

**HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
September 8, 2020
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting via Cisco Webex**

Members Present:

Mark Pascu, At-large Member and Chair	Wanneh Dixon, At-Large Member
Leon Suskin, At-large Member and Co-Chair	Laura Kaplan-Weisman, At-large Member
Deborah Moore, Consumer Member	Emily Pearce, At-large Member
Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member	Jen Lafferty, At-large Member
Fatima-Zahra El Maliki, At-Large Member	

Members Absent:

Laurie Gira, Caregiver Member	Stacey Erd, Caregiver Member
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Mayor and Council Liaison Present: Councilmember Mark Pierzchala

Staff Present: Allison (Ali) Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst
Niambi Powell, Acting Community Service Manager

RE: Call Meeting to Order

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

RE: Community Forum

Carlos Aparicio, former Community Services Manager, joined the meeting as a City of Rockville resident to share his concern about the Community Services Division as it transitioned from the Recreation and Parks Department to the Housing and Community Development Department. He shared that one of his major concerns was the delay in hiring several open positions within the Division, including his former position, which has been open since April 2020. He stated that this position is responsible for advocating for more vulnerable populations in Rockville and believes that the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) should advocate for immediate hiring of the Division manager and for expanded services provided under the Division. He said that because of COVID-19, these positions and services are essential. Carlos also expressed concern about how the Department was presented during the Mayor and Council meeting on June 22, 2020 and echoed statements by Councilmember Beryl Fienberg that were made during that meeting. He shared that during his tenure as Community Services Manager, he fought for continued and expanded services to less fortunate populations in Rockville, against some expressed beliefs that those services should be County run services.

Deborah Moore, Consumer Member, thanked Carlos for his comments and requested that this issue be made an agenda item for the next HSAC meeting and Emily Pearce, At-Large Member, agreed. Laura Kaplan, At-Large Member, asked about who is leading the hiring process. Niambi

Powell, Acting Community Service Manager, told the group that Asmara Habte, Director of Housing and Community Development is leading the hiring efforts. Laura asked if staff could invite Asmara to attend the next meeting. Ali Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst, said she would add this item to the next agenda and invite Asmara to attend the meeting.

RE: Approval of Minutes from July 14, 2020

Emily Pearce moved to approve the minutes, as drafted. Deborah Moore seconded. The motion was unanimous.

RE: Community Services Division Report (Niambi Powell)

Niambi Powell, Acting Community Service Manager, provided the following updates regarding the Community Services Division's programs:

- The Division summer programs ended in August. The Latino Youth Development program is scheduled to operate and adjustments were made to provide modified in-person and virtual services, due to COVID-19.
- The Linkages to Learning (LTL) program staff have been participating in weekly food distributions and are planning a drop-in ESOL course. Case management has continued to be provided to family participants of the program and a parent governance meeting took place to identify services that are provided.
- The Youth and Family Counselor and LTL Community School Coordinator have submitted their resignations. The City of Rockville will begin advertising their positions, shortly after the vacancy begins because County contracts require an immediate posting of both positions for hire.
- The hiring process for the Community Services Program Coordinator is under way.
- One Rockville Emergency Assistance Program (REAP) referral was received last month. The County has been processing REAP cases with a maximum allocation of \$4,000 per case. Roughly 72 eviction cases per day are being seen in court, although there has been a moratorium on evictions issued by the Centers of Disease Control through the end of 2020, if the resident has shown to have met income requirements and sought government assistance. 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 Home Energy Assistance Program is being promoted along with Community Development Block Grant funds for low to moderate income home owners to make energy efficiency and weather upgrades to their homes. Habitat Metro will also be a community partner to leverage available funds for making these upgrades.
- The Holiday Drive will resume modified operations, with a gift card only distribution.
- The Community Services Division has supplied the Caregiver nonprofits, currently funded by the City, with additional COVID-19 relief funds to assist their operations for the grant year.

Emily Pearce asked why the County originally planned to not include Rockville in the original payment process and also asked what the advocacy was like from the City of Rockville. Niambi responded that the County initially wanted targeted interventions for zip codes that are low-income. Niambi shared that as a member of the Montgomery County COVID-19 Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Workgroup, she advocated that although Rockville may be a high-medium income bracket, there are still pockets of poverty and residents that would benefit from County rental assistance.

Emily Pearce asked about the modified Holiday Drive operations. Niambi shared how extensive typical operations are, including food and toy drives from the local schools and the large number of volunteers involved. Niambi said that due to COVID-19 concerns and the schools remaining closed, staff decided to change the operation to a gift card only model in 2020. Emily expressed concern about the gift card model placing the burden of picking up food on the residents and asked what type of gift cards. Niambi responded that they will be Giant gift cards in November and Target gift cards in December.

Mark Pascu, At-large Member and Chair, asked about how much staff is left in the Community Services Division with the two new vacancies and asked Councilmember Pierzchala about if there has been any recent budgetary pressure within the City of Rockville. Councilmember Pierzchala shared that many of the open positions in the City are frozen and that the City Manager determines which positions can be open for hire. He also shared that Mayor and Council cannot be involved in the hiring process because it is against their charter, but they will have a better sense of the budget impacts in October, once the summer operational losses from the typically strong Recreation and Parks programs are analyzed.

Laura Kaplan, At-Large Member, asked about Holiday Drive fundraising and Niambi responded that the City Manager provided the project with additional funds and that donation efforts would continue. Laura said that she would share any potential fundraising ideas with Ali Hoy via email.

**RE: Discussion on Human Rights Commission Request for Partnership
Creating a Community Survey**

Ali Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst, told the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) that three members of the Human Rights Commission reached out about a community survey to assess needs of the Rockville community. They are requesting HSAC members to participate in the creation and distribution of this survey. Emily Pearce and Wanneh Dixon volunteered to represent the HSAC during this joint project.

RE: Discussion about Boards and Commissions Task Force Report

The Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) discussed the Boards and Commissions Task Force Report, which the City Clerk's office requested the HSAC gather comments about for presentation to the Mayor and Council. The HSAC members held a discussion and brought up the points listed below:

- There was a consensus that the HSAC is underrepresented within the report, along with other boards and commissions.
- HSAC members, who were serving in 2018-2019 when this report was being drafted, reported that they did not receive a questionnaire from this task force. The HSAC Staff liaisons (Carlos Aparicio and Ali Hoy) were interviewed by a task force representative in July 2019, but this interaction was not included in the report. The overall concern is that the Task Force made recommendations and evaluations about the HSAC with incomplete or inaccurate information.
- The reference to “no legal requirement for this commission” in the chart (Attachment C) is incorrect because the HSAC was formed through a City resolution.
- This report may contain flawed methodology that includes non-objective language like “wow” and “ok” when assessing boards and commissions performance.
- One of the newest members of the HSAC found the report to be very informative about the other boards and commissions, indicating a need for training about boards and commissions.
- There was agreement with the report recommendations for a volunteer coordinator and improvements on volunteer outreach efforts, especially to increase diversity among the boards and commissions.
- Some members would like to see a documented, more transparent recruiting and appointment process and believe that the current process may be a barrier to the creation of a diverse and appropriate board composition.
- The website evaluation mentioned in the report was great and HSAC members agreed that content on the website is inconsistent among boards and commissions.
- There was concern expressed that some content was left out, as referenced in the attached email communications with Mayor and Council about the report.
- The HSAC expressed concern that the report recommended better communication with specific task forces, but did not clarify the reasoning. Specifically, the Caregiver Funding Task Force communication issues were surprising because the HSAC had a member serving on this task force and would receive regular updates. It is also worth noting that many of the recommendations from the Caregiver Funding Task Force have already been implemented or are under review by staff and the HSAC.

Councilmember Pierzchala notified the HSAC members that the Mayor and Council would be discussing this issue again during the November 2nd meeting and suggested that the HSAC submit testimony at community forum or send an email to Mayor and Council. Mark Pascu, At-large Member and Chair, suggested that during the next meeting, the HSAC draft a statement to Mayor and Council about this issue and asked that it be added to the next month’s agenda.

RE: Old Business

- Discussion about Racial Justice

Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member, shared that she attended the City of Rockville police training that was mentioned during the last Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) meeting. She said she was impressed by the discussion that was had with the community and felt that the audience got a better feel for what could be done to address racial justice issues.

Wanneh Dixon, At-Large Member, asked what the HSAC action items are on this issue. Deborah Moore responded that HSAC members Laura and Emily testified during the June 2020 meeting and that they held a joint meeting with the Human Rights Commission (HRC). Emily shared that she is interested in how the community survey project can address community gaps and underrepresented populations. Niambi shared that she and the Youth and Family Counselor set up a meeting with the HRC chair to explore a potential partnership for their youth oriented events to discuss racial issues and mental health disparities. Niambi said they wanted to make City services known so that they can be utilized by students of color.

Emily Pearce brought up the lack of diversity among the City's boards and commissions and asked if there was any active recruitment within underrepresented groups to serve in these positions. Councilmember Pierzchala said that the City doesn't have a recruitment coordinator and that the Mayor is the only person who can officially nominate board or commission nominees. He shared that boards and commissions used to make recommendations to the Mayor, but ultimately she makes the final decision on who to nominate.

Nancy Sushinsky brought up that there used to be an event that highlighted local Caregiver nonprofit agencies at the Rockville farmers market and that this event allowed the public to learn more about resources provided in the City. She felt this was a good avenue for recruitment to boards and commissions.

Emily suggests that the HSAC invite community leaders, LTL participants and City program participants to hear how the commission could benefit the people of Rockville better. Deborah Moore highlighted that the consumer member of the HSAC can also act as a resource for these discussions and she hopes that another consumer member can join the Commission. The members had a discussion about involving other boards like the Asian Pacific Task Force to join future meetings and asked Ali Hoy to reach out to them for a the December meeting.

Nancy Sushinsky brought up that there used to be an event that highlighted local Caregiver nonprofit agencies at the Rockville farmers market and that this event allowed the public to learn more about resources provided in the City.

RE: Other Items

Laura Kaplan shared that she contacted County Council about the healthcare letter drafted by the Human Services Advisory Commission. Councilmember Gabe Albornoz is supportive of advocating for federal healthcare bills, but will need additional councilmember support. Laura said that she wants to send the letter to the Montgomery County Executive too and asks HSAC members for their thoughts on that course of action. Deborah Moore motioned that Laura send this healthcare letter to the Montgomery County Executive. Emily Pearce seconded. The motion was unanimous.

RE: Plan Agenda for October 13, 2020 Meeting

The members of the Human Services Advisory Commission requested the following for the next agenda:

- That Asmara Habte, Director of Housing and Community Development, attend the next meeting to report on hiring updates and answer questions about community services.
- Drafting a Boards and Commissions Task Force statement for Mayor and Council.

RE: Adjourn

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