

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on June 7, 2011

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

April 19, 2011
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Beighle, Commissioners 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: Betty Takahashi, Deborah Duitch, Bellevue School District

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 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 Yantis, who arrived at 6:33 p.m., and Commissioner Plaskon, who arrived at 6:35 p.m.

3. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Stout reported that earlier in the day she along with Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly and intern Kimberly Walker participated in a discussion with SeniorNet, which was holding its monthly meeting. The group of vibrant seniors, which teaches computer skills in the community, spoke about the needs of seniors in community and wanted to know how they could volunteer more widely. The usual themes of transportation and not being able to find services when they are needed were highlighted.

Commissioner Hoople said he attended a meeting of the King County Alliance of

Human Services on April 18 where the focus was developing strategy around the Veterans and Human Services Levy.

Commissioner Hoople said that earlier in the day the chairs and co-chairs of the two Levy Oversight Committees provided testimony before the Budget and Fiscal Management Committee of the King County Council. The committee subsequently voted to send the levy on to the full County Council and approved Ordinance 0018 which would put the levy on the August ballot, and approved a striker amendment to include an annual adjustment to the levy based on the Consumer Price Index, with a maximum increase of three percent.

Human Services Manager Emily Leslie informed the Commissioners that the City Council is set to receive a briefing on the levy at its Study Session on April 25.

Commissioner Bruels said that earlier in the day the King County Alliance of Human Services was briefed regarding the levy. In addition, the group was informed about legislation pending in Olympia, HB-2048, which repurposes some document recording fees to housing and homelessness programs. While the legislation is not dead, it is in peril and could use some support.

Commissioner Bruels said another thing the Alliance is doing is trying to get the human services side of the levy oversight board filled up. Alan Painter from the King County Executive's office has indicated they will try and achieve more diversity on the board.

Commissioner Bruels also commented that he had attended the last two performances of the Bellevue Youth Theatre, which is supported by the city. He said he had a nice conversation with the chair of their foundation about the intersecting values and goals of arts and recreation services as well as human services. He said the quality of the productions is astounding with the diversity represented in the group.

Ms. Leslie reported that she attended the AtWork! breakfast on April 13th. She said they featured a client who was employed by Drugstore.com. The emphasis is primarily on placing clients into competitive employment, and they had cards on each of the tables that gave the biographies and skills of each client that is currently seeking work.

5. DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Services for Homeless Students and the Early Learning and After School Programs in the Bellevue School District

Betty Takahashi with the Bellevue School District said too often people are not aware of the fact that Bellevue has homeless families. The truth is, however, that the number is growing. Currently there are 160 children in the school district that are

homeless.

Ms. Takahashi said the McKinney-Vento Act is federal law and is part of No Child Left Behind. Each school district in the nation must designate a person to serve as the McKinney-Vento liaison. She said as the designated liaison for the Bellevue School District, it is her job to determine which families meet the eligibility requirements of the Act; to arrange transportation for eligible students even if they move out of the district; to coordinate with other school districts to facilitate enrollment; to work with the parents or guardians to determine the specific needs of eligible students; to give out information about school services; and to arbitrate disputes between parents and the school district. She said she also advocates for unaccompanied youth, which by definition is youth not in the custody of a parent or guardian. She said she assists them in getting into housing, and after high school with getting into college. Unaccompanied youth often do not know that there are services and programs available to them.

Under McKinney-Vento, the definition of a homeless child is someone who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.

Ms. Takahashi noted that many of the families she works with are from the east side of I-405. While 22 percent of the students in the district qualify for the free or reduced price lunch program, the percentage is triple that among the students from Lake Hills. Nearly half of the students from the Sherwood Forest and Ardmore neighborhoods qualify for the program. The schools with the highest numbers of McKinney-Vento qualified students are Sammamish with 17, Interlake with 10, Lake Hills with 12, and Stevenson with 21. Housing options include The Landing, which is for young adults aged 18 to 25, and Friends of Youth, which is for female youths aged 13 to 17. There are no emergency shelters in Bellevue for families, though there are some apartments in the Avondale Park complex and in Kenmore. KITH sometimes has openings. Some families elect to live with another family, some teens simply move from couch to couch in different homes, sometimes with relatives, and some live in their cars. Some families rent single rooms in the homes of others and live there.

Commissioner Yantis asked about the longevity of students who are known to be homeless. Ms. Takahashi said some stay at their schools for an entire school year, others stay for multiple years, while others stay only part of a year. So long as they are homeless, they can stay at their school of origin to provide for stability. If they get into permanent housing outside the school district, however, they are allowed to remain at their schools only through the remainder of the school year.

There are Family Connection Centers in five different elementary schools: Ardmore, Sherwood Forest, Stevenson, Lake Hills and Phantom Lake. The program is funded in part through a grant from the city of Bellevue. The human services specialists in the centers work directly with the families every day and assist them with a variety of issues.

Ms. Takahashi said she works in conjunction with a lot of programs offered by local non-profits, including Congregations for Kids, Operation School Bell, Holiday Support, Breaktime Mealtime, and Clothes for Kids.

Commissioner Bruels asked if the requirement to screen for housing status is only a Bellevue School District policy. Ms. Takahashi said it is currently but beginning in the fall it will be a state policy. A residency questionnaire is being developed and it will be utilized as students register; it will be a tool that will help find more students who may be eligible for McKinney-Vento services.

Commissioner Bruels asked how many of the students are undocumented. Ms. Takahashi said she is not permitted to ask that question. She allowed that many of them undoubtedly are, though being undocumented often hurts their chances of getting into housing.

Commissioner Hoople asked if the kids who come to the area from outside the country and stay with relatives so they can go to school qualify for the program. Ms. Takahashi said it all depends on why they came to the area. If they came to live with a relative only because they want to go to school in Bellevue, they would not be considered homeless, but if they live with a relative because their parents have died or for some economic reason that leaves the parents unable to care for the child, they could qualify. The question is whether or not they have alternative housing options.

Ms. Takahashi said everything that is done is done for the benefit of the student. The focus is on keeping the students in their schools for as long as possible; the school is often the only stable environment they know. Having wraparound services available is very helpful. The kids need good role models and mentors.

Deborah Dutch with the Bellevue School District shared with the Commissioners several stories of the kids involved with the programs. She said there has been an increase of about 67 percent over the last year in terms of the number of kids served. On any given school day there are 1300 kids enrolled ranging from infants to school age. The infant programs are filled to capacity within one day of opening enrollment; the same is true of most toddler program as well, most of which are already filled for the fall. The preschool and after-school programs are also full and have waiting lists for the next school year already.

Ms. Dutch said the eligibility cut-off for low-income families in Washington state has been reduced in the past. For the current year there was no reduction, but a limit was placed on the total number of families. Since January, 15 families have been encountered who have had their subsidies taken away. The mother of one small child, whose husband died in June 2010 of a terminal illness, received word that she no longer qualified for a childcare subsidy. Scholarships funded in part by the city were used to keep the child in her childcare program.

Commissioner Bruels said the story serves as a good example of an excellent

investment. He pointed out that without the relatively small investment, the family would have been in need of far more services in order to avoid homelessness. Ms. Duitch agreed. She said often the research is focused on the benefits of early childhood education, but there are indeed economic benefits as well that are often overlooked. About 50 staff were added to the early learning program to help meet the need, and several of those who got hired are family to children enrolled in the program. About 36 percent of the current staff were born outside the United States, and that has proved to be an added benefit.

Ms. Duitch related the story of Claudia, an assistant in one of the programs. Claudia has two children who are receiving scholarship assistance to attend after-school programs, which allows her to work. Claudia is from Mexico, is fluent in Spanish, and has many connections within the Latino community; she is working in a school that has a large Latino population and is able to communicate and establish relationships with families and bring them into the program.

On March 1 the state began keeping a wait list for childcare subsidy. There are currently some 1500 families on that wait list in the greater Seattle area. The wait list for Child Care Resources scholarships is as long as two years. The lack of childcare is a significant barrier for families looking for work; once they find a job, they must have some place for their children to go before they can accept a job offer.

The reimbursement rates are not sufficient to offset the costs of delivering childcare services. Many centers can no longer afford to take state subsidies, so the availability of scholarships has become all the more important.

Ms. Duitch said there are a number of families, particularly those who do not have English as their first language, and who do not have school-aged children who have not enrolled their children in preschool programs for a variety of reasons, including financial and lack of comfort in coming to the schools. A program called Kaleidoscope Play and Learn Groups, which was organized by Childcare Resources, has been started and is operational currently in two schools, Enatai and Stevenson. The plan is to expand the program to other schools. There are up to 20 families attending on a regular basis and those parents are choosing to enroll their children in the preschool programs.

A couple of new strategies have been tried for preschool, including the Orca program in which the teaching is conducted in both Spanish and English. The other program Puesta del Sol has often attracted higher income level families. In the Orca program, about 40 percent of the families enrolled are native Spanish speakers.

Ms. Duitch shared the story of four-year-old Emily who has a mom, dad and older sister at Sammamish. Dad works multiple jobs and mom also works. The family was faced with the need to take in the children of relatives, aged six, four and one, all in their two-bedroom apartment. The state provided subsidies for the children that were taken in, but the income level of the family was too high to have them qualify for state

assistance for their own Emily. Emily was provided the opportunity to attend the Orca preschool program. The program is looking to offer a Mandarin/English Orca program.

Ms. Duitch said there are currently 144 children enrolled in Head Start. She said the wait list has never been as long as it is currently, nor has there ever been as little movement on the list. There has been a significant increase in the number of children with special needs; that has triggered a focus on working on how to serve more children in their own schools. The Kindering Center is relied on to assist in identifying and working with children with special needs.

A summer kindergarten transition camp is in the planning stages. There have been in the past transition camps for families that meet certain eligibility requirements, and the school district intends to keep those going at Lake Hills and Sherwood Forest. However, there are families who do not have incomes low enough to qualify them for the program yet whose children have not had the opportunity for a variety of reasons to attend any kind of structured preschool program. During the summer months a one-week camp will be conducted to introduce children to school routines, including a ride on a school bus. The camp will include some general skill level assessments, and that information will be passed along to the entering kindergarten teachers.

The Commissioners were told the story of Miguel whose mother immigrated from Honduras when she was only a teenager. She found herself in a domestic violence situation. Both of her young children entered the Head Start program, which allowed the mother to go back to school. She will be graduating this year with an Associate of Arts degree from Bellevue College and she is interested in pursuing a position that will help her give back to the Bellevue community.

Ms. Duitch said there are a number of after-school programs that are focused on enhancing the learning experiences of the students.

Ms. Duitch added that in 1987 her children were enrolled in the free and reduced price lunch program and regularly visited food banks in order to get by. She said she knows from a personal perspective how supportive the schools can be of parents and families that are struggling for one reason or another. The support can really make a difference, and the community as a whole benefits.

6. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Leslie reported that at the most recent meeting of the Eastside Homelessness Advisory Committee (EHAC) the McKinney-Vento representatives from the Bellevue, Northshore, Lake Washington and Issaquah school districts shared their information with the homeless providers. The meeting was very well attended.

Ms. O'Reilly said about 15 community conversations have been completed, and more are scheduled. In addition, arrangements have been made to attend the May 9

Interagency Coordinating Council meeting. She explained that the King County organization works with the birth-to-three developmental program. She also said the consumer survey will be taken twice during the month of May to the Hopelink food bank. The survey will also be sent to the Bellevue College vocational ESL program and will be available at the mini City Hall in Crossroads and at the city's community centers.

7. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Bruels pointed out that a Youth Leadership Awards ceremony is scheduled at City Hall on May 17, the same day as a Commission meeting. He noted that many of the Commissioners have been invited to attend. Ms. Leslie said ARCH is working to schedule another housing tour on Thursday of that same week and suggested that it might be wise to cancel the May 17 Commission meeting.

Grant Coordinator Joseph Adriano asked the Commissioners to save June 15 on their calendars as the date for the Alliance of Eastside Agencies luncheon. He said the event will run from noon to 1:30 p.m. at Bear Creek Country Club.

8. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

9. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Beighle adjourned the meeting at 8:09 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date