

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on July 18, 2023.

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

June 6, 2023
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Singh, Commissioners Halsted, Piper, White
COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Singh, Commissioners Amirfaiz, Jain
STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Donna Adair, Asma Ahmed, Saada Hilts, Department of Parks & Community Services
COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present
POLICE LIAISON: Major Mark Tarantino
GUEST SPEAKERS: Michael Byun, Asian Counseling and Referral Service; Lalita Uppala, Indian American Community Services; Karia Wong, Chinese Information and Service Center
RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present with the exception of Vice Chair Singh and Commissioners Amirfaiz and Jain.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. May 16, 20223

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Piper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Halsted and the motion carried unanimously.

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Mansfield took a moment to note that in compliance with Washington state public

disclosure laws regarding the use of public facilities during elections, no election-related topics could be discussed during oral communications or any other public participation portions of the agenda, including promoting or opposing ballot measures, and supporting or opposing a candidate for election, including oneself. Any speaker discussing topics of such a nature will be asked to stop.

Alex Tsimerman said the most dangerous people in the world are not Democrats or Republicans they are the slaves. The current situation is extremely terrible and sickening. It is not understood why so many people, the government together with the Council, are supporting Amazon management. Amazon will bring 30,000 people to the city and it will be a nightmare. Prices will go through the roof for everything without exception. The situation was similar when Microsoft came to town. A hundred thousand people will move out of Bellevue and King County because they will not be able to afford the prices for housing, food and services. The government and Amazon only focus on making more money. It is all about control and classic Fascism. Government together with corporations controls everyone without exception.

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

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland noted having sent to the Commissioners an email regarding a tour of North Bellevue Community Center with Chinese Information and Service Center, Friday, June 23 at 10:00 a.m. It will be an opportunity to see one of the programs they are offering and to tour the facility itself.

Christy Stangland said a total of four agency monitoring visits have been completed to date and more will be scheduled.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

A. Panel Conversation: Trends and Challenges with Services to Asian and Pacific Islanders

Human Services Planner Saada Hilts asked the panelists to outline for the Commission the misconceptions or misunderstandings about Asian and Pacific Islanders. Michael Byun, executive director of Asian Counseling and Referral Service, said one misconception is the myth of the model minority. It is very challenging when folks categorize the Asian community as all being the same and facing the same underlying issues and challenges. Another misconception is the Asian community is of one mind relative to affirmative action; some do, some do not. Those who support affirmative action recognize they are riding on the shoulders of the work Black communities have done. Finally, in thinking about the provision of services, culture trumps geography.

Lalita Uppala, executive director of Indian American Community Services, said the adjectives smart, successful and privileged are often broadly applied to Asian-Americans. The fact is that

40 percent of the agency's emergency rent assistance and Covid rent dollars went to single moms of South Asian descent, many of whom are restaurant workers. It is not unusual to have five restaurant workers living together in a studio apartment in Bellevue, and the individuals cannot receive rent assistance if the apartment is not in their name. The immigrant families often do not know who to turn to when their 17-year-old is violent because of anxiety and substance abuse and is taken into custody on a Friday evening. Mental health issues do not identify by socioeconomics. The Asian-American community faces a lot of systemic racism.

Karia Wong, Chinese Information and Service Center Family Resource Support Center Director, said there are a number of misconceptions about Chinese immigrants. They are considered to be professionally trained in the high-tech field, have high incomes, and English proficient. Not all of them, however, are high-tech workers. The Chinese immigrant families served in Bellevue moved to the city because of the schools and desire to have their children to receive a good education, giving them a brighter future. Many parents work seven days per week, and often two shifts per day, mostly to combat the rising cost of living in Bellevue. Their needs often go unrecognized because of misconceptions.

On the question of what are the most significant human services needs and barriers impacting Asian and Pacific Islanders, Lalita Uppala commented that Indian American Community Services addresses basic and emergency needs across all generations. Seniors in the community do experience isolation and face a lack of affordable housing. Forty percent of South Asian women living in the United States experience domestic violence. Indian American Community Services hosts family law legal clinics, starting with one in 2017 and now five or six per week. There are also needs in terms of raising the economic abilities of women by providing employment and vocational training; helping with food and affordable housing; and helping small businesses that are still struggling to recover from the pandemic. Many of the relief grants have dried up but there are still needs in the community. There are also mental health issues faced by the community, including by the youth. The community also experiences racism.

Michael Byun added that the pandemic had a major impact on the Asian-American communities, especially the older adults who were isolated at home, and the young people who have lost significant developmental opportunities. There is a clear concern that the healthcare safety net support system has been impacted by a substantial workforce shortage and challenges involved with recruiting and hiring competent people to support the unique population. A number of clinicians who came to the United States as refugees and who have provided treatment are retiring, leaving a major gap of professionals with specific skills to deal with the issues the communities are facing. The youth face a number of intersectional identities such as being LGBTQ and Asian, transracial adoptees and Asian, or of mixed race; each of those identities requires clinicians with very specific competencies, including lived experience.

Karia Wong said those in the Chinese community are facing barriers to accessing affordable housing. Many earn too much to qualify for low-income housing, but not enough to pay market rates. Chinese Information and Service Center calls apartment operators on a regular basis to see if they have any openings, which is a labor-intensive process. Mental wellness is another major issue for the community. The community members need culturally appropriate family counseling and mental health counseling. There is a clear need for job skills training that will lead to stable

incomes, but for many who are working so much there is no time for job training.

Saada Hilts asked the panelists to provide a brief overview of the programs and services offered by their agencies that address the needs and barriers. Karia Wong said Covid changed many things, including connections to people and the community. For the past year the agency has focused on connecting to people and helping them connect with each other. In-person activities and programs have been provided at the North Bellevue Community Center. Various skills and health workshops have been offered, and systems navigation support has also been offered. Outreach has also been provided at Mini City Hall and at the agency's office, all with an eye on reaching people where they are. Many come to the agency as their last resort. An in-person pro bono service day was offered in May as part of celebrating Asian and Pacific Islanders Heritage Month which was a big boon to those who find technology challenging.

Lalita Uppala said Indian American Community Services also offers services at Mini City Hall in Crossroads. Outreach efforts also take place at the popup on Thursdays at the North Bellevue Community Center and in the Crossroads farmers market. The outreach efforts are all about meeting the community and hearing them out via focus groups and listening sessions, including at the Lake Hills library. On Thursdays at North Bellevue Community Center, multigenerational programming is offered, ranging from early childhood play and learn to senior fitness sessions, art workshops, and mental health counseling. Often that leads to one-on-one counseling sessions. During Covid the legal programming was all provided virtually, and they still are, but all other services are now offered in person. Seniors enjoy the yoga classes, and small businesses benefit from the workshops on various topics. On June 24 a night market will be hosted for the small business community in Crossroads Park. There will be 22 food vendors and 38 craft vendors, as well as live music. Elected officials are asked to come and meet with the community.

Michael Byun said Asian Counseling and Referral Service began humbly in 1973 at a time when the communities were being misdiagnosed and inappropriately institutionalized. It was very much a social justice movement. Now the organization is celebrating 50 years of a holistic approach to social services, health services and education. Individuals can receive from the agency help in developing their job skills. Those same individuals can be enrolled in citizenship classes. Their children can be enrolled in youth development programs, and older adults who often face isolation are connected with socialization programs.

The panelists were asked what challenges the agencies are experiencing that the Commission should be aware of. Michael Byun stressed the importance of focusing on prevention and addressing social determinants of health. By focusing on basic human needs upstream, much can be done in terms of achieving care for them. With regard to data, it was noted that graduation rates for Asians as a whole look amazing. However, at the granular level Southeast Asians like Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians, as well as Pacific Islanders, have graduation levels that are comparable to Black communities.

Lalita Uppala stressed the need to focus on prevention. Agencies like Indian American Community Services are asked by funders if they are paying their employees a living wage, but that requires receiving the necessary funding. Indian American Community Services is a small grassroots organization that is struggling to be able to pay health benefits to its employees,

something it is not yet able to do. Transportation continues to be a challenge for many who need to receive services, particularly for isolated seniors. Making sure that emergency rent assistance is awarded to those who need it the most is another challenge. Many of the tenant protection policies will expire in July, triggering another challenge. Ramping up support for mental health in the schools, aging communities and work places is also a challenge. It takes endless hours just to do all the required paperwork.

Karia Wong said Chinese Information and Service Center was started by a group of high school and college volunteers who saw needs of seniors in Chinatown to be connected with available resources. There are now over 17 programs offered by the agency, and there is a presence in Bellevue, Redmond and Issaquah. As the agency grows, different skills, knowledge and experiences are acquired, making it possible to serve even more people. Immigrants who are new to the area are afforded opportunities to learn and to grow by connecting to resources. The top challenge faced by the organization is bilingual staffing. There are people working in restaurants making more money than employees of the agency, and more funding is needed to address that problem. Another struggle is in managing the expectations of the funders while also working to help clients. One case may involve only a single phone call, while other cases may involve multiple calls and much more time. Economic uncertainties are certainly challenging. Covid changed many things, including family dynamics. Screen time has increased for children, and there are conflicts between parents and children regarding technology devices. The agency is not a mental health organization but needs to know what resources are available in order to make referrals. There are many therapists who are retiring, making referrals more difficult.

The Commissioners were asked to weigh in on the comments made. Chair Mansfield commented that the continued lack of availability of professional services drives prices up and causes budget issues before asking what innovative solutions are being sought, such as sharing resources or engaging in other collaborations. Michael Byun said one thing being explored is the concept of skilling up existing positions. The approach serves multiple purposes by addressing the workforce shortage issue and filling need areas. It gives individuals who are in different roles the opportunity to build up their professional skills. That affords clients access to additional services. For instance, the agency's front desk staff recognize that they are the first ones to see folks in crisis as they come through the doors. Additional support and training for them along with increases in salary will benefit everyone.

Lalita Uppala said the civic engagement navigator at Indian American Community Services spent a lot of time meeting with community members via outreach booths and the like. Her work in the community built up a high level of trust, which led to folks sharing their needs. That person is now the small business coordinator as well as the civic engagement navigator who also connects people to crisis services. In working through different jobs, different skills are learned. There have been negotiations with family law attorneys to get them to participate in the legal clinics but without paying them their typical hourly rates, and there have been successes using that approach. The same is being done with mental health counselors. There is a clear benefit in working together with other agencies.

Karia Wong said Chinese Information and Service Center receives a lot of calls for legal assistance concerning divorce. Family finances are often the root cause. By helping people gain

access to unemployment benefits and other financial assistance, the families are less inclined to seek a divorce. The family support principles the agency works with includes helping families become financially independent. Families are assisted in gaining access to child care programs, allowing both parents to work and thus relieving financial pressures on the family.

Commissioner Halsted commented on the disaggregation of the data. So much of what the Commission does boils down to a simple powerpoint or spreadsheet and is separated from interaction with people. There is a clear need to focus on the individual communities. The question asked was if there are great pilot programs in place that are doing innovative work the Commission could learn from. Lalita Uppala said there are some private foundations in the Seattle area that have decision-making tables involving community-based organizations and allowing them to comment on how evaluations and reporting is done. There is a lot of great work being done in King County by community-based organizations that are very creative and innovative in using culturally nuanced approaches that are key to building trust.

Karia Wong said Chinese Information and Service Center has several partnerships with the city of Seattle in which the city and the agency work together to develop program materials and training opportunities in culturally appropriate ways. Partnerships are vital to effective operations.

Michael Byun said Eastside Pathways is a great model. It involves bringing key stakeholders together for a coordinated effort around addressing the needs of young people. Where investment resources are limited, often the approach taken is a scarcity model. There is an opportunity for supporting regular ongoing programming provided in the community, and an opportunity to have all stakeholders and providers think collectively and to think big about long-term investments with the goal of sustainability. Small business development is another example of working with partners like Indian American Community Services or Chinese Information and Service Center where getting a CDFI designation might be an important objective. That would allow for leveraging funding resources and redeploy them to small businesses, allowing them to sustain generating some level of income to sustain their operations. Large front-end investments might be needed, but in the long run organizations can be independent by having additional resources coming through from different funding streams.

Commissioner Piper thanked the panelists for mythbusting the model minority. It is clear that the Bellevue community is not a monolith and that is important to the work the Commission does. The Commission looks at funding in terms of the human services continuum ranging from a roof overhead and food to eat to more personal development. For good reason the Commission is drawn to the acute and immediate needs, but that is sometimes to the detriment of the other. The Commission needs to be intentional and thoughtful in making sure all aspects of the continuum are addressed.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner White, Michael Byun stated that sometimes the strategies proposed by a community may not in fact be the solution. It may be that focusing on upstream preventive solutions is the better approach. For instance, out of school programming for youth can reduce instances of juveniles interacting with the criminal justice system. The Commission should consider how investing in upstream programs might prevent more costly

interactions downstream.

8. PUBLIC HEARING

A. Public Hearing on Housing, Community Development and Human Services Needs in Bellevue

A motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner Piper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Halsted and the motion carried unanimously.

Jerry Kroon with Eastside Legal Assistance Program thanked the Commission for its past funding of the organization, and the city for taking a leadership role on funding human services. The staff were also thanked for the partnerships they have created. Monitoring visits conducted by the staff is clearly evidence of a partnership. The single largest issue facing the social service agencies funded by the city is pandemic burnout. People are hearing on the news that the pandemic is over, but the lasting after effects are just starting to be seen. Through the pandemic, ELAP averaged about 350 phone calls per month; as of January 2023, that number has increased to 750 and continues to escalate. The clear need is for eviction protection as federal funding goes away.

Dale Hoover with Sound Generations said the organization deals with food insecurity, transportation, social work programs and wellness. The agency is the consummate provider of meals to senior citizens throughout the state, King County and Bellevue. In Bellevue, about 112 people are provided with food on a weekly basis. It is anticipated that the number of clients will be rising. With regard to transportation, the agency is doing a pilot program with Bellevue, Kirkland and Redmond. Thus far, 1130 trips have been made for folks who are 55 and over and those who have disabilities. Numerous letters of appreciation for the service have been received. There is a need to add another bus or two in the area. Regarding the minor home repair program, it was noted that every church and every fraternal organization in Bellevue has been visited to apprise them of the service that is available to Bellevue residents in need of home repairs. Pathways is the information and assistance arm. In Bellevue alone 125 people have been contacted, many of whom are surprised to learn all that is available to them at no charge.

Donna Lurie, board president of NAMI Eastside which serves all of East King County said there are 535,000 people living in East King County, and if one in five have a mental health condition, that is over 100,000 people. Thanks to funding received from the city, the agency has served 1069 individuals between 2020 and 2022. In 2022, 355 middle school and high school students were served by the NAMI In The Schools programs. About a hundred Bellevue residents have attended the education programs, 70 residents have attended the support groups, and 31 have received referrals to behavioral health providers and other resources in 2023. The Housing Stability Program provides specialized support groups and education for individuals and families living in Bellevue that experience homelessness, with a focus on building skills to address trauma and coping. The Women In Transitional Housing support group trains support group facilitators. NAMI Eastside can help fill the gaps where there are not professional behavioral health providers. People are trained to be facilitators for family and peer support groups. Those support groups and mental health classes can help people in the gap while they are waiting for

professional behavioral health specialists. The agency partners with many community organizations to provide culturally relevant and appropriate behavioral health support. Indian American Community Services and NAMI Eastside jointly operate a support group by Indian American Community Services members. The same is true for Centro Cultural Mexicano where Spanish language support groups are offered. Youth ambassador clubs that build empathy have also been started.

Lisa Flotland with the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, a Bellevue resident and survivor of sexual assault, reported having received therapy and legal advocacy from the agency as a client. The speaker reported having been sexually assaulted repeatedly by a high school teacher at 16 and 17 years of age and having suffered silently without telling anyone about it. One day a call was made to the 24-hour King County Sexual Assault Resource Center resource line and overnight Lisa was connected with a number of experts, including a therapist who helped process the trauma, and a legal advocate who helped understand the complicated and intimidating legal system. The legal advocate provided personal support for the entire four-hour interview with the private investigator hired by the school district. Ultimately the teacher's teaching license was surrendered. Now having become an advocate, Lisa's story can now be used for the good of others with like experiences. King County Sexual Assault Resource Center served more than 5000 individuals in 2022, half of whom were children and youth. The need continues to grow, with an increase of 11 percent of Bellevue residents requesting services between 2021 and 2022. The Commission was asked to continue its support for the services.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Piper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner White, and the motion carried unanimously.

9. OLD BUSINESS – None

10. NEW BUSINESS

A. Commissioner Requests to Participate in Future Meetings Remotely

A motion to allow Commissioner White to participate remotely for the July 18 meeting was made by Commissioner Halsted. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Piper and the motion carried unanimously.

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

12. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mansfield adjourned the meeting at 7:29 p.m.