

**CITY OF BELLEVUE
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday
April 6, 2023

City Hall & Remote
6:30 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Knezevic at 6:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vanja Knezevic (Chair), Neal Hines (Vice Chair), Andy Dupertuis

COMMISSIONERS ATTENDING REMOTELY: Ken Wan

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Diann Strom (excused), Anne Howe (excused), Negin Khanloo (excused)

COUNCIL LIAISON: Conrad Lee

OTHERS PRESENT: Lucy Liu, Deputy Utilities Director; Nav Otal, Utilities Director; Linda De Boldt, Utility Engineering Assistant Director; Andy Baker, Fiscal Manager; Joe Harbour, Assistant Director; Khadija Sadat, Program Administrator; Jon Gire, Solid Waste Program Manager; Cheri Brignon, Senior Administrative Assistant; and Laurie Hugdahl, Minutes Taker

2. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Motion made by Vice Chair Hines, seconded by Commissioner Dupertuis, to approve the agenda. The agenda was approved unanimously (4-0).

3. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Alex Tsimerman, 14150 NE 20th Street, Bellevue, WA complained about not being able to speak at the City Council meeting due to the rules which he feels are unfair. He also is concerned about the racial makeup of Bellevue because of people who work for Amazon, Google, etc.

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

Conrad Lee thanked commissioners whose terms will be up at the end of May for their service - Neal Hines, Anne Howe, and Diann Strom.

He gave an update on the Washington DC National League of Cities Conference. He discussed the opportunity to seek federal funding and encouraged the City to apply for available resources.

5. STAFF REPORTS

Deputy Director Liu expressed appreciation to commissioners who will be leaving at the end of May – Neal Hines, Diann Strom, Anne Howe – and reviewed important accomplishments.

Deputy Director Liu also announced that Director Nav Ota has made the decision to retire at the end of June. On behalf of the Utilities Department, she expressed appreciation to Director Ota and wished her well. Staff will be working on a transition plan over the next couple of months. Councilmember Lee and commissioners expressed gratitude to Director Ota for her dedication and service. Director Ota thanked everyone for their comments and noted she would be around for a few more months. She expressed confidence in and optimism for the Department.¹

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) MARCH 2, 2023 MINUTES

Motion made by Vice Chair Hines, seconded by Commissioner Dupertuis, to approve the 3/2/23 minutes as presented. Upon a roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously (4-0).

7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

8. NEW BUSINESS

a) Donation Program for Rate Assistance

Utilities Fiscal Manager Andy Baker reviewed the proposed donation program for rate assistance. This is in response to a recommendation from Council to explore accepting donations from the community in support of

¹ The meeting recessed from 6:56 to 7:14 to address technical difficulties.

rate relief. Mr. Baker discussed the proposed donation program called Neighbors Helping Neighbors. He reviewed the background on existing customer assistance programs – Emergency Assistance Program, Utility Rate Relief Program, and Utility Tax Relief Program. The new billing system will allow the possibility of accepting donations. It would address an existing gap because not all low-income customers qualify for existing programs. He reviewed examples of low-income customers who this would help for temporary relief on an availability basis. Funding could occur from customers through recurring fixed amounts or one-time donations. Non-customers could also provide one-time donations online. The City is proposing to seed this program with an initial amount of \$50K from Utilities and to match donations up to \$50K per year to motivate donations. The program would be targeted at preventing water shutoffs. It would be available to low-income customers who have an urgent shut off notice. This would be a pilot program to allow evaluation of donation levels and need as part of the budget process. He requested ESC feedback and asked for a recommendation to move forward with this. Staff will develop an implementation plan and a communication plan to inform customers of the new program and inform the community of the opportunity to donate.

Discussion:

Commissioner Dupertuis suggested making sure it is simple. He thought overlapping programs could get confusing. He thought this would be a great opportunity for public-private partnerships with some of the major corporations in Bellevue. He expressed full support for the program.

Chair Knezevic asked how frequently they have low-income customers being faced with shut off. Mr. Baker stated that over 3000 accounts in the last year were faced with a shut-off tag. They don't know what percentage of those are also low income. Chair Knezevic commented that one of the funds intended for low-income residents consistently has unused funds. How would this be different? Mr. Baker reviewed existing programs and how they work.

Commissioner Wan agreed with soliciting partnerships with local and global businesses located in Bellevue. He asked if they are expecting to receive a significant amount of donations from regular customers. Mr. Baker replied that they are. The hope is to have it be regular recurring donations. Commissioner Wan recommended clarifying the definition of low income. Mr. Baker explained that the existing definition in code is 50% of median income for the Seattle Bellevue area as measured by Housing and Urban Development. This would help to meet populations not met by the current programs.

Motion by Vice Chair Hines, seconded by Commissioner Dupertuis, to recommend approval of this program to the City Council. Motion passed unanimously (4-0).

b) Republic Services Action Plan

Jon Gire, Utilities Solid Waste Program Manager, gave a solid waste collection contract update. He reported that while Republic continued to achieve over 80% for overall customer satisfaction, they did not meet minimum satisfaction scores in the following areas:

- Response time following a missed collection (single-family and multi-family/commercial sectors).
- Response time following request for replacement container (multi-family/commercial sector).
- Helpfulness of customer service staff (single-family sector).

The required Action Plan will include strategies to improve customer service helpfulness by refining training for new staff and providing a reference tool for customer service representatives. Regarding container delivery, Republic's strategies will adapt to supply chain challenges by establishing an alternate vendor; they will also strive to improve internal coordination and organization. For collection services, there was some progress, but still room for improvements. The improvement strategies will continue operational tactics to reduce misses, provide additional coordination on Fridays, and gather more customer feedback via Republic's informal surveys. Next steps will be to track the effectiveness of the Action Plan. Key operational metrics will be reported and analyzed. Staff will be working with Republic on their bi-monthly customer surveys and their monthly reports. Staff will return to the ESC in the fall to review the results of the next customer survey and also Republic's progress on their Action Plan.

Commissioner Dupertuis referred to customer service issues and suggested that they have reached the peak of the agreement. He asked what Republic is doing as a result of the \$50,000 penalty that they wouldn't do otherwise. He thinks the City either needs to accept what has been going on for the past eight years or dramatically rethink the penalty structure if they want things to change. If they are going to drive meaningful change, the activities in the Action Plan need to directly relate back to item being measured. He also recommended simplifying Republic's monthly data sheet.

Wendy Weiker, Republic Services, stated that customer service is a key value for Republic. It is not their intent to miss customers. She explained

that if people call in a missed collection after 3 on Friday, Republic is not able to collect it until Monday. If they call before 12 on Friday, Republic is able to get to them the same day. She is proud that their statistics are moving in the right direction. She reviewed some issues that have impacted customer service including COVID, job turnovers, and technology issues. She stated that the system is not designed to get to zero.

Commissioner Dupertuis thought they might need to re-examine reasonable levels of service. Ms. Weiker agreed and referred to the 84% overall customer satisfaction rate. Commissioner Dupertuis thought comparisons with other jurisdictions would also be helpful. Ms. Weiker agreed and noted they are not able to make changes to the survey questions which have been used for years. Commissioner Dupertuis thought that there has to be a way to evaluate the survey results.

Deputy Director Liu agreed that the overall customer satisfaction rate is acceptable but commented that the missed collections number is a very important number for City also. Commissioner Dupertuis asked what lever they have to achieve what they want. He doesn't think it is the \$50,000 penalty. Director Otal agreed. She noted that if a couple is working, they will not be home by 3:00 on Friday to know if their garbage was picked up. She asked if there is an opportunity to have Saturday pickups for missed collections. Ms. Weiker noted they are doing everything they can to address these issues and it is not their intention to leave any cans uncollected.

Chair Knezevic asked why containers got missed. Ms. Weiker noted that sometimes containers are in the wrong spot, sometimes there are new drivers or replacement drivers, sometimes gates are locked. There are a lot of reasons. She stated they have a new system for container replacement to address that issue. Chair Knezevic summarized that it sounds like there are times when the missed collection is out of the control of Republic. Ms. Weiker concurred and noted that drivers will often circle back around if cans are not out the first time. Chair Knezevic acknowledged there are issues but commented that her sense was that satisfaction is higher with single-family residents.

c) Remote Participation Approval for May 4, 2023

Motion made by Vice Chair Hines, seconded by Commissioner Dupertuis, to approve remote participation for Commissioner Strom for May 4. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion made by Vice Chair Hines, seconded by Commissioner Wan, to approve remote participation for Commissioner Dupertuis for May 4. Motion passed unanimously.

9. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

None

10. REVIEW OF COMMISSION & COUNCIL CALENDARS

Deputy Director Liu reviewed the calendars.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Chair Knezevic, seconded by Vice Chair Hines, to adjourn the meeting. Upon a roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously (4-0).

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.