

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on June 15, 2021

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

May 18, 2021
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Commissioners Ma, Mansfield, McClure, Mercer, Piper

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Kline, Commissioner Amirfaiz

STAFF PRESENT: Alex O'Reilly, Dee Dee Catalano, Christy Stangland,
Toni Esparza, Sara Holbrook, Department of Parks and
Community Services; Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis

GUEST SPEAKERS: Sara Sisco, Staci Sahoo, Hopelink

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Kline and Commissioner Amirfaiz, both of whom were excused, and Commissioner Mercer, who arrived at 6:40 p.m.

Vice Chair Piper 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

A. April 6, 2021

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner McClure. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mansfield and the motion carried unanimously.

B. April 20, 2021

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Mansfield. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McClure and the motion carried without dissent. Vice Chair Piper abstained from voting.

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. Transportation Options for Bellevue Residents – Hopelink Mobility Management

Human Services Manager Alex O'Reilly noted the Commission's special interest in transportation options. The Commission has spent quite a few meetings talking in-depth about the transportation needs of Bellevue residents. She introduced Sara Sisco and Staci Sahoo with the Hopelink Mobility Management team to outline some exciting developments that have occurred over the last year.

Ms. Sahoo said Hopelink was founded in the 1970s and is celebrating its 60th anniversary. The organization's vision is for a community free of poverty. More than 65,000 community members are served annually. The organization's theory of change focuses on different elements, beginning with stability and ensuring that basic needs are met. Beyond that there are programs and services to assist people from existing poverty. The issue of transportation is key in terms of access to the grocery store, to medical appointments, to jobs and to school.

Ms. Sahoo said there are a variety of transportation options and services via a number of different modes. For those traveling within Bellevue, the options include traveling by bus, such as Crossroads Connect, Uber and Lyft, other rideshare programs, and volunteer driver programs. For those needing to travel outside of Bellevue, there are options that range from ferries to street cars to the monorail. It can be very overwhelming for those in need of transportation to fully grasp what their options are and the reality is that many fall through the cracks.

Hopelink's Mobility Management program is passionate about understanding what the needs are in the community and determining who is not being served by the existing transportation network. There are three different functionalities for the mobility management team, beginning with providing travel education and resources to build awareness about the options that are available. The second focus is on supporting the coordination of special needs transportation through cross-sector collaborations, which is done through the King County Mobility Coalitions which for more than a decade served was co-chaired by Ms. O'Reilly. The third focus is on gathering data and conducting needs assessments to advocate for improved services.

Ms. Sisco explained that mobility education and outreach involves a targeted approach that allows the end user to see transportation as a resource and not a barrier. That comes into play in a number of different ways, from showing someone how to use something Crossroads Connect to showing an older adult how to use Google Maps on their phones, to connecting with other community based organizations that offer bus tickets and provide access to low-cost fares. The programming always takes a culturally appropriate approach. The program is currently undergoing a rebrand to elevate and reframe it. A multipronged approach to outreach is used that allows the end user to get the services they need.

There are three core programs in place for communicating to the community about what programs exist for them. The travel ambassador program is a train-the-trainer model. It is designed for social service agencies, medical providers and community organizations and provides them with travel resources for their employees. The training sessions are tailored to meet the needs of the specific clients served. Getting Around Puget Sound is a program that

connects King County residents with information about travel options to increase their independence and mobility. The lack of transportation creates a lot of barriers. The program works directly with those in need of transportation options. During the pandemic, the program was adapted to virtually meet with clients and get the information out. The Public Transit Orientation program is a free guided excursion on public transportation to really help folks understand how to use the transportation system. The program partners with a number of different service agencies and engages with those who have never ridden a bus before. The program is currently suspended due to the pandemic.

The Transportation Resources Line is a program done in partnership with Aging and Disabilities Services' Community Living Connection. It is a resource line to help the community better understand their transportation options. Folks can call in, ask questions, find out what transportation options that will best work for them, make individualized trip plans, and gain an understanding of what alternative services exist. The program is available Monday through Friday between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Ms. Sahoo allowed that Covid has made a huge impact on the transportation system that will reverberate for years to come. She noted, however, that the Mobility Management Program team focused on how to be supportive during the vaccine rollout by forming the King County Covid Vaccine Mobility Task Force in partnership with King County Metro and Seattle/King County Public Health. The mission of the task force is to ensure that transportation will not be a barrier to obtaining the Covid-19 vaccine, and the goals are ensuring equity in service delivery and outreach, especially for the communities most impacted by the pandemic; coordinating and optimizing transportation options; supporting the safety of drivers and riders; minimizing the impact of vaccine transportation on other services; and identifying funding and resources to expand transportation options.

Ms. Sisco said the Coordinated Vaccine Transportation Helpline is a one-stop shop for finding transportation to and from vaccine appointments in King County. Anyone who calls is eligible and can get support for themselves or for someone else. Scheduling a ride simply needs to know when and where. The helpline, which is staffed by the Mobility Management team, has been operational for a little more than two and a half months. The service operates Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Language assistance is available. The service is operated in partnership with the King County Covid Vaccine Mobility Task Force and A Regional Alliance for Resilient and Equitable Transportation. While available to anyone who calls, the program has been marketed to the BIPOC communities, seniors, immigrants, refugees, low-income individuals, individuals with disabilities, and those with limited English proficiency. Transportation can be provided to anyone, but for vaccine trips referrals are often made to specialized transportation providers who have their own eligibility requirements. The team does all it can to secure rides for clients, but cannot guarantee any specific type of ride. The earlier arrangements are made, the more options there are for fulfilling the ride. Same-day requests are typically fulfilled by Uber and Lyft. Thanks to the list of partners, there is typically no cost to clients for the ride.

The way the helpline works is a client places a call. The staff intakes the information, and because the staff understands various situations, they internalize the information and do some problem solving before calling or emailing a transportation provider to secure a ride. Staff then confirms the ride with the client, ensures that the ride occurs, and then follows up to make sure all went well.

Ms. Sisco said the helpline enjoys a 91 percent success rate of fulfilling rides. In some cases, that is due to the client rejecting the ride that is offered. The clients' main concerns range from difficulties accessing services to language barriers, limited mobility, no alternative services, safety issues, and waiting times for public transportation or other services. Rides are filled in a

number of different ways with various providers. Most of those who have used the service have been over the age of 65.

Ms. Sisco toggled over to the Find A Ride website which she noted recently underwent a major renovation to be a functional site with a lot of information for the tri-county area regarding securing a ride, mobile clinics, Covid-19 positive transportation providers, and how to schedule an appointment. Searches can be done by client location and show options for that area, or by choosing a different area to see what options are available there. The accessibility menu allows clients options such as a larger cursor and different contrast colors. There is also a glossary explaining the various transportation terms, and there is a page showing all transportation providers.

Commissioner McClure stated that there are a variety of services available to address the needs of the community, but without transportation options clients are not able to access them. Transportation is a fundamental component in getting people to services, back to work and school, and to rise out of poverty. She noted that during the pandemic a number of transportation options were not available for various reasons and she asked if transportation services are back to where they were before the pandemic or if there are still only limited services. She also asked for a high-level outline of what the needs assessment showed. Ms. Sisco said transportation services are returning to pre-Covid levels, especially the services without a fixed route. The volunteer driver programs have more and more availability as drivers become vaccinated and are willing to once again engage. A number of services that did not operate in the summer of 2020 are operating again, though there are still limits and face masks are required.

Ms. Sahoo confirmed that there has been an uptick in the number of volunteers willing to drive. From an operational aspect, the demand is not back to where it was in 2019, but it is above where it was in 2020. Social distancing requirements remain in place, but they may change going forward. With regard to the needs assessment, she said it addressed all of King County. The assessment took the form of a meta analysis in that a total of 49 needs assessments were reviewed. There were five high-level needs that rose to the top: 1) populations residing in the rural and suburban areas of King County need better options to get to employment and medical centers; there is a need for folks to be able to get around their own communities; individuals with limited English proficiency face barriers in understanding what options are available, so resources need to be made available in more languages; many simply feel overwhelmed by all the transportation options and need help in understanding what they are eligible for; and there is a need to access employment centers during the traditional off-peak hours.

Ms. O'Reilly said she would make the needs assessment available to the Commissioners.

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland said the Bellevue Network on Aging has had conversations about people not being able to get to community centers, social events and grocery stores. Many seniors are not low income enough to qualify for many services, but at the same time are not always able to pay for Uber and Lyft. She asked how the Bellevue Network on Aging could advocate for making sure resources when they become available will address those gaps. Ms. Sahoo said her team is aware of the gap that exists in suburban areas, including Bellevue. She said the Bellevue Network on Aging has been a big partner with Hopelink for many years and will continue to be going forward. Crossroads Connect is a showcase service showing what transportation options are available on the Eastside. Having a plan in place once the needs are scoped out and the gaps are identified will help to move things in the right direction.

Ms. O'Reilly noted that prior to the pandemic the group was working with King County Metro

to develop some routes for the Hyde shuttle program. As normalcy returns, other viable opportunities will come online.

Commissioner Mercer said off-hour transportation options was an issue raised by the Commission when going through the process with King County Metro. She asked how the Hopelink Mobility Management program supports those who need rides during the off hours, especially the homeless population that might have to get to an early or late appointment. Ms. Sahoo allowed that there is a huge gap. There are some options available to address the gap but they are limited. Most transportation options are not available 24 hours a day. Across the country there are some creative rideshare solutions for qualifying riders with off-hour appointments and work times, but in King County options are fairly limited. Ms. Sisco said the work done with the King County Mobility Coalition allows for advocating with transit providers so they can understand the problem and try to find solutions. In the meantime, the Mobility Management team is taking the programs that are in place and trying to make them work.

Ms. O'Reilly said the human services staff is willing to help facilitate training for providers in the community.

B. 2021 Washington State Legislative Session Update

Ms. O'Reilly said the human services department has over the years had wonderful interns from the University of Washington School of Social Work. Sara Holbrook has served for the past year and is very close to graduating with a Master's Degree in Social Work. She has been tracking the state legislative session.

Ms. Holbrook said during her tenure with the city over the past year she dedicated time to learning more about advocacy, policy and the legislative process. She said her efforts involved attending advocacy meetings, following priorities, summarizing information and tracking bills through the process in what has been an unprecedented year.

Ms. Holbrook stated that going into the session Washington was facing an \$8.8 billion deficit, which caused a lot of concern that there would be deep cuts to human services. However, with federal funds, a strong revenue forecast and new revenue measures, the legislature passed a budget that is both strong and ground breaking. Instead of drastic cuts, significant investments were made in human services aimed at meeting basic needs. The session was conducted completely remotely for the first time ever, including all hearings, all meetings with constituents, floor debates and votes. Some technical issues were encountered, but overall the process greatly expanded access for people all across the state. It is likely the remote participation option will continue in future sessions.

The legislature passed 335 bills, the lowest number for a 105-day session since 1983. However, the bills that were approved included some very bold approaches, some of which have been in the works for many years. The Working Family Tax Credits bill was approved 13 years ago but was never fully funded until this year, highlighting the fact that advocacy takes long and hard dedication.

The legislative session addressed everything the Commission has focused on over the past year, including the threat of evictions; the need for rental assistance; rising food insecurity; the mental health crisis, especially for youth and isolated seniors; increasing domestic violence incidents; issues of public safety; homelessness; substance abuse disorders; the disproportionality of the impacts from Covid-19 on members of the BIPOC, immigrant and refugee communities; and the rise in hate crimes and discrimination.

Tax Credits for Working Families was passed in 2008. Now that it has been funded, it is expected to have a huge impact on children in poverty. For the mother of three children in Bellevue who might be a survivor of domestic violence and who is barely making ends meet will have an extra \$1200 in her pocket for basic needs. Currently, low-income workers pay 17 percent of their incomes in taxes, while upper earners pay less than three percent. The bill will directly translate into helping those who are the most vulnerable and the most affected by the pandemic, including women, BIPOC community members, and the survivors of domestic violence.

HB 1236 put an end to no cause evictions. That directly affects those who face housing discrimination. For the low-income Eastside renter who is trying to stay in their apartment will not have to worry about their lease not being renewed for no particular reason. Children will be able to stay in their schools, and employees will be able to maintain employment to support the growing economy. Fewer numbers of family will face homelessness, need shelter, have to seek financial assistance or unemployment and other benefits.

SB 5160 provides renters facing eviction with a right to counsel. It also provides landlords with access to rental assistance, making it a win-win for all involved. The protections will help to stabilize the community and support economic recovery. The statistics show that for tenants who are represented in court, 80 percent are able to avoid a costly eviction.

HB 1151 bolsters the economy by updating the standard of need for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The program makes it possible for low-income families to pay for food, shelter and utilities. TANF has not been updated since 1991.

SB 5214 makes allowances for families to receive TANF benefits beyond the 60-month lifetime limit, and it also allows for one-time emergency assistance.

HB 1342 addresses food insecurity by eliminating co-pays for families who are eligible for school lunch. Homelessness is directly affected by HB 1069, HB 1070 and HB 1083 by providing cities and counties with fiscal flexibility in using taxes to reduce homelessness by purchasing properties for affordable housing and facilities. HB 1220 supports emergency shelters and housing. HB 1108 helps homeowners navigate foreclosure. HB 1218 improves health, safety and quality of life for residents of long-term care facilities. It mandates disaster plans, visitation rights and better communications. SB 5237 expands access to affordable child care, which has proven to be critical for families and to the economy.

Ms. Holbrook said the legislative session was historic and innovative. All business was conducted virtually, which made it possible for people in all areas of the state to participate. The legislation was dominated by a sense of urgency, purpose, focus and priorities, largely because so many people were hurting.

Ms. Holbrook said the Eastside Human Services Forum sets an agenda annually prior to each legislative session outlining their priorities. She said one of her tasks was to collaborate with the intern for United Way of King County. She said together they attended meetings, including Bellevue Network on Aging meetings, to better understand the priorities and then to draft a legislative supplemental for the Eastside Human Services Forum and the United Way of King County. Creating the supplemental required an understanding of the bills before the legislature and the Forum's agenda, and then synthesizing critical points into a digestible document for many audiences. It was amazing to watch the level of engagement and advocacy of the Forum and of the Bellevue Network on Aging, and to see how much influence community members have in the process. The supplemental contained relevant information based on each priority, and the associated spreadsheet that was created served as a way to track progress and to indicate where contacting a legislator might make a difference. The bills

that aligned with the Forum's legislative agenda were categorized and included descriptions, key components, status, sponsors and notes. A similar spreadsheet was created for United Way of King County.

Ms. Holbrook said her experience as an intern with the city helped to satisfy her genuine curiosity about how government works. She said her 18 years of experience working with people experiencing homelessness, and that the driving force behind her returning to school was to better understand complex systems in order to improve them. She said she had not previously had a grasp on how government work and the impact advocacy and policy can have. All social workers should have that knowledge. She said prior to her internship she had no idea how many layers of thoughtful planning, rewriting and reviewing edits goes into the planning and preparation of an RFP process. She said she has come away in awe of the division's attention to detail, focus, work ethic and demonstrated commitment to equity, social justice and transparency. She thanked Ms. Stangland, Ms. Catalano, Mr. Esadean and Ms. Ekstrom, and her supervisor Ms. O'Reilly who proved to be an excellent teacher in many ways. She also thanked the Commission for allowing her to attend the meetings and learn how the body functions. She said going forward she hoped to work in government impacting the most vulnerable in the community.

Commissioner McClure thanked Ms. Holbrook for her participation. She said a question often raised in regard to new bills is how they are funded. She asked if funding primarily comes from taxes or a redistribution of other funding sources, or from new federal grants. Ms. Holbrook said from her limited experience it appeared to her that multiple sources of new revenues have been brought into play. The legislature has allowed for more flexibility in how tax revenues can be spent, and there have been federal dollars brought into the mix, particularly in terms of Covid relief. Ms. O'Reilly agreed that there has been a huge infusion of federal dollars. The question is how long the federal funds will continue to flow in to the states. Another source of funding has to do with improvements in the economy and thus increased tax revenues. With regard to funding affordable housing and homelessness, the fees paid by people when recording titles and the like were increased and earmarked for that purpose.

Ms. O'Reilly commented that Ms. Holbrook and her counterpart at the United Way of King County did an amazing job in putting together the spreadsheet, which is a huge work in progress. They spent a great deal of time on the legislature's website tracking the various bills, and they did a lot of looking into who was sponsoring which bills, and focused particularly on the Eastside legislative district and determined who might need more education on whether or not to vote for a bill given how it would affect their constituents.

Commissioner Ma congratulated Ms. Holbrook on her work and upcoming graduation. He asked her how she sees the issue of all testimony before the legislature being remote playing out over time. Ms. Holbrook said she would not go so far as to say that will be the preferred method of taking testimony in the future, but it likely will be offered as an option. She said it was amazing to see how diverse and widespread the remote testimony was.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis thanked Ms. Holbrook for her services to the city of Bellevue and for the great presentation.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. O'Reilly informed the Commissioners that on May 14 the RFP for the funds collected through the new sales tax approved by the Council in late 2020 was released. The release was sent to a wide variety who might want to apply for the funds. The due date is June 4. She also reported that the city is contracting with Communities Rise, a non-profit technical assistance

agency that focuses on agencies working with underrepresented communities who are wanting to build their capacity. They will be providing assistance to those wanting to apply for grant dollars. At the Commission's June 1 meeting, there will be a public hearing for human services needs for the CDBG grants, and there will be a deep dive into the priorities of the grant and the details the Commission will need to have in order to begin deliberations around how the funds should be allocated. The Commission will be making allocation recommendations to the Council for just over \$1.6 million.

Ms. Catalano informed the Commissioners that on May 14 HUD notified the city of a mistake made by them in the formula used to determine the 2021 entitlement amounts for all communities around the country. She said the city will be getting a 1.47 percent increase over what they had originally said the amount would be, bringing the new total to \$841,239. That means the contingency plan will kick in, with more going to planning and administration up to the 20 percent cap, and the balance going to the Seattle Business Education Hub's micro enterprise assistance program, bringing its total award up to \$102,000.

Ms. Stangland noted that along with Chair Kline she made a presentation to the Parks and Community Services Board on May 11. There was a lot of great feedback offered regarding the Needs Update and how it is used.

9. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Stangland announced that Sam Esadean, the city's longtime home repair loan specialist, retired in March. Donna Adair, formerly with Habitat for Humanity, was hired to take on the position.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Ma. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mercer and the motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chair Piper adjourned the meeting at 7:44 p.m.