

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes as amended on Nov. 16, 2010

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

October 19, 2010
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

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

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Huenefeld Gese who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Plaskon who arrived at 6:53 p.m.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. September 9, 2010

Commissioner Stout called attention to the second paragraph under Item 5 on the second page of the minutes and noted that in the fourth line "...funding for the facility..." should read "...funding for the agency...."

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

B. September 21, 2010

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

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Stout reported that she attended the first of the King County Council public hearings on the budget along with Human Services Manager Emily Leslie. She said the session was intense and somewhat discouraging. There were more than 40 speakers.

Commissioner Beighle said she spoke with Councilmember Degginger concerning his comments regarding not forgetting that there are Bellevue schools in the Issaquah School District.

Commissioner Beighle said the Issaquah Food Bank is seeking a new director. Cherie Meyer, who has been the director for the past 20 years, is stepping down. The organization is seeking a person who will serve more in a fundraising capacity.

Commissioner Beighle said she attended the Washington State PTA legislative assembly. She noted that Region 2, which is Bellevue and Issaquah, is very well represented. The group selected as its legislative priorities the education reform efforts under HB-2261; math and science; literacy instruction; teacher reduction; funding education first, which if successful could have a negative impact on human services funding; new models for teacher compensation; school breakfast and lunch programs; and physical education and health issues.

Commissioner Hoople reported that a Veterans Forum was conducted on October 7 at the North Bellevue Community Center. Some 35 persons attended and there was good discussion.

Commissioner Hoople announced that a three-day event focused on military trauma is slated to occur at the SeaTac Red Lion starting October 20.

Commissioner Bruels shared that he attended the recent benefit event for the Chinese Information and Service Center. The event came very close to meeting the fundraising goal.

Commissioner Bruels said he and his family attended the Kelsey Creek Farm Festival and said he was very impressed with the young people who volunteered to help with all of the kids. The event was very well organized.

Ms. Leslie took a moment to introduce graduate student intern Kimberly Walker. She said Ms. Walker took up her duties on September 29 and will continue with the city through the end of the school year in June. She said Ms. Walker is a second-year graduate student at the University of Washington School of Social Work.

Ms. Leslie reported that on October 18 the Council began its review of each of the Budget One outcome areas. They reviewed at that meeting the Innovative, Vibrant and Caring Community outcome, which is where most of the human services proposals are housed. Councilmember Chelminiak attended the meeting via speakerphone and made sure the special recession impact request was included on the add list.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly said she attended the Washington State Senior Lobby along with Cathy VonWald from the Bellevue Network on Aging. The annual conference focuses on issues of interest to seniors for the next legislative session. Some of the information will be used to help build the legislative agenda for the Eastside Human Services Forum, which is currently being formulated.

Ms. O'Reilly commented that twice per year a Home Repair Program Networking meeting is held in Bellevue. Representatives of similar programs attend from as far away as Bellingham, Anacortes and Vancouver, Washington. Everyone shares what their particular programs are facing and what the trends are.

6. DISCUSSION

A. Refugee Panel Presentation

Ms. O'Reilly explained that every two years or so the Commission is provided with an update with regard to issues faced by refugees. She said it is well known that Bellevue is becoming more diverse. The school district produces a report each October concerning the diversity of its student body. The report just released showed that for the first time the percent of students identified as white fell below 50 percent for the first time. The percentage of Hispanic students rose from eight percent to 9.7 percent, and the percentage of Asian students increased from 27 percent to 28 percent. The report indicates that the number of first languages spoken increased to 84 from 80.

Ms. O'Reilly introduced panelists Bob Johnson with the International Rescue Committee; Annette Holland with the Seattle/King County Public Health Refugee Screening program; and Shane Rock with Jewish Family Service.

Mr. Johnson said the International Rescue Committee's refugee agency was started in 1933. The Seattle office was opened in 1976 and is the only non-sectarian group focused on refugees in the state.

Mr. Johnson explained that a refugee is defined as a person who has fled their home country because of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion. Those who apply for asylum from outside the United States are called refugees, while asylees are those who apply after they have entered the United States. Once they achieve asylum immigration status, both groups are considered the same as refugees and are eligible for the same benefits.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has their durable solutions for managing refugees. The first is the most preferable and involves voluntary repatriation to the refugee's home country. The second is local immigration, which involves the refugee remaining in a neighboring country. The third, which is in a sense the least desirable and the least available, is third country resettlement, which involves bringing refugees to the United States or somewhere other than the country to which they first fled. Less than one percent of all refugees in the world are resettled in a third country.

The target number for refugees entering the United States between October 1, 2010 and September 30, 2011, is 77,000. A statutory number of 50,000 was set in 1980 as part of the Refugee Act, but each year Congress and the current administration meets to agree on a number based on a variety of factors of which funding is often paramount. The United States has established a three-tiered priority system for admitting refugees: referral from the UNHCR or a US embassy; a group referral based on nationality or religion attached to the likelihood of persecution; and family reunification, which for a number of years has been the backbone of the program but which has for the last couple of years been placed on hold.

Mr. Johnson explained that certain groups are considered refugees even if they have not left their home country. The processing occurs inside their home country based on the presumption of persecution. Historically the definition has fit those from Cuba, the former Soviet Union and Vietnam, but lately Iraqis have been processed as well. The family reunion countries make up an extensive list, and once the program is restarted the required steps will be difficult to work through, including much stricter background checks and verification of family affiliations.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Plaskon, Mr. Johnson clarified that persons in the United States illegally are not considered to be refugees. They could apply for asylum if they believe they have a case, but they are otherwise simply undocumented or illegal aliens. All refugees in the United States are in the country legally and can after five years become a permanent resident and become United States citizens.

There used to be a ban on refugees entering who were HIV positive. The Obama administration, however, did away with that restriction. Refugees are no longer required to be tested before entering the United States so it cannot be known if those coming into the country are HIV positive. In Washington state, one must provide consent before being tested for HIV; testing of refugees arriving in the state is encouraged but is not mandatory.

Mr. Johnson said the numbers of refugees admitted to the state have climbed. In 2008 there were 2,247, in 2009 there were 2,588, and in 2010 there were over 3,000. Washington used to be ranked fourth in the nation in terms of the number of refugee arrivals, but in 2009 fell to eighth place. That has created the problem of losing some

federal funding which is all based on a ranking. Washington has historically had the largest or second largest number of secondary migrants, which are refugees moving from another state to Washington. However, according to the state coordinator the state lost 60 percent of the secondary migrants claimed, either by having another state claim them, or through an error in the listed Social Security Number, which is how it is determined which state they started in.

Commissioner Hoople asked if the state is required to provide services to refugees even absent federal funding. Mr. Johnson said the state often is left to pick up the tab. Washington state is one of the few states that has chosen to kick in with additional funds for the refugee program. The state's current budget woes, however, are triggering a call for a 6.3 percent funding reduction across the board. The state has cut out entirely the citizenship program; refugees who become citizens become eligible for federal benefits and might be able to get better jobs. Refugees who within seven years of arriving in the United States do not gain citizenship do not qualify for SSI or other federal benefits and must fall back on the state GAU programs.

Ms. Holland said she works with both the refugee health screening program and interpretation services for Public Health of Seattle/King County. She said the screening program is for refugees and asylees only; it does not include immigrants. The program morphed out of the wave of refugees that were coming to the state in the 1970s and was set up to screen all newly arriving refugees. The core of the program remains the same in that all refugees that come to King County receive a screening within 90 days of their arrival. The program builds on the medical assessment that all refugees receive before coming to the United States and is focused on controlling infectious diseases.

Ms. Holland said refugees who are bilingual are often asked to come work for the program as health assistants and interpreters. The interpretation program morphed out of that approach. Since the 1970s, everyone who comes to public health and needs an interpreter is provided with one; that was the case even before federal funding was handed down along with a mandate to provide interpretive services.

The health screening program collaborates with case workers whose job it is to get all refugees in for a screening within 90 days of arrival. The increased number of refugees coming into the county in the last year have stretched the program; where screening used to occur three days each week, it now occurs five days per week.

Ms. Holland stated that the medical histories of all refugees gets uploaded into the CDC database and subsequently get transmitted to the states and the departments of health. In Washington State, the reports are printed by the state once received and mailed to the departments of health. It is hoped that in the future the reports will be transmitted electronically. The refugees have copies of their medical histories as well. The reports compiled after the local screening takes place is compiled, transmitted back to the state and hence back to the CDC.

Commissioner Stout asked where the refugees are during the 90 days prior to being screened by the program. Ms. Holland said they are placed in housing by their resettlement agency. Commissioner Stout pointed out that a refugee with a highly communicable disease could be living in the local community for up to three months before anyone knows about it. Ms. Holland explained that persons with active TB cases must be treated for it before being allowed into the United States. She agreed that a refugee could be HIV positive without anyone knowing it.

Ms. Holland noted that during the screening process some work is done on preventive care though it is often a tough sell. Many have never seen a dentist and their primary focus is on learning English and getting a job. Refugees are given eight months' worth of medical coupons, but if they do not use them chances are they will not find a job that has medical coverage. The importance of going to see a doctor and a dentist at least once is stressed.

Ms. Holland informed the Commissioners that because the Spokane area has more jobs, more affordable housing and good services, that area of the state is rapidly catching up with King County with regard to the number of refugees resettled there. King County saw a little over 1,500 refugees in 2009 and the anticipation is that for 2010 it will see about 1,900.

The medical screening program is aimed at making sure refugees do not have acute illnesses. Hypertension is a huge issue among refugees and it is necessary to send some directly to Harborview Medical Center. Persons without immunization records must start from scratch, and the program makes sure they complete the series. People are linked to the services they need, both medical and dental.

About 96 percent of all refugee visits must be interpreted, and the interpreter does far more than just interpret: they help the families understand what is going on, what the healthcare system can and cannot do for them, and generally make them feel more comfortable.

Commissioner Hoople asked if refugees can have their medical coverage beyond eight months. Mr. Johnson answered that the refugees receiving TANF benefits receive medical coverage. The eight-month medical coverage limit is only for single refugees and couples without children.

Ms. Holland said many refugees suffer from disabilities, especially those coming from Iraq. High blood pressure, TB and diabetes are encountered quite often. Many refugees coming to King County are from parts of the world where Hepatitis B is endemic. Very few refugees have had dental work done and are in need. Many refugees suffer from nutritional problems. There are no medical coupons that cover vision for refugees.

Mr. Rock said Jewish Family Service (JFS) was founded in 1892 to resettle Eastern European Jews in the Pacific Northwest. The agency has been resettling refugees

ever since. The agency serves both refugees and immigrants in its Bellevue and Kent offices. JFS is the second smallest resettlement agency; in 2009 it resettled 180 refugees, and that represented an 80 percent increase over the previous year.

Mr. Rock explained that resettling refugees nationwide works from the grassroots up. Agency directors estimate how many they will be able to serve in the coming year and fill out an abstract that is forwarded to the national office which compiles them and forwards them to the State Department. The compilations largely determine how many refugees the United States can process in a given year.

JFS resettles a few refugees in Bellevue, though housing costs are a limiting factor. The agency provides social service case management, ESL classes, employment assessment and placement assistance, mental health counseling, support groups, and training aimed at helping refugees become acculturated to life in the United States. JFS also offers a Russian language information and assistance program, and until November 30 will continue to offer a citizenship training program; after that date the funding will dry up.

JFS receives funding to provide services from a variety of sources, including the city of Bellevue. The largest support contract the agency has is for employment services and a program called Limited English Proficient Pathways. DSHS is, however, proposing to eliminate funding for the program for the next biennium. The program serves primarily to help refugees become self-sufficient.

Mr. Rock said most of the refugees coming to Bellevue are Iranians seeking family reunification. Many are religious minorities, including Baha'i. Also resettled in the Bellevue area over the last year were refugees from the former Soviet Union, most of which were also family reunification cases. Those trends can be expected to continue into 2011. The bulk of the refugees JFS is bringing in are going to the Kent area purely for economic reasons, though it also makes sense to put people from the same countries together so they can form their own communities.

The key to the long-term sustainability of refugees is learning English. Accordingly, JFS provides ESL instruction both on-site and at area community colleges. The anticipation is that funding for employment programs will be reduced, so more employment concepts are being introduced into the ESL classroom instruction.

Government support is being stretched at all levels. JFS is looking at entrepreneurial approaches to delivering its services. The agency does not want to go there but is being forced to. One model being investigated involves having employers subsidize a portion of the cost of providing the services.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Bruels, Mr. Rock said JFS is a small agency and is able to create a pipeline for services of which Public Health is a key component, particularly at the front end. JFS focuses on resettlement, ESL, employment training, social services and citizenship classes, all within the first five

years after each refugee's arrival. Refugees must be residents for five years before they can begin the citizenship process.

Mr. Johnson said all agencies provide six months of case management using federal funds. After that it requires piecing services together. Most agencies are seeking funds for extended case management, and it appears the federal government is inclined to start moving in that direction. Agencies also work closely with each other to provide services.

Ms. O'Reilly asked if it is getting easier or harder for refugees to find employment. Mr. Rock said things have improved somewhat over the last eight or nine months and more refugees are finding jobs. Temp agencies are doing very well, and many of them seek out refugees to hire.

7. OLD BUSINESS

Commissioner Stout reported that at least one strong nominee, Michelle Kline, has been identified for appointment to the Human Services Levy Oversight Board. She suggested that once the application is submitted, letters of support should be sent to King County Councilmember Hague, who says she is looking for someone with administrative and financial experience.

Ms. Leslie said she would check with the city's intergovernmental relations staff person to see if there is a way the city could make the nomination. Commissioner Stout agreed the nomination would be stronger if it came from the city. She stressed, however, that a show of support from community members will also be important; the County Council needs to know they are being watched and that they will not be able to just let the committee slide.

Commissioner Hoople commented that when the committee was first appointed it needed persons with administrative and financial experience. That is no longer the case. What is needed is someone who can look at what the levy has done, the successes that can be claimed, and has the clarity to know what programs should be dropped and what programs should be added.

8. NEW BUSINESS – None

9. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Carol Bostick, address not given, said she has been a participant of the Sophia Way program. She said she is currently residing in an apartment that is being subsidized by the agency. She said that even though she is fully qualified, she has not been able to find employment, which could lead to the loss of her apartment and homelessness. Sophia Way has case management but the agency has not done anything to help find work.

Ms. Leslie allowed that the Commission does not get involved in any of the day-to-day operations of any of the agencies funded by the city. As such, it would not be appropriate for the Commission to intervene on behalf of any individual client. She told Ms. Bostick, however, that she would let Sophia Way know that the Commission had received her testimony.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Huenefeld Gese adjourned the meeting at 8:37 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date