imagine Housing underwent a change of leadership in January 2021. She said tenants have previously brought concerns to the attention of the city and the new leadership. She added that Imagine Housing leadership has met with city staff to share how they have been responding to the tenants' concerns, and they have and are continuing to meet with tenants to address their concerns.

Chair Kline asked if the city's monitoring of Imagine Housing has highlighted any issues that the Commission should factor into its considerations. Ms. Catalano said staff has conducted what is called desk monitoring quarterly as the agency submits its reports, which spell out the service units performed, substantiating documentation for their charges, and a narrative of how things are going generally. What the city is paying for is resident support services, not behavioral health services, and the contract does not cover landlord/tenant issues or anything of that nature. The agency has been performing well on its contract and no issues of concern have been identified.

Chair Kline said she found it interesting that residents had come forward with comments. Generally during a funding round there is opportunity for a public hearing. The current process does not include that element so that opportunity for input is missing. She said she appreciated all who took the time to send in comments for the Commission to consider, and suggested they should be received in a similar manner to how comments from a public hearing are received.

Chair Kline asked the Commissioners to comment on the overall dollars allocated the behavioral health services category relative to the rental assistance and supportive services categories.

Commissioner McClure noted that the preliminary allocations for each category were close to the 50 percent mark in terms of the overall requests. She said the comments received made behavioral health services stand out as a need and she suggested earmarking a little more to the category.

Commissioner Amirfaiz agreed. She said the Commission's discussion on June 15 was robust regarding the rationale and she said she would be comfortable allocating the remaining \$79,000 to the category. She said she would be comfortable with fully funding MAPS-MCRC and increasing the allocation to LifeWire.

Commissioner Piper agreed with Commissioner Amirfaiz relative to increasing the allocation to LifeWire.

Chair Kline said in terms of the initial allocation of funds, the behavioral health category was funded at 51 percent of the total requests; rental assistance was 44 percent; and supportive services was 56 percent. She said she could support lowering the overall allocation to the rental assistance category based on how many dollars already flow to that category from the other one-time funding sources.

Commissioner McClure said it was her understanding that the eviction moratorium had been extended through September. Ms. Esparza explained that the extension is more nuanced than then the previous moratorium in that tenants will be asked to start making payments on a payment plan.

Ms. O'Reilly clarified for Commissioner Amirfaiz and the Commission that prior funding to behavioral health services amounted to \$1,029,644, while funding for supportive services totaled \$1.5 million, and funding for financial assistance totaled \$1.6 million. Overall, prior

dollars investments in behavioral health were less by some \$500,000.

Commissioner Amirfaiz said she would support adding another \$20,000 or \$30,000 to the ICHS application.

Commissioner McClure said she supported bringing the MAPS-MCRC application up to full funding. That would certainly help address meeting the needs of the BIPOC community. She said she also would support increasing funding for ICHS, which also serves a more diverse group of the BIPOC community. She proposed fully funding the ICHS application, and using the balance left over for Congregations for the Homeless.

Chair Kline noted that approach would not allow for increasing funding for the LifeWire application.

Commissioner Piper voiced his support for fully funding MAPS-MCRS and for increasing the allocation to ICHS, though not at their full request. He said he would consider increasing the amount allocated to Friends of Youth given the community their program serves. He added that he would welcome opening a discussion about reducing the allocation to Imagine Housing.

Chair Kline noted that there is a supportive services piece and a behavioral health services piece to the Imagine Housing application. She said the negative comments from Imagine Housing residents were more about the company providing the services than about the services themselves.

Commissioner McClure said she was concerned about the reports offered by the Imagine Housing residents. She added, however, that the Commission should respect the long-time relationship it has had with the organization. There are always two sides to every story. She said one option would be to focus just on one service area while the concerns are addressed.

Chair Kline pointed out that Imagine Housing had submitted a request for rental assistance funds which the Commission had preliminarily chosen not to fund. That means the amount of funding going to the agency has been reduced based on its overall request.

Commissioner Piper recalled that the rationale for passing on the rental assistance request from Imagine Housing was that it would only benefit their residents.

Commissioner Amirfaiz agreed that the Commission was only hearing one side of the story in regard to Imagine Housing. She said the Commission does not often hear from those who are benefiting from the work an agency does, but allowed that the messages delivered were certainly strong. She said she would support honoring the agency with a reduced funding amount. She noted her support for funding mental health services for youth and said she could support giving more to Friends of Youth, LifeWire and MAPS-MCRS. She said her previous remarks in regard to Friends of Youth were in regard to the number of clients to be served in light of their requested amount.

Chair Kline asked which of the Imagine Housing services, behavioral health services or supportive services, the Commission would choose to fund if it were to fund only one.

Commissioner Piper said he would be inclined to support behavioral health services.

Commissioner Amirfaiz said she would choose supportive services given how difficult it is to find therapists from diverse communities. She added that supportive services include case management which helps clients get housing and resolve issues. Commissioner McClure

agreed.

Commissioner Piper said his thinking was driven in part by the comments received from the Imagine Housing residents. He allowed, however, that he could be convinced to fund supportive services rather than behavioral health services.

Commissioner Piper proposed increasing the allocation to LifeWire to \$80,000, increasing Friends of Youth by \$20,000, and fully funding ICHS.

Commissioner Amirfaiz proposed increasing the allocation to India Association of Western Washington to \$60,000.

Chair Kline proposed giving the balance to Congregations for the Homeless, bringing their total to \$128,812. She said with those changes, behavioral health services were funded at 55 percent of the total requests; rental assistance were at 46 percent; and supportive services were funded at 56 percent.

Ms. O'Reilly noted that the increased funding to MAPS-MCRS, India Association of Western Washington and ICHS would help to serve the BIPOC community in the behavioral health category.

The Commission took a few minutes to develop their rationale for funding or not funding each application. Commissioner Piper highlighted the fact that the proposed funding will serve traditionally underserved and underrepresented communities. Commissioner McClure pointed out that funding for most applications ranged between 40 percent and 50 percent of the requested amounts across the three different categories. Chair Kline said the rationale for not funding Imagine Housing for rental assistance should indicate the concern about the funds only going to Imagine Housing residents. With regard to the behavioral health piece of the Imagine Housing application, the rationale could indicate the Commission chose to support the supportive services piece instead and that behavioral health services could be better handled by outsourcing to other providers.

Commissioner Amirfaiz said the rationale for Immigrant Women's Community Center was that the number of people served did not support the amount requested.

For the rental assistance programs not funded, MAPS-MCRC, Salvation Army and AmPowering, the rationale was that the Commission chose to consolidate the number of funded agencies. It was specifically noted that a large portion of the MAPS-MCRC ask would go for overhead. For Salvation Army, the concern was that based on the projected number of persons to be served, the grant to each would be too small to be meaningful. For AmPowering, the Commission did not want to add another rental assistance program to the mix, found nothing to distinguish the program from the others, and there were issues with the application in general about the numbers.

A motion to approve the proposed allocations and forward the recommendation to the City Council was made by Commissioner Piper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Amirfaiz and the motion carried unanimously.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. O'Reilly reminded the Commissioners that the next Commission meeting would be on Wednesday, July 7.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Piper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McClure and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Kline adjourned the meeting at 7:54 p.m.