

**HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

June 9, 2020

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Cisco Webex

Members Present:

Mark Pascu, At-large Member and Chair
Jen Lafferty, At-large Member
Deborah Moore, Consumer Member
Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member

Laurie Gira, Caregiver Member
Laura Kaplan-Weisman, At-large Member
Emily Pearce, At-large Member

Members Absent:

Leon Suskin, At-large Member and Co-Chair

Stacey Erd, Caregiver Member

Mayor and Council Liaison Present: Councilmember Mark Pierzchala

Staff Present: Allison (Ali) Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst
Kate Bouwkamp, Community Services Program Coordinator
Niambi Powell, Community Services Referral Coordinator
Asmara Habte, Director of Housing and Community Development

RE: Call Meeting to Order

Mark Pascu, At-large Member and Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm.

RE: Introduction to the Housing and Community Services Director

Asmara Habte, Director of Housing and Community Development, introduced herself to the Commission and shared her housing development work for the City of Rockville. She spoke about the ways the City is addressing housing, food assistance, emergency financial assistance, and other community needs. She shared that there have been discussions with Mayor and Council about the department formation, staffing, service delivery and the combining of the Housing and Community Services divisions.

RE: Community Forum

The Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) had two visitors during community forum that are interested in joining the HSAC. Wanneh Dixon, a 4-year Rockville resident, introduced herself to the group and shared that she formerly lived in the Atlanta region and has worked overseas on community development. Wanneh spoke about her experience living in Rockville and shared that she wants to be more involved in the City and chose the HSAC because of her experiences working in social services and raising a special needs child. Fatima-Zahra El Maliki, a 20-year Rockville resident, introduced herself and shared that she is from Morocco and has two grown children. Fatima expressed her interest in becoming more involved and highlighted her past volunteer work with the Montgomery County Abused Persons Program.

Councilmember Mark Pierzchala, the Commission members, and City staff introduced themselves to Wanneh and Fatima and shared their background and some reasons why they joined the HSAC. Deborah Moore, Consumer Member, asked if either of them are considering joining as a “consumer member” and Ali Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst, spoke briefly about the three membership types for this Commission. Ali also shared that new commission appointments would be made during an upcoming July Mayor and Council meeting.

RE: Approval of Minutes from May 12, 2020

Laurie Gira, Caregiver Member, moved to approve the minutes, as drafted. Deborah Moore, Consumer Member, seconded. The motion was unanimous.

RE: Community Services Division Report (Niambi Powell, Kate Bouwkamp)

Kate Bouwkamp, Community Services Program Coordinator, and Niambi Powell, Community Services Referral Coordinator, have been assigned as Acting Community Service Managers. They provided the following updates regarding the Community Services Division’s programs and City of Rockville COVID-19 updates:

- All Division programs have been operating virtually via Zoom and are meeting on a weekly basis. All summer programs are scheduled to operate and adjustments are being made to provide services via Zoom.
- There has been an uptick in counseling cases at the schools. After transitioning to online learning, the school staff are now able to prioritize referrals.
- No Rockville Emergency Assistance Program (REAP) referrals were received last month. DHHS Services to End and Prevent Homelessness was initially focused on processing applications for residents without formal lease agreements or those who did not qualify for federally funded programs. As of June 8th, Montgomery County has 400 open cases and only 53 cases have been closed due to limited staff and increased case management to help people apply for all other benefits. Niambi Powell shared that internal staff from the City of Rockville are being trained to handle incoming REAP cases.

Laura Kaplan-Weisman, At-large Member, asked a follow up question about how mental health referrals are happening with limited classroom time. Niambi responded that the Youth and Family Counselor (YFC) is reaching out to school counselors for students who need or want services and is continuing to communicate open referral spots. The YFC also provides access to informal counseling and is available via phone and Webex for those without formal referrals. Kate also responded that the Linkages to Learning program staff meet weekly with the school psychologist and are keeping an eye on attendance. Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member, commented about the great and extensive outreach done by City Staff to continue the City’s programs.

Emily Pearce, At-large Member, asked about summer programming options for residents without internet, like summer learning packets. Kate responded that the Summer Enrichment Program she runs will have handouts and that Montgomery County Public School students will still have

access to Chromebooks during the summer. Internet providers are offering discounted access during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RE: Discussion about Racial Justice and Police Relations

Deborah Moore, Consumer Member, began the conversation by speaking about the recent events and civil unrest sparked by the in-custody police killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. She stated that the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) is one of the most qualified Rockville boards or commissions to make a statement on this issue and that they should do so urgently to show solidarity and make change in Rockville. Emily Pearce commented that she agrees with Deborah and thinks the letter should include other talking points like mental health access.

Councilmember Pierzchala shared that the Mayor and Council have received a lot of emails from the community about this subject and that he recommends the HSAC make this planned statement during community forum of the June 22nd or July 6th Mayor and Council meetings. He said that about 4,000 people recently attended a rally about this issue in Rockville and that it is not just about overt racism, but the racial inequalities experienced in communities with access to services like housing. Emily and Nancy shared that they attended the rally in Rockville and loved the community support.

Deborah Moore volunteered to draft the letter and motioned to include the below topics within the letter. Emily Pearce seconded the motion. The motion passed.

- Condemning the death of George Floyd at the hands of police
- Housing inequity
- Mental health and preventative healthcare access
- Food and clothing access
- Educational opportunities
- Systemic racial bias in police
- Job opportunities and access to “stay at home” work during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Relevant statistics in support of these topics

Laura Kaplan-Weisman, At-large Member, volunteered to present this letter during the June 22nd Mayor and Council meeting. Deborah motioned, Emily seconded. The motion passed.

Mark Pascu, At-large Member and Chair, motioned to send a copy of this letter to Mayor and Council. Deborah seconded. The motion passed. Mark asked City staff if any edits can be made to the letter and Councilmember Pierzchala responded that as long as members are satisfied that the content agrees with what was voted on during the meeting, then edits are allowed.

RE: Mayor and Council Advocacy - Healthcare Position Paper Update

During the April HSAC meeting, Laura Kaplan-Weisman raised her concern for the increasing number of uninsured residents. She discussed the federal healthcare initiatives introduced by Bernie Sanders and suggested that the HSAC create a position paper about this topic and send it to Mayor and Council. Laura drafted up a letter and sent a copy to all HSAC members for review, prior to the May meeting.

Laura summarized the healthcare letter talking points and Councilmember Pierzchara shared that the discussion of this letter by Mayor and Council has been placed on the agenda for June 22nd. The letter asks for Mayor and Council to draft a letter of their own in support of these federal healthcare initiatives. The Councilmember asks for HSAC support to finalize the letter draft by June 15th and send to City Manager as a draft to enter the agenda.

Laura volunteered to revise the letter draft for Mayor and Council. Emily volunteered to read the healthcare letter during community forum on June 22nd.

RE: Discussion on Pregnancy and Homeless Services

In a continuation of a previous discussion from the May meeting, Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member, brought up the experience of first time mothers living in emergency homeless shelters and the potential gap in services for pregnant women. Nancy shared that the clients transition from a singles shelter to the hospital for the baby's birth and then to a family shelter can result in inconsistent case management and a feeling of isolation for the new mother. She also commented on the difficulties case workers can experience trying to reserve spots for new mothers in group shelters. Nancy Sushinsky and Stacey Erd are working on gathering relevant data from community organizations that serve this population, performing outreach to gather community support and identifying potential funding avenues. Emily Pearce asked if case management for this potential shelter would include pre-natal care, assistance for the first year of life, or employment services and Nancy responded that these types of services are recommended in the similar program models she has reviewed.

Mark Pascu asked Nancy what future action would be needed to make this shelter type a reality- i.e., would policy changes be required or will grant funding be the main barrier? Nancy said she has had initial conversations with community leaders about the potential community impact and locations for the shelter and hopes that the Human Services Advisory Commission can voice support in the future, if the need is determined. Emily asked about upcoming advocacy opportunities. Councilmember Pierzchala offered to set up a meeting with Nancy and City Staff when more of the details have been sorted out.

RE: Other Items

In a question raised by Deborah Moore, the Commission members briefly discussed whether there would be an August Human Services Advisory Commission meeting. They decided to table this discussion until the July meeting.

RE: Plan Agenda for July 14, 2020 Meeting

- Community Services Division report and COVID-19 response efforts
- Racial justice policies
- Federal Healthcare Initiative letter follow up

Some of the Commission members expressed interest in inviting the Rockville Chief of Police to attend a future meeting and speak about the recent racial bias in policing. Councilmember Pierzchala shared that Police Chief Brito will be speaking during the June 22 Mayor and Council meeting and invited the Commission to watch that agenda item.

Mark Pascu, At-large Member, asked if the City of Rockville has a civilian review board or other commission that oversees the police. Councilmember Pierzchala said that it is something that is being discussed and that there will be a presentation by the Boards and Commissions Task Force on July 6th, where they will propose a Public Safety Commission. Mark pointed out that this is a gap and the Councilmember responded by suggesting a joint meeting with Human Rights Commission (HRC). Ali Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst, said she will reach out to the HRC and discuss a joint meeting to discuss police brutality and racial bias.

RE: Adjourn

Deborah Moore, Consumer Member, motioned to adjourn, Emily Pearce seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.