

**HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES**

**July 14, 2020**

**6:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

**Virtual Meeting via Cisco Webex**

**Members Present:**

Mark Pascu, At-large Member and Chair  
Leon Suskin, At-large Member and Co-Chair  
Deborah Moore, Consumer Member  
Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member

Stacey Erd, Caregiver Member  
Laura Kaplan-Weisman, At-large Member  
Emily Pearce, At-large Member

**Members Absent:**

Laurie Gira, Caregiver Member

Jen Lafferty, At-large 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

**RE: Call Meeting to Order**

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

**RE: Community Forum**

The Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) had two visitors that are interested in joining the HSAC. Wanneh Dixon and Fatima-Zahra El Maliki attended their second HSAC meeting. Councilmember Pierzchala informed the visitors and the Commission members that new commission appointments would be made during the July 20<sup>th</sup> Mayor and Council meeting.

**RE: Approval of Minutes from June 9, 2020**

Emily Pearce, At-large Member, moved to approve the minutes, as drafted. Leon Suskin, At-large Member and Co-Chair, seconded. The motion was unanimous.

**RE: Community Services Division Report (Niambi Powell)**

Niambi Powell, acting Community Service Manager (CSM), provided the following updates regarding the Community Services Division's programs:

- The newly formed Department of Housing and Community Development has been formalized, after approval of the organizational structure was given by Mayor and Council in June.
- The Division programs ended in June. All summer programs are scheduled to operate and adjustments were made to provide services via Zoom or with modified in-person service models due to COVID-19.

- The Youth and Family Counselor (YFC) provided counseling services via Webex and phone. The YFC and CSM have been working on a plan to get new counseling referrals because referrals during the COVID-19 pandemic have been low.
- Kate Bouwkamp, Community Services Program Coordinator, announced that she is leaving her position with the City.
- No Rockville Emergency Assistance Program (REAP) referrals were received last month. The REAP cases referrals to the City of Rockville were initially delayed by the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services because of a focus on processing applications for residents without formal lease agreements or those who did not qualify for federally funded programs. The waitlist was recently 200 people.
  - The Department of Housing and Community Development did a survey of Rockville housing and found that 63 cases of delinquency are over the Rockville REAP amount maximum.

Leon Suskin asked about the housing survey response rate. Niambi responded that she does not know specific numbers, but that the response rate was very low and that there are likely a higher number of delinquency cases.

Stacey Erd, Caregiver Member, asked if the eviction stay order was a county or state order. Niambi said that it is a state mandate and that new eviction cases are not being seen in court until after August 31<sup>st</sup>. Emily Pearce, At-large Member, asked if residents are accumulating debt until the REAP and case management process is started. Niambi said that landlords are working with tenants for payment plans, but some reported poor communication with the tenants because they are refusing to agree to the payment plans suggested. The landlord-tenant experiences have varied based on the landlord's mortgage type. She also shared that she is part of the Montgomery County COVID-19 Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Workgroup, which is exploring how best to support to landlords and tenants in accessing resources that will reduce rent arrears via payment plans and emergency funds. Niambi worked with the City's Landlord and Tenant Specialist to provide a workshop and resources for City residents that will help ease tensions around rental payments.

Councilmember Pierzchala stated that the housing needs are greater than what the City of Rockville can provide, due to anticipated budget cuts. He highlighted the high number of apartments in Rockville and the need for a realistic approach to this issue. Rockville is advocating to the County about the REAP needs of Rockville residents and that it is not just low-income residents who are struggling because job losses and subsequent housing issues are impacting residents of other income levels.

Mark Pascu asked about federal support to cities like Rockville. Councilmember Pierzchala responded that federal support typically supports the states and that he did not think the federal support was well distributed and the policies may have been rushed due to political issues. Niambi shared that additional Department of Housing and Urban Development funding may be

available for rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing in cases where people become homeless because of COVID-19.

Councilmember Pierzchala shared that after a two-year process, Rockville Housing Enterprises closed on the refinancing of the Fireside Park Apartments, an affordable housing complex in Rockville that sustained heavy fire damage in 2018. There were discussions of knocking down the facility to build new housing. The rehabilitation of this apartment building will begin soon and will be primarily low-income housing.

### **RE: Discussion about Racial Justice and Police Relations**

Deborah Moore, Consumer Member, began the discussion by congratulating Emily and Laura for testifying at the recent Mayor and Council meeting about racial justice and healthcare. They thanked Deborah for her contributions writing the Commission's racial justice testimony and for also writing her own statement to Mayor and Council on the issue. Councilmember Pierzchala stated that he plans to discuss the attitudes about housing within the Rockville community because it is a racial equity issue.

Ali Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst, shared that the Human Right's Commission (HRC) invited the HSAC members to a joint meeting on July 22<sup>nd</sup>. She also summarized some of the topics and documents that were discussed by representatives from both the HRC and HSAC during their participation in a racial justice conversation with Rockville Staff on July 6<sup>th</sup>. Deborah emphasized that racism is institutional and that we need to complete a review of more than just the racial bias in police relations. Stacey Erd agreed and stated that the police issue discussion is reactionary because of the national discussion, but we should be more proactive using communication with residents about their experiences. She also said that given the national spotlight on this issue, now is the perfect time to make a real impact on this issue.

Mark Pascu said that the City of Rockville should perform a review to look for bias in current laws and policies. He said that utilizing something similar to the Montgomery County Community Engagement Toolkit would be a good start. Councilmember Pierzchala shared that policy reviews are happening constantly, and some examples include policy changes put in place by the Police Department three years ago and the plan to enact a citizen police review board. The Councilmember also said that, as the main source of social service programs, it makes sense for the County to evaluate at that level.

Councilmember Pierzchala highlighted that voting populations with high participation in local elections tend to have more influence on city programs, who are typically homeowners. Deborah responded that that reality is part of the equity issue because it is not easy for disadvantaged populations to one day own a home. Nancy Sushinsky added that low voter turn-out is systemic, due to higher likelihood of a lack of transportation to the polls and less of an ability to interact with candidates, even with good campaign outreach efforts. Mark Pascu mentioned that the recent vote by mail effort in Rockville doubled the voter population to 30%. Laura Kaplan-Weisman shared that in her own experience, moving homes often can lead to a lack of information received about voting candidates and deadlines, which can also contribute to the lack of participation in voting.

Stacey Erd brought up the possibility of working with the Human Right's Commission to engage the Rockville community through a virtual town hall about equity issues. Emily Pearce also suggested utilizing neighborhood associations to communicate with the community. She asked if it would be useful to provide a guide with resource information for incoming residents to these communities. Niambi agrees that providing resources to homeowner and neighborhood associations would be helpful, since you can't assume that people within those communities are financially stable and many residents aren't aware of the City's services. Deborah asked if these associations have an advisory council and Councilmember Pierzchala responded that they are elected positions and vary by neighborhood participation.

Leon Suskin asked about what the goals are for the upcoming HRC and HSAC meeting. Mark responded that with a current lack of a public safety commission, the joint meeting will be helpful to assist with equity and police issues until that commission can be formed. Emily Pearce stated that the racial equity action items document provided by staff during the June 22<sup>nd</sup> Mayor and Council discussion of social justice, racism, and bias in Rockville was a good start for coming up with action items. The Commission agreed that the joint meeting will be helpful in ensuring that the two commissions don't duplicate their efforts.

**RE: Mayor and Council Advocacy - Healthcare Position Paper Update**

Councilmember Pierzchala shared that the federal healthcare advocacy letter that the Commission submitted to Mayor and Council has been approved and mailed out with no modifications to the language. Laura Kaplan-Weisman shared that she is grateful that the commission took this issue on and she plans to follow up with the Montgomery County Council and ask them to also send a support letter to delegates.

Laura motions that she contact the Montgomery County Council on behalf of the Commission to send a support letter to delegates, Debbie seconds. The motion was unanimous.

One of the commission members also highlighted that a recent Washington Post article said 74% of Montgomery County positive COVID-19 cases are Hispanic people and that healthcare options are essential during this pandemic.

**RE: Discussion on Human Rights Commission Meeting and Topics**

The Human Services Advisory Commission planned some topics for their upcoming July 22<sup>nd</sup> joint meeting with the Human Rights Commission (HRC). The potential talking points included:

- Examination of the Human Right's Commission and Human Services Advisory Commission actionable items to ensure no duplication of efforts
- Review Rockville racial equity document (see attached)
- Review of City of Rockville policies and laws for biases and suggested improvements to address equity issues
- Citizen police review board and the Rockville Police Department
- Voting access issues (renters vs homeowners, is there a racial inequity among voters? Did the mail-in ballot improve access to previously under-represented populations?)
- Community events and virtual town halls to get feedback on Rockville equity issues and personal experiences
- Juneteenth holiday and events

- Communication and outreach with civic and homeowner associations about City of Rockville human services resources
- Inequity in access to human services (housing, healthcare, mental health, food, clothing, educational opportunities, work from home opportunities during COVID-19)

**RE: Other Items**

Emily Pearce asked for an update from Nancy Sushinsky about the progress with pregnant women's shelter that was discussed during the last meeting. Nancy shared that there has been some discussion with Community Reach of Montgomery County and that her research and discussions with similar programs has shown that many are working on a faith-based model, not a government program. Nancy also clarified some language from the previous month's minutes, that the difficulty in client transitions from single to family shelters stems from a lack of support by hospital social workers to assist with the transition. There have also been concerns expressed among undocumented residents in working with hospital staff because of a fear of being reported to Child Welfare Services.

Nancy revisited the intention to set up a meeting with Rockville Staff and Councilmembers about this issue. Ali Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst, requested that Nancy reach out to her when she is ready to set up that meeting and she can facilitate that meeting.

**RE: Plan Agenda for August 11, 2020 Meeting**

Deborah Moore motioned that the Commission not hold an August meeting and continue meeting again in September. Emily Pearce seconded. The motion was unanimous.

Laura Kaplan-Weisman expressed concern about waiting until September to meet because of the upcoming Human Rights Commission joint meeting and potential action items from that meeting. Emily advocated for the break in August to allow time for researching topics and processing the recent events.

**RE: Adjourn**

Nancy Sushinsky motioned to adjourn; Deborah Moore seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.