

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on August 16, 2011

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

July 19, 2011
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Beighle, Commissioners Bruels, Habib, Perelman, Plaskon, Stout

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Yantis

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Leslie, Alex O'Reilly, Joseph Adriano, Megan Farwell, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. by Chair Beighle who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Perelman, who arrived at 6:35 p.m., and Commissioner Yantis who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. June 7, 2011

Chair Beighle called attention to the third paragraph on page 2 and asked that the minutes be amended to reflect that she attended the ARCH housing tour as well.

Commissioner Bruels noted the second paragraph on the same page and said he had not attended the Youth Link awards ceremony.

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Stout. Second was by Commissioner Plaskon and the motion carried unanimously.

B. June 21, 2011

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Stout. Second was by Commissioner Bruels and the motion carried unanimously.

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Bruels reported that he attended the open house for the new Swedish Issaquah hospital. He said more than twice the number of visitors than expected attended. The facility is only partially open; the full hospital will not open until fall.

Commissioner Plaskon noted that he attended the open house as well.

Human Services Manager Emily Leslie informed the Commission that on July 5 the Council endorsed the Veterans and Human Services Levy. The other Eastside cities that have endorsed the levy as well are Kirkland and Redmond. She noted that Issaquah would not be taking a position.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly welcomed Megan Farwell back for a second round of internship with the department.

6. PUBLIC HEARING

A. 2012 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funding Recommendations

Grant Coordinator Joseph Adriano noted the receipt of a comment in the form of a letter from Senior Services and said it would be included in the record. He reminded the Commissioners that the recommendation from the Commission will be presented to the City Council in October, and said the Council must approve the recommendations by early November.

Motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner Bruels. Second was by Commissioner Stout and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Andrea Meewes Sanchez spoke representing Senior Services and explained that the Minor Home Repair Program helps elderly and disabled residents and homeowners living in their own homes safely and longer. The program has historically been supported by CDBG funds, and the proposed 33 percent funding cut comes at a time when demand for the program is very high. In 2010 the projection was that 111 minor home repairs would be made for Bellevue clients, but in reality more than 200 were served with the CDBG funds. Many of the clients would not be able to afford the repair work without the program; that could mean degradation of the housing stock and potentially putting people at risk from falls. Things like secure

handrails and fixing stairways can go a long way toward preventing falls. The cost to home repair clients is only \$10 per hour plus the cost of materials, but the proposed funding cuts will mean either increasing the costs to the clients or reducing the overall number of clients served. The Commission was asked to reconsider its funding proposal for 2012.

Ms. Trinese Clark, Family Development Program manager for Hopelink, thanked the Commission for its past support. She said continued support for the program is imperative. Hopelink uses CDBG funds to help Bellevue residents prepare for and achieve employment, a service which is more important than ever before. The city's 2009 telephone survey found that 49 percent of the respondents rated not having work to support themselves or their families as a moderate or major issue of concern. A recent report from the Human Services Policy Center indicated that with the unemployment rate surpassing nine percent in the state, an additional 37,000 children were expected to enter poverty status in 2009. The minimum wage in Washington State is the highest in the country, but an adult making only minimum wage and supporting two children still falls under the federal poverty level for a family of three. The Family Development Program works to mitigate poverty through comprehensive strength-based case management and goal setting. The employment program is a collaborative effort between the Family Development Program and Hopelink's Employment Program. The program provides long-term intensive case management services and employment support to unemployed and underemployed families who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Participants work with trained family development specialists to develop employment goals and tasks that will aid in developing the tools and skills necessary to secure a livable wage and eradicate barriers to self sufficiency. The staff provide job coaching, job development, job placement, and post-employment support to ensure long-term success. During the 2010 program year, 92 percent of the participants who reside in north and east King County followed a course of action to develop and strengthen job readiness. The support of the city is needed more than ever before.

Mr. Arthur Sullivan with ARCH thanked the Commission for its past support of the Housing Trust Fund. He said the Housing Trust Fund is a vehicle that member cities use to provide support for long-term affordable housing. Since ARCH was established, more than \$32 million in land, cash and fee waivers have been provided to support more than 2500 units of affordable housing. The Housing Trust Fund is only one of several areas ARCH works with to support efforts for affordable housing; the housing tour and Housing 101 are two other means used. Recent projects include Imagine Housing, formerly St. Andrew's Housing, which will be 75 percent for the homeless and 25 percent for low-income families; and preservation of the Evergreen Court facility for seniors.

Motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Plaskon. Second was by Commissioner Bruels and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Perelman referred to the draft contingency plan and said it was her recollection that the Commission had worded the decreased funding option such that funding for the two programs would reduce proportionally until both reached zero.

Commissioner Stout said she was troubled by the letter from Senior Services and the information presented orally by the agency's representative. She stressed that the Commission's proposal is not intended to be punitive in any way; it simply reflects the reality the Commission must deal with.

Commissioner Bruels agreed that the Minor Home Repair program serves the public health by helping to prevent falls. He said he hoped the agency understands that the point is not lost on the Commission.

Commissioner Habib asked if there is a sense of which consequence – fewer projects overall or increased cost for the clients – will result from the proposed funding reduction. Mr. Adriano said it was his understanding that the program would take on fewer clients. It is conceivable that the cost to clients would be increased, but such increases would need to apply to clients in Seattle and Shoreline as well, which are the other two cities that fund the program.

Commissioner Stout said an article in the *Washington Post* recently focused on the implications of the coming increases in Medicare costs. The article pointed out that only about five percent of the nation's seniors have disposal incomes. The annual increases ranging from \$6000 to \$12,000 will not be able to be met by most seniors. Along those lines, increasing program fees for seniors who desperately need services will not solve the problem.

Commissioner Perelman asked if clients applying for the Senior Services program also apply for the city's Major Home Repair program. Ms. O'Reilly said the minor jobs done through the Senior Services program are too small for the Major Home Repair program. The latter involves securing a lien on the property title which incurs certain costs; it would not be cost-effective to use that program for minor repairs.

Commissioner Bruels asked if anything more has been heard from the federal government about what the actual allocation to Bellevue will be. Ms. Leslie said Congress remains in disarray and as such it is very hard to say what will ultimately happen. Lobbying in favor of CDBG funding is going on, but what the outcome will be remains an unknown.

Motion to accept the 2012 CDBG funding proposal as outlined by the Commission, and the contingency plan as revised by Commissioner Perelman, was made by Commissioner Plaskon. Second was by Commissioner Bruels and the motion carried unanimously.

7. DISCUSSION

A. Update on the Results of the Phone Survey for the 2011-2012 Needs Update

Ms. O'Reilly said every attempt is made to get information from a variety of sources in the community to help understand the human services trends. The phone/online survey wrapped up with 409 resident respondents. There were a total of 22 community conversations conducted, and 53 providers completed the online survey. To date there have been 12 key informant interviews, with a few more to follow. The faith community completed their survey online, and 145 consumers completed the survey as well. The consumer surveys were translated into five languages in addition to English and were distributed to community partners where they were filled out.

Two years ago when the Needs Update was being addressed, the conclusion was reached that things needed to move beyond a mere phone survey because of the increased number of cell-phone-only households. Other departments tested the waters with online surveys and found success. The focus changed from a random phone-only survey to an address-based sampling with multiple modes of data collection. The work focused on a representative sampling generated from addresses received from the US Postal Service. The survey company matched the addresses against phone numbers. Those with phone numbers were sent a letter informing them they would be called to participate in a phone survey; those without phone numbers were sent a letter asking them to fill out the online survey. There were 256 surveys completed by phone and 153 completed online.

The online respondents filled in the gaps in representation noted during previous surveys relative to the city's population. They were more likely to be male, newer residents of the city, to live in multifamily housing as renters, and to use cell phones only. They also happened to be younger. Previous surveys have experienced overrepresentation by older adults; in 2009 52 percent of the phone survey respondents were 55 or older.

Ms. O'Reilly said in the future it will become even more important to get to the non English-speaking population. Past surveys have offered the respondents the opportunity to be called back by someone speaking their language. In 2009, out of the 440 who completed the survey, 32 took the survey in a language other than English. The same offer was made to the phone survey respondents for the most recent survey, though only two responded; the online survey was not available in translated versions due to budgetary limits. Both the online and phone surveys included a question about the languages spoken in the home of the respondent. Of the 153 respondents to the online survey, 114 indicated that a language other than English was spoken in their homes, for a total of 25 different languages.

Ms. O'Reilly said a very high percentage of the survey respondents rated Bellevue as a good or excellent place to live. That information closely matches the data received from other city surveys.

For the latest survey, there was a significant increase in the percentage of respondents who highlighted more than ten problems in the community compared to the 2009 survey; 40 percent gave that response, which compares to 29 percent in 2009. Conversely, in 2009, 15 percent said there were no problems in the community, but in the latest survey only nine percent had that response. Ms. O'Reilly stressed that responses to community level problems is very sensitive to the perceptions at the time of the survey. For instance, the occurrence of burglaries in their neighborhood prior to responding to the survey could trigger a response that there are indeed problems in their community.

Ever since the survey was first conducted in 1988, the lack of affordable housing has been viewed by the respondents as the largest community problem.

Commissioner Habib suggested it would be helpful to know the value of the homes in which the respondents live in understanding their responses relative to affordable housing.

Ms. O'Reilly noted that unemployment, lack of medical insurance and lack of affordable medical care are three issues that are also traditionally high on the list of community problems. All three were in the top tier in the 2009 survey, but in the most recent survey they climbed to a higher degree of concern.

With regard to household problems, 19 percent indicated having six or more problems in their personal lives; that number was 14 percent in 2009. Younger residents, people with incomes below \$25,000 per year, those whose first language is not English, renters and the unemployed tend to report having an above-average number of household problems. There was no significant change in the number of household problems between the 2007 and 2009 and the 2009 and 2011 surveys.

The first tier of household problems, which are those that received the highest number of mentions, had four groupings: inadequate public transportation, anxiety, not finding work to support self or family, and difficulty in budgeting the available money. The issues that appear lowest on the list include domestic violence, child abuse and neglect; while those may not be the highest problems in a respondent's household, those problems historically are underreported for various reasons.

Ms. O'Reilly said the current survey takes about 25 minutes to complete by phone. For that reason, adding too many more questions is not advised. However, the qualitative interactions, including the community conversations and the key informant interviews, were asking what impact the economy was having on individuals and families. The survey company researched questions asked in other surveys and settled on a series of three questions: 1) were you unemployed other than by choice

at any time during the past year; 2) what happened to your income during the past year, did it increase, decrease or stay the same; and 3) how affected have you personally been by the current recession. Sixty-four percent of the online and phone survey respondents stated that they had been negatively impacted by the economy in one of those three ways.

The survey included several questions about adequate access to human services in the community. In 2009 significantly more people, 76 percent, indicated they had adequate access to human services; that percentage fell to 61 percent in the 2011 survey. That finding bolsters what has been heard from providers. For various reasons, human services are getting harder to access.

The responses to the question about residents seeking help has fluctuated over the years. The percentage of respondents seeking help increased significantly between 2009 and 2011.

The respondents reporting having had one or more major problem are asked by the survey if they sought help for their problems. In the most recently survey, a little over half indicated they had not sought help, which compares to 30 percent in the 2009 survey. Of those who said they did seek help, the majority stated that they found help; only 23 percent did not find help. Of those who reported finding help, 81 percent stated that they were satisfied with the help they received. The satisfied group had a much higher percentage in the 2009 survey. Those who sought help reported difficulties in finding the help they needed in terms of medical issues, employment and house. The barriers to finding help reported included eligibility, not knowing where to find help, and inability to pay. With shrinking budgets, providers are having to tighten eligibility requirements, which makes receiving help more difficult for many.

Commissioner Bruels said eligibility requirements are a game changer for everyone involved, not only for the clients but also for the 2-1-1 system and those who make referrals. It would be worse to give a referral to someone who is ineligible than to give no referral at all.

Ms. O'Reilly said the next steps will be to finish up the data collection, doing the analysis, and writing up the report. A draft will be ready for the Commission's review around the last week of August.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Leslie suggested that the Commission should meet once during the month of August and proposed August 16. The Commission concurred.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Beighle adjourned the meeting at 8:10 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date