

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

October 2, 2018
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Mercer, Commissioners Kline, Ma, McEachran, Oxrieder, Perelman, Piper

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Alex O'Reilly, Dee Dee Catalano, Toni Esparza, Natalie Minas, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. September 5, 2018

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

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Human Services Manager Alex O'Reilly introduced new intern Natalie Minas, noting that she is with the School of Social Work at the University of Washington. Ms. Minas said she served an internship in 2017 with the Bellevue School District in their Department of Equity, and for the three years prior to that she served as a case manager at Sophia Way in the long-term women's shelter.

6. DISCUSSION

A. Evaluation of the Allocation Process (Strengths, Lessons Learned, Next Steps)

Commissioner Piper said he learned a lot by going through the allocation process. He noted that he struggled in the beginning with the fact that the Commission does not have a set scoring rubric, something he has used in the past with other organizations. He allowed, however, that by the end of the process he realized he preferred not having a scoring rubric in that without one the process is more collaborative and iterative.

Commissioner Ma said he also had learned a lot by going through the process. He also agreed that it is better not having a scoring rubric. By not having one, the Commission is more free to decide what path to take. He said he found the finance side of things difficult to follow because that is not his profession. Some of the answers given by agencies to questions on the applications were repetitive, especially for questions 1 and 3.

Commissioner Oxrieder said it would be nice for new Commissioners and veterans alike to have some tips about things to look for and to consider before starting the allocation process, including specific things to look for in the financials; whether or not their fundraising efforts have changed over time; and whether or not the program is duplicated by other agencies.

Commissioner Piper said there is a back-story to almost every application. He said he did not know how to get around that without introducing bias into the process.

Commissioner Ma said his first reading of the applications led him to conclude that all of the programs were worthy of being funded. The discussions, however, proved to be very insightful and helpful in steering the allocations in the right direction.

Commissioner McEachran said the mentoring that occurs as part of the allocation process is very positive. He added that during his first funding cycle he was mentored by Commissioner Yantis to highlight the agencies he did not know much about and Google them to see what comes up. New Commissioners facing their first funding cycle would also benefit from reading the Commission meeting minutes of the previous funding cycle along with the staff reports.

Commissioner Perelman said during her tenure on the Commission there have been years where there was someone on the Commission who could do a deep dive on the financials, while in other years that element has been missing. She said the Commission would benefit from having a volunteer separate from the Commission diving deeply and consistently into the numbers for each application, highlighting items to specifically consider. The role could even be taken on by an intern. She also noted that there have been some cycles in which the Commission tied the allocations

tightly to the Needs Update, but the recent process did not make that connection as strongly as it could have.

Commissioner McEachran pointed out that the Commission relies on receiving cues from the Council from the liaison relative to the direction the Council wants to take. He also noted that the Council has over the years been tremendously supportive of the recommendations from the Commission and has in fact always approved them, which is evidence of the trust they have in the work done by the Commission and the staff.

Commissioner Kline stated her concern that the Commission was not receiving enough information to make sound financial decisions. She agreed it might be helpful to have someone assigned to dive into the financials, but added that the staff reviews could include more of a focus on the finances. Someone needs to be looking at agency budgets as a whole to determine what they are doing about moving their fundraising dollars around and things like that. All the Commission sees is the financial information relative to the program for which funding is being sought. She agreed that the most recent allocation process was not closely tied to the Needs Update, though the document was brought up a few times. The Commission could have been more deliberate about doing that. The Commission should give careful thought to how to coordinate more closely with the other cities, particularly as more dollars flow into the process from other cities. The Eastside as a whole could benefit from coordination on the funding end of things, but how to achieve that will require a great deal of thought and discussion.

Chair Mercer agreed with the need to coordinate with other cities and said she has been a proponent of doing that all along. She said the previous funding cycle had much more of an up-front discussion on the part of the Commission around what to focus on and what the strategy should be, well ahead reviewing the applications. The Council liaison should be specifically asked to participate in the strategy session to help inform the conversation. During the joint meeting with area commissions, each group should be asked to share how they will be looking at things.

Commissioner McEachran said the needs update documents authored by Issaquah and Snoqualmie both reference the work Bellevue does in terms of how much is given and particular goals. That essentially means there is collaboration, which is desirable, particularly around the issue of attainable housing. It would be a good idea to have a Commissioner or two attend the meetings of other human services commissions to gain an understanding of what they do and how they go about their work.

Chair Mercer commented that the last joint session was helpful but occurred at a time when everyone was trying to get everything read and done. It would have been better to have held the meeting earlier before the applications were in hand. That would allow for talking about how to approach things and debriefing on strategies.

Commissioner Ma agreed that a pre-analysis meeting would be very helpful in both creating strategies and highlighting for newer Commissioners what to look for.

Commissioner Oxrieder said one thing that came up through the process was the number of agencies giving emergency financial assistance to help prevent eviction and other things. She said before going through the allocation process again it would be helpful to have some of the agencies come to the Commission to share about their processes and limits.

Commissioner McEachran said prior to the start of the meeting he and Commissioner Oxrieder were talking process. He said one suggestion he made was to look at the five goals and divide the available funds evenly between them as a starting point. In the subsequent deliberations determinations can be made about moving funds from place to place, or about the need for the Council to allocate additional funds for a particular goal area given their priorities.

Chair Mercer said she heard loud and clear during the public hearing the assertion that given the Commission's requirements it is often difficult for smaller groups to ask for money, an approach that might in fact have some inherent biases. She suggested the issue should be addressed. The Commission wants to be good stewards of the money, which requires carefully reviewing how agencies will spend the dollars allotted to them. She asked if there is a way something like a sixth goal could be established that would have a limit set on the maximum amount to be awarded and have relaxed requirements as a way of investing in small organizations that offer promising programs. Such allocations could be clearly identified up front as a one-time thing. In addition to a limit on the award, there should be a limit on the number of times an agency can receive dollars from the program. The approach could be something for which the Commission seeks new money from the Council.

Ms. O'Reilly said she was scheduled to meet soon with representatives from Sammamish and Redmond to look at a pilot program called parallel grant funding. The cities of Kent, Federal Way and Auburn are already involved in the program which focuses solely on small-dollar allocations to small agencies and programs. As established, the funding cities require a fiscal agent, particularly where an agency does not have non-profit status.

Commissioner Kline suggested the pool of funding for such a program should be contributed by all of the cities. That approach would require a joint process for allocating the funds, and that could in turn lead toward a larger plan to coordinate the funding processes of the cities.

Commissioner Perelman agreed such an approach could work in getting small-dollar programs funded, but she stressed that in her mind the dollars would all have to go to clients, not for infrastructure.

Grant Coordinator Dee Dee Catalano said seven Commission meetings were held during May, June and July to review and discuss the applications. Only one none regularly scheduled meeting was held. The public hearing was held on September 5. Four of the meetings lasted for more than three hours; three lasted for only two hours, and one lasted for two and a half hours. She asked the Commissioners if they would prefer to schedule an additional meeting in lieu of having meetings that run three hours or more.

Chair Mercer said she would add a strategy meeting to the schedule ahead of the review process.

Commissioner Piper noted that in the first meeting one application took a full hour of the time, and only five applications were reviewed. He said no application should be given short shrift, but where possible there should be some cap on the length of each meeting, possibly by starting each meeting with a good idea of how many applications should be discussed.

Commissioner Oxrieder said she would prefer to have longer meetings than more meetings. Commissioner McEachran agreed.

Commissioner Ma suggested that leading off the process with a strategy meeting could help to streamline the following meetings. The first run through of the applications should be less focused on minute details and more focused on an overview of the programs and issues.

Commissioner McEachran said what helped him during his first allocation round was to be mentored by a Commissioner who had been through the process more than once. He said that made all the difference in the world to him.

Ms. Catalano agreed that the first round could include somewhat longer high-level discussions about the individual applications and programs. Specific funding recommendations are not made in the first round, that element is left to the second round after the merits of each application have been discussed.

Chair Mercer said she did not favor using a scoring sheet when working through the applications, but said she would like to see the initial strategy session include a discussion of specific things to look for and questions to ask, all of which could be printed out and checked off during the review phase.

Commissioner McEachran said his personal review includes identifying the applications that have not previously been funded, as well as those applications that previously have either been refused or have had their ask limited. He said he also would support developing a grid of specific items to look for in the review process.

Ms. Catalano noted that a couple of Commissioners had mentioned not reviewing the applications sequentially starting with Goal 1 and working through to Goal 5, which traditionally has been the approach.

Chair Mercer said for the recent process, starting with Goal 5 and working forward would have been beneficial.

Ms. O'Reilly reminded the Commissioners that usually about a month or so before the applications are received, there is a discussion about the supplemental, the part of the application that agencies see. Each city has something different. The supplemental is where the focus areas are highlighted. That discussion, which is tied directly to the Needs Update, could incorporate a focus on developing strategies for the review process.

The Commissioners agreed that during a funding year more meetings should be scheduled up front as part of setting up the application review process. They agreed those meetings should include the development of strategies.

Commissioner Kline suggested it would be helpful to have the applications grouped both by goal area and by service. Then when the review teams are established each team should be given all of the related applications.

Ms. Catalano noted that there were three review teams for the recent allocation process. Newer Commissioners were paired with veteran Commissioners. Each team received roughly one third of the applications, but she agreed that going forward it would be prudent to be strategic in assigning applications to the teams as outlined by Commissioner Kline.

Commissioner Perelman stressed the need for the Commissioners to read all of the applications, not just the ones assigned to the team they are part of.

Commissioner Ma said his initial review of the applications was focused on those assigned to his team, but he pointed out that he read the rest of the applications after the first round discussions.

Commissioner Kline said she would prefer to see agencies filling out the applications avoid repeating information by simply indicating a reference to where the pertinent information could be found. She added that things could be simplified somewhat by taking a look at the application itself. Ms. O'Reilly reminded the Commissioners that the same application is used by all of the funding cities. She allowed that the other cities may also want to see the level of redundancy reduced to the degree possible. Each city has the ability to add specific questions for agencies to answer.

Ms. Catalano reviewed with the Commissioners the outline of the staff reviews, including the financial section, the outcomes and the staff comments, as well as the audit comments, managerial/general and fundraising comments, demographics

information, and responses to questions asked by the Commissioners in the first round. She said the staff comment section takes the longest time to produce. Most of the information is contained in the application and if reduced or eliminated staff could spend more time focusing on the financials.

Commissioner Piper said he found the staff reviews to be very helpful in the way they provide context and color. He agreed the rephrasing information in the application is not necessarily helpful. Commissioner Ma agreed. Chair Mercer said the questions asked and the background information not in the application but included in the staff reports are very helpful.

Commissioner McEachran said he would welcome having staff prototype a different style staff review. Ms. Catalano agreed that the staff reviews have taken essentially the same approach for the last ten years or so. They could be made more helpful.

Commissioner Piper asked if the applicants could be directed to provide a précis for each program. Ms. Catalano said it may be difficult for the applicants to do that but staff could draft a quick summary of each program to be included in the staff review, followed by financial information and contract performance.

Commissioner Perelman pointed out that the information in the staff report about funds requested from other cities is included in the application and is not needed in the staff review.

Commissioner Kline commented that in an ideal world she would begin the review process by reading the staff reviews. That could not be done, however, unless the review process were to be held off for a month or so after the applications are submitted. Ways should be sought to avoid duplicating information, and having unique information available sooner.

Chair Mercer agreed that the financial and contract performance is important to include in the staff reviews, adding that the staff commentary and impressions are the most helpful.

There was agreement that the section of the staff report relative to whether or not programs address one or more of the focus areas was helpful.

Ms. Catalano said the way the application data came out of the new system was a nightmare in terms of formatting and it took staff a lot of time to address. She said the cities would be working with the vendor to make improvements.

Commissioner Kline suggested that though it may be painful in some respects, the Commissioners should switch to accessing the information online rather than in hardcopy format. The information is accessible and fairly easy to use online. She allowed that she did not know if access to the data could be gained when not online,

however. Ms. O'Reilly said there is value to having hardcopy as the Commissioners can write on them their notes and impressions.

Ms. Catalano asked for comments on the application questions. Commissioner Ma pointed out that questions 1 and 3 both ask how the program will meet the needs. Some agencies simply used copy and paste for those questions.

Chair Mercer called for a better way to ask agencies about their service units, specifically how they are defined and that they are relevant to what is being delivered. For some, there is no way for them to avoid hitting a hundred percent, making the metrics useless.

Commissioner Oxrieder said she had given up on reviewing the metrics for that reason. She said she had wished the agencies could come up with an accurate accountability measure.

Ms. Catalano stressed that the outcomes are different from the service units. She said the different cities are looking at a results-based accountability approach as something that would be more interesting and useful.

With regard to the cultural competency question, Ms. Catalano said during the 2016 cycle the question did not really yield any usable information. The question was revised to get to a description of how services are tailored to meet the culturally specific needs of targeted populations, including examples of specific knowledge and experiences, and how the agency has used the learning to inform services and staffing.

Commissioner Oxrieder said the answers to the cultural competency question were much more specific and useful given the revised question.

Commissioner McEachran said he attended a staff training session at Bellevue College that was focused on equity and diversity. The presenter made the comment that cultural competency sounds like an AP test for institutions and said she prefers the term "cultural humility." He said he picked up on that and has used the phrase a couple of times to good effect. Ms. Catalano noted that King County uses the cultural humility phrase in some of its publications.

Chair Mercer said she would love to find ways to add questions that speak to some of the things the Commission routinely must dig for in the applications. She said she would like a question that asks in general about the various different ways a program is funded outside of the request to Bellevue and the other cities. Additionally, she said she would like a specific question about how much of the requested funding will be used to provide direct services and how much will be used for overhead. The information can be pulled from the applications but it takes effort, and it would be better to have it readily and explicitly available.

Assistant Director of the Department of Parks and Community Services Toni Esparza suggested taking a look at the applications used by major foundations in the area. She said some of them are very well crafted and specific. The Commissioners agreed that would be a good thing to do.

Commissioner Ma suggested that questions 1 through 3 could all be combined into a single big question focused on the existing need. With regard to the questions about the financials, he noted that some agencies chose not to answer them, possibly because they felt the answers could be found in the financials section. He added that it is difficult to craft specific data outcomes for social services and suggested allowing for some narrative to better tell the story.

Ms. O'Reilly sought input from the Commissioners in regard to what points should be included in the presentation to the Council on November 5. She said the presentation of the Commission's funding recommendations are typically given about half an hour on the Council agenda. Department of Parks and Community Services Director Patrick Foran will introduce the topic and the Chair and staff will present the Commission's recommendations. She encouraged all of the Commissioners to attend the meeting to hear the Council's feedback.

Continuing, Ms. O'Reilly said a half-hour session has been scheduled with the Commission's Council liaison, Councilmember Robinson, to review with her the Commission's recommendations with Chair Mercer and staff. The opportunity will be taken to provide Councilmember Robinson with a briefing of how the process went and key elements of the recommendations.

Commissioner McEachran said the presentation to the Council should include the Commission's appreciation for the support the Council has shown over the past 30-plus years. Additionally, the presentation should highlight Goals 3, 4 and 5 in keeping with the Council's established priorities.

Commissioner Ma suggested including some specific examples in narrative form. Councilmember Robinson in meeting with the Commission talked specifically about the opioid crises and some mention of that would be good.

Commissioner Perelman stressed the need to be very politically correct, noting that in the past the Commission came very close to cutting funds for an agency that certain Councilmembers favored. This time around the agency in question is recommended for full funding and that should be highlighted while also pointing out that the limited funds available meant the financial aid area could not be fully funded. She also proposed including in the presentation that the Commission would love to see a small pot of money set aside for investing in smaller organizations that have programs that address clear needs in the community.

Commissioner Ma agreed and stressed use of the word "invest" relative to cultural communities and low-income workers.

Ms. O'Reilly said financial aid programs address the Council priority of preventing homelessness. Some wording around prevention in the presentation would be appropriate along with a couple of examples. Ms. Esparza proposed indicating the total requests received in the area of prevention and compare it to the amount that is recommended for funding, thus highlighting the gap.

Commissioner Perelman agreed, suggesting the presentation should highlight what was fully funded, what it was not possible to fully fund, and what was not funded at all in terms of requests from smaller organizations. Ms. O'Reilly said that approach would serve as a narrative for what has been learned about what will need to be addressed during the next funding cycle.

Commissioner Oxrieder said she would support informing the Council about efforts to communicate and coordinate with other Eastside cities relative to human services. Ms. O'Reilly agreed that it would be useful to remind the Council that the funding process is larger than just Bellevue and involves 17 other cities in King County.

With regard to investing in small non-profits, Commissioner Ma pointed out that the Council recently chose to focus on incubating small businesses. Referencing small non-profits in that regard might get their attention.

7. OLD BUSINESS

Commissioner Kline asked if anything had been heard from United Way or others about providing development education for agencies. Ms. O'Reilly said she has reached out to United Way staff about that issue but had not yet heard back.

Ms. O'Reilly reported that Fire Chief Jay Hagen will make a presentation to the Commission at the October 16 meeting. Natasha Grossman, Manager of the Bellevue Fire Cares program will also be present to give an update.

Commissioner McEachran proposed providing Chief Hagen with a copy of the executive summary of the Needs Update. Commissioner Ma said he would like the Chief's report to include statistics and trends relative to calls the department responds to. Commissioner Oxrieder said she would like to hear comments about the department's interactions with the homeless population. Commissioner McEachran said he would like to hear comments about the department's interactions with seniors living in place.

Ms. O'Reilly informed the Commissioners that the city's giving campaign kicked off earlier in the day. She said United Way attended and she gave a quick update about the human services fund, which is one option for employees to donate to through a payroll deduction. In 2017 a total of \$12,000 was donated by employees. Fire department staff discussed their foundation and what it does.

Ms. O'Reilly reminded the Commissioners about the parliamentary procedures training session on October 18 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

8. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Perelman asked when the winter shelters were slated to open. Ms. O'Reilly said she was still waiting to hear when the men's shelter at Lincoln Center would open, adding that the shelter is usually open by November 1. The women's shelter and the family shelter have both been open throughout the year by rotating to different churches.

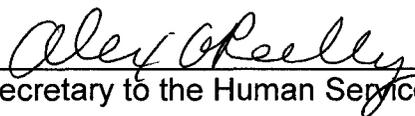
Ms. O'Reilly said she would include in the packet for the next Commission meeting information about when the human services commissions and committees from other cities meet and include a sign-up sheet for Commissioners wanting to attend.

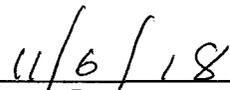
9. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

10. ADJOURNMENT

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

Chair Mercer adjourned the meeting at 7:47 p.m.


Secretary to the Human Services Commission


Date


Chairperson of the Human Services Commission


Date