

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

June 2, 2009
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Stout, Commissioners Beighle, Hoople, Huenefeld-Gese, Plaskon, Yantis

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Leslie, Alex O'Reilly, Joseph Adriano, Warren Leyh, Cathy Von Wald, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Lynn Robinson, Berta Seltzer, Network on Aging

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Chair Stout who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. May 5, 2009

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

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Hoople reported that he attended the Special Olympics at Fort Lewis.

Chair Stout noted that the presentation of the CBDG-R to the City Council on June 1 went very well. There was one question about the administrative funds which was handled nicely by Human Services Manager Emily Leslie. The staff did an excellent job in putting together the materials.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly provided the Commissioners with copies of the 2008 annual report of the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative.

Ms. O'Reilly announced that the intern Warren Leyh had completed his term and that June 3 would be his last day. She added that on June 10 he would be graduating from the University of Washington with a Masters Degree in Social Work. She said he has been great to work with and an integral part of the team.

Chair Stout thanked Mr. Leyh for his invaluable contributions.

Ms. O'Reilly said she and Mr. Leyh attended the SOAR conference entitled Putting the Pieces Together. Some 300 were in attendance. The focus of the event was on youth violence prevention.

Chair Stout thanked the Network on Aging for attending the June 1 Council meeting to highlight World Elder Abuse Day.

6. DISCUSSION

A. Update from Bellevue Network on Aging on their 2008 Annual Report, Including Their 2009 Work Plan

Community Services Supervisor Cathy VonWald reported that May is Older Americans Month. She provided the Commissioners with copies of the 2009 work plan for the Network on Aging as well copies of the 2008 report on accomplishments.

Network on Aging Chair Lynn Robinson and member Berta Seltzer shared with the Commission a Power Point presentation developed by the Network that has been shared with neighborhood associations, churches and neighborhood groups. Chair Robinson said the Network was formed in 2006 as a citizen advisory board and was charged with communicating with and advocating for older Bellevue residents.

Chair Robinson pointed out that the aging population of the nation is growing at a very quick rate due to improved longevity and the Baby Boom that started during the 1940s. Additionally, there are components of life that contribute to people living longer, including excellent health care, having a purpose in life, exercise and general physical activity, lifestyle choices, social engagements, nutrition, and caregiving. There is a need for the city, community and neighbors to prepare for the influx of elder adults, and there are challenges to be faced, including mobility, healthcare, access to services, housing, employment, learning, arts and entertainment.

Aging in place is important. Older Americans are not sitting on the margins of society, rather they are choosing to be participants instead of spectators. They are active, curious and savvy, and they have high expectations of life.

Ms. Seltzer said the Network on Aging advocates for and takes action on the wide range of issues and initiatives that affect elder adults, including transportation legislation, housing, and protective issues such as abuse, scams and identity theft. There are a multitude of needs to be met ranging from medical to caregiving to a city embracing accommodating and embracing all people. Older persons lead more vital lives when they can maintain their independence and live in a community that values and services them well.

Continuing, Ms. Seltzer said the purpose of the Network on Aging is to support the mission of aging services in Bellevue through effective and systematic outreach, regional collaboration, and community involvement with a unified voice. The Network's goals are to effectively serve older adults in Bellevue; communicate older adult needs and provide a forum for that communication; strengthen community outreach to inform and connect older adults with the necessary resources; create a unified voice for older adults in Bellevue; create an environment that makes Bellevue a livable community where older adults have the ability to successfully age in place; gain the respect and knowledge of older adults in Bellevue; set the standard in the region for older adult services through an annual forum of regional senior services providers; and to create a regional approach to serving older adults.

The work plan for 2009 includes advocating for affordable senior housing and increased mobility options for older adults; performing extensive research resulting in informational tools to increase awareness and knowledge of how to meet the many daunting needs of older adults; and providing community information about safety and support programs specifically available for older adults in the community. The Network is forward thinking in its vision and services; as such it adjusts its workload as the dynamic environment yields new challenges.

Chair Robinson said outreach is the action taken by the Network. The Network delivers what it knows and learns to the community, putting hands and feet to its stated purpose. The group has produced and created videos for programming in Bellevue TV on topics such as older adult abuse awareness, state Attorney General Rob McKenna's presentation in April on older adult abuse and victimization, and a promotional piece on the Bus Buddy program. New outreach ideas are always welcome.

The Network has been blessed by its many regional partnerships, all of which have contributed to the successes the Network has enjoyed. The organization has linked up with other cities, such as Kirkland and Redmond, to share information and develop common solutions. Several exciting programs have been implemented, such as the Vial of Life in partnership with Medic One and Bartell's Drugs. The Network is actively involved in having a voice and influence on certain issues pending before the legislature. Letters have been written to legislators in support of retaining the Volunteer Adult Day Healthcare and the Housing Trust Fund.

Aging adults love choices. They want information and the more sources the better. They are not afraid to make decisions, but they want to do so on their own clock and on their own terms. They want many things and they want them now; the ideal is to have something delivered before they even knew they wanted it, and yesterday would be just fine. Elder adults lean more toward being independent and would prefer not to blend in with the crowd. It must be kept in mind, however, that older adults are ethnically, sociologically and economically diverse, certainly more than their parent's generation.

Chair Robinson said the Network tells the story and anxiously seeks to get information out to those who need it. There are far too many who lack knowledge about where and how to navigate resources for critical information. The Network scrutinizes the resources and draws down the information so that diverse populations can use it for their purposes. The information is even translated into Spanish, Chinese and Russian.

The city offers many excellent resources. In making presentations, Network representatives find residents are amazed to learn how much the city cares for older adults.

Hospitals make great partners. Overlake Hospital is a giant contributor to and advocate for human services and senior initiatives in Bellevue, and they are continually offering new programs to raise the quality of life of older adults. In Kirkland, Evergreen is doing the same. Additional resources are coming online because of the relocation of Group Health.

Often those who need the most assistance are the least capable of accessing the resources. It then falls for their family members and friends to assist them. The Network advocates the handful of help concept by encouraging everyone to reach out to five neighbors near them. The approach has proved valuable in reaching out to shut-ins and in fostering communication between neighbors.

The bookmark created by the Network has on it three telephone numbers of great importance to older adults with needs, including 2-1-1.

Commissioner Beighle asked if steps are being taken to create a facility for seniors in the downtown area. Chair Robinson said one possibility under discussion is creating underground parking for the library in the Ashwood district and using the space above it to create a community center. The concept could be further enhanced if affordable senior housing were to be included on the upper floors of the building.

Commissioner Hoople suggested the presentation should include the notion of respite care which is so important to those who provide care to older adults.

Chair Robinson noted that anyone with a neighbor or someone they are concerned about can call the police and ask for a welfare check. The police will come out and they will not leave until they make contact with the person.

Commissioner Plaskon said his experience has been that the elder population shies away from advocating for themselves. They do not want to be seen as a burden, and they do not have to rely on someone because that would mean losing their independence. As a result, they often do not ask for help. If in telling elders about the services available they are told that in fact they are entitled to receive them, they will be more likely to access them because they will not feel like they are asking for help.

7. DISCUSSION

A. Preliminary Findings from the Human Services Needs Update Phone Survey

Ms. O'Reilly said wisdom truly does begin with wonder. She said good decision making in the near future in terms of allocating staff time and funding must be predicated on a clear interpretation of the findings of the Needs Update phone survey of over 400 residents, the 22 community conversations, the 60 provider surveys, the 12 key informant interviews, the faith community survey, the business survey, the consumer surveys, and the key indicators from previous years.

Ms. O'Reilly reminded the Commissioners that the same telephone survey company, Opinion Research Corporation, has been used for the past four surveys. A total of 441 surveys were completed, 409 in English and the rest in a mix of languages. The increase in the number of persons who are giving up landline telephones in favor of cell phones is resulting in persons not being reached by the random dialing of landlines only. Consideration is being given to including a random sample of calls to cell phones in two years when the survey is conducted again.

Ms. O'Reilly said the first few questions of the survey are aimed at finding out how people feel about living in Bellevue. The vast majority of respondents, 94 percent, indicated that Bellevue is an excellent or good place to live; that is two points higher than the last survey. Older residents were more likely to rate Bellevue as a good place to live, while those who believe there are many community problems were least likely to give the city a high livability rating. Higher income respondents were also more likely to give an excellent or good rating.

A high percentage, 85 percent, of the respondents indicated Bellevue has one or more community problems. The community problems questions are, of course, the most susceptible to what is going on in the world at the time. If there has been a break-in in the respondent's community recently, they may report unsafe living conditions, whereas those without any recent neighborhood incidents may report just the opposite.

The top community problems rated as major or moderate were lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable medical insurance, unemployment, lack of affordable medical care, and people not knowing how to manage personal finances. Those responses closely mirror the results of the 2007 survey. There were some surprises, however. For instance, hunger did not show up in the top tier. That could be because when the survey was done in March it was less of an issue than it has become; another reason could be that the mean age of the survey respondents was 55. Also somewhat surprising was the fact that affordable housing was rated significantly lower as a problem than it was in 2007.

Chair Stout suggested that the dramatic changes to the economic picture and to people's personal situations over the past four or five months should trigger the need to be especially careful in interpreting the survey results.

Commissioner Huenefeld-Gese added that the perception is that Bellevue is a prosperous place. She suggested that could lead to the belief that while hunger is an issue elsewhere it is not an issue in Bellevue.

Ms. O'Reilly noted that unemployment was rated higher as a community problem in 2009 than it was in 2007.

With regard to household problems, Ms. O'Reilly said the respondents were asked to call on their own experiences in providing answers to the survey questions. About half reported that they did have some household problems, which was similar to 2007. The areas rated the highest matched those from 2007, with the exception of inadequate public transportation which moved up to take first place.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Hoople, Ms. O'Reilly commented that the household problems have consistently had lower percentages than the personal problems in all of the surveys done to date. She suggested that even in an anonymous survey it is more difficult to talk about personal problems. That is why it is so important to round out the quantitative data with the qualitative data generated from the non-survey sources.

The survey included questions about health-seeking behaviors and finding assistance. Ms. O'Reilly said the proportion of residents who reported seeking help was comparable to the 2007 results. More than a third of the 2009 respondents who indicated they looked for help said they did not find it. The reasons they cited were lack of medical insurance, lack of funds to pay for medical assistance, financial assistance, and transportation.

Mr. Leyh noted that a Commissioner participated in almost every community conversation. During each conversation detailed notes were taken, and those notes were written up in narrative form. A matrix was created that included every single comment from each community conversation, categorized by the five goal areas

singled out for the 2007 Needs Update and a new section focused on the effects of the economy.

The key themes in the first goal area, Food to Eat and a Roof Overhead, were increased homelessness, the need for affordable housing options, food security and the need for fresh foods at the food banks, meal programs, and an increased need for programs that help with utilities and general finances.

Commissioner Beighle suggested that the fact that food banks have been running out of food should be included in the food security section.

The key themes in the second goal area, Supportive Relationships Within Families, Neighborhoods and Communities, were access to information about resources, where to look for services, service provider eligibility issues, language services, the need for legal support, the need for parenting support, and the need for low-cost recreation options for families.

Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence and Abuse was the third goal area. The key themes were housing, mental health services, legal support, culturally specific services, youth gang involvement and pre-gang behaviors, increased incidents of domestic violence, and people staying in unsafe domestic violence situations longer due to economics.

The key themes in the fourth goal area, Healthcare to be as Physically and Mentally Fit as Possible, included healthcare insurance for adults, mental health services, dental care, prescription drug assistance, and transportation and child care for medical appointments. When people lose their jobs they lose their healthcare, and people not previously in need of help are now.

The fifth goal area, Education and Jobs Skills to Lead an Independent Life, had as its key themes employment needs, living wage jobs, transportation for employment, income eligibility issues, employment support, child care, help with education costs, recreation needs for school-aged children, and storage for the belongings of homeless folks.

People who have never needed help before need it now. There is an increased need for family recreation options and child care. People are having to move out of Bellevue for financial reasons, and agencies are losing funding from both donors and other revenue streams. There is increased stress within families, and the incidence of domestic violence situations has increased. Agencies are seeing a higher volume of referrals involving people with very complicated situations, and people are staying dependent on services for longer periods of time.

Mr. Leyh said the Survey Monkey tool was used for the provider survey. About 120 providers were asked to take the survey for each of their programs. A total of 60 surveys were completed and returned. Ninety-four percent reported an increased

demand for their services. Sixty-nine percent reported changes in the types of clients using their services, and 48 percent reported having waiting lists for their services.

The reported barriers to service closely mirrored those reported in 2007. They included transportation, costs, not knowing where to find help, language issues, and ineligibility.

A majority of the providers indicated that donations have fallen off, though five percent reported increased donations and 36 percent indicated their donations have remained about the same. Eighty-three percent of the providers reported receiving cuts in county, state or federal funding. When funding is reduced, staffing must be reduced, which makes it difficult to provide the needed services.

Ms. O'Reilly said the next steps will be to finish the data collection and analysis. The consumer surveys are still coming in. Staff is poised to begin the daunting task of writing the report; the first draft should be ready for release to the Commission by the end of August.

Commissioner Hoople observed that the phone survey did not garner much input from the Latino population. He asked if that population will be directly appealed to through the consumer survey. Ms. O'Reilly said the highest number of surveys completed in a language other than English are completed in Spanish. Some connections in the Latino community have also been made, resulting in completed surveys. She said it would not skew the results to seek additional Latino input through the consumer survey.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Yantis said he would not be able to attend the VIBES meeting on June 11.

Ms. Leslie reported that four applications have been received from persons desiring to fill the vacant Commission seat. Interviews will be scheduled as soon as possible.

Ms. Leslie reported that the Leadership Team is continuing to find ways to trim the city budget. One of the things they are currently looking at is cutting out all city-provided food at meetings.

Chair Stout suggested the elimination of any thank-you gifts provided to Commissioners for their services to the city. She said a simple verbal thank-you would be sufficient.

Ms. O'Reilly said one of the subcommittees of the Recession Response Task Force is dedicated to looking at helping to support Bellevue employees. She said she is

...serving on the team that is working with the Crisis Clinic to develop some training for Frontline Bellevue employees. They will talking about active listening, working with callers who are not sure exactly what they need, and working with upset persons.

Chair Stout pointed out that the annual 24-Hour Relay event will be changing its focus for 2009 to a citywide food drive.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Stout adjourned the meeting at 8:11 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date