



PRINCETON HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes

January 18th, 2023

Zoom Meeting * Princeton, NJ 08540

Board Members – Present

Veronica Olivares-Weber,
Chair

Ericka Deglau, Vice
Chair

Leticia Fraga, Council Liaison
Nakia White Barr
Rebecca Balaguer

Larry Spruill

Ming Kuang

Khristina Gonzalez

Jean Y. Durbin

Staff – Present

Rhodalynn Jones, Director
Salum Hur Bukhari-Board
Secretary

Board Members Absent

Call to Order:

The Regular Meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission was called to order by Council Liaison Leticia Fraga at 6:03. Council Liaison Fraga then recited the acknowledgment: *“We gather today on the land of the Lenape. As members of the Princeton Human Services Commission, we aspire to show appreciation, respect, and concern for all people and our environment. We honor the Lenape and other Indigenous caretakers of these lands and waters, the elders who lived here before, the Indigenous today, and the generations to come.”* Roll Call was completed with those present indicated. There were no members of the public present.

Reorganization of the Commission:

- Council Liaison Fraga began the meeting by welcoming new members to the Human Services Commission. The new members followed by introducing themselves briefly to the rest of the Commission.
- Council Liaison moved the meeting forward by requesting the Commission members to nominate and elect the Chair and Vice Chair for the Commission. Veronica Olivares-Weber was elected unanimously as the Chair after being nominated by Ericka Deglau and seconded by Khristina Gonzalez. Ericka Deglau was elected as the Vice Chair after being nominated by Larry Spruill and seconded by Rebecca Balaguer.
- Chair Veronica initiated the review and approval of the meeting dates. The dates were approved unanimously.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: November 2022

Meeting Minutes for the month of November 2022, were approved by the Commission.

Director’s Report:

Director Jones began by welcoming and introducing herself to the new Commission members. She informed the Commission that:

- **2022 Holiday gift drive:** Director Jones updated the Commission on successful conclusion of the 2022 Holiday Gift Drive which is hosted by the Human Services Department. The Department was able to give 328 gifts to children and families who belong to lower income groups, to ease the burden of expenses on the families during the holiday season.
- **NJ Count=Point in Time Survey/Homelessness Prevention:** The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires a nationwide survey to be conducted by the end of January each year. The aim of this survey is to identify homeless individuals who lack access to proper shelters or those who have been living in untraditional housing/dwellings which are not safe or stable. It is upon the collection of information through this survey that the determination about what proper and relevant services are needed is made, along with decisions about how funding should be allocated by the government. For this purpose, Mercer County is conducting its Point in Time Survey on January 25th, 2023 in partnership with Monarch Housing. Director Jones stated that this is the first time that the Department of Human Services is directly getting involved with this survey.



- **NJ FamilyCare/Medicaid Expansion:** Director Jones shared the amazing news of Gov. Phil Murphy's Cover All Kids initiative to expand Medicaid coverage for children under 19 years of age regardless of their immigration status, went into effect on January 1st, 2023. Director Jones requested everyone to share the flyers for this breakthrough initiative and informed the Commission that the Human Services Department is expected to host an informative in-class event in collaboration with Princeton High School's ELL program. She further shed light on the benefits that this will bring for the Child Healthcare Conference, as the Municipality pays for health care provided to the uninsured children. However, now with the kids being covered by this program, the Municipality can explore directing the budget towards funding the same healthcare services for adults.
- **Princeton Community Works Conference:** Director Rhodalynn Jones informed the Commission that the conference for the Princeton Community works will be held during the last week of January. This conference is geared towards non-profit organizations. They provide workshops for non-profits and boards to help navigate fund raising, volunteer management, and everything else which comes under the non-profit arena.
- **Discussion:**
 - Vice Chair Ericka had requested Director Jones to share information about the homeless individuals whom the Department of Human Services is currently serving and had further requested the director to summarize some of the challenges that the office faces when dealing with such cases.
 - Upon her request Director Jones briefed the Commission on how 12 individuals were helped during December 2022 and more data was being collected. She emphasized on how the number of assistance seekers can vary from one season to another depending on weather and other factors.
 - Director Jones also highlighted the top three challenges which the office encounters. The first challenge arises when it comes to people without identification. The second challenge is numerous times people calling in to seek help from the office are not Princeton nor Mercer County residents. The last challenge arises since majority of the people who seek help do not wish to leave Princeton. It is to be noted that Princeton itself does not have shelters in town and the office can offer emergency shelters through hotels or motels but they are not in Princeton.
 - Council Liaison informed the commission about her recent meeting with the Chief of the Police Department, where they discussed the use of several techniques and procedures through which the police handle calls regarding homelessness. She further noted that most of these calls are regarding trespassing, which the police handle by connecting the individuals to the Human Services Department and other relevant resources rather than imposing charges on them.
 - Vice Chair Ericka enquired Council Liaison if the PD have enough resources and training to tackle situations which involved people with mental health issues that were not enforcement related but still required some sort of intervention by the police.
 - Council Liaison responded by emphasizing on how the police department is always well versed with their training programs for all kinds of predicaments. Director Jones seconded by sharing how the police regularly works in collaboration with the Human Services Department. She further mentioned how Volunteers of America are a growing channel in the North.
 - Director Jones stated that the county identifies team leaders who are trained for this by Monarch Housing and several agencies will be going out of Mercer County. However, Oaks Integrated Care will be surveying Princeton and the Human Services will work with them.
 - Chair Veronica enquired Director Jones about situations where minors facing homelessness are indirectly reported to the office by schools or other channels and how the office responds to them by adding them to the reports.
 - Director Jones clarified that the office adds only those individuals who directly contact the Human Services Department. Any information without an actual interaction from the Human Services Department directly is not noted or put into records.



- Rebecca Balaguer asked Director Jones if there were any pamphlets or signs that would help direct people to the Human Services Department in case of being homeless themselves or in predicaments where they identify someone else.
- Vice Chair Ericka questioned Director Jones in regard to the Medicaid expansion programs as to how information about the coverage is being spread around the community. Director Jones mentioned that both traditional and untraditional routes, such as putting flyers in food bags, will be determined, and used to spread the information around.
- Director Jones stated that the community partners are aware of the information, but the community business may not be familiar. She stated that the word can be sent out to the community businesses too.
- Director Jones further answered Council Liaison's question regarding the updating and digitization of the Resource Directory by highlighting how Mercer County in partnership with the Trenton Health team developed a food finder application which has been a huge success. The app was created by the help of Princeton University's students, and they will generate something similar for the Human Services Department too.
- **Council Updates:**
- **Commission Goals:** Council Liaison Leticia Fraga shed light on the need to set goals for the new year and stated how Council administration, and Departments Heads were already working on designing a list of goals that Council will then review to determine which goals to focus on. She noted that once the list will be finalized, she will share it with the Commission, so that Commission members can align their list of goals with those of the Council to see how to prioritize.
- **BCC Handbook:** Council Liaison informed the Commission that the BCC handbook is being revised and updated and that each member will receive a copy soon. She encouraged everyone to review it to get a fathom understanding what the role of a Commission is. She added that the voluntary work of the Commissioners is profoundly appreciated, however, it should not be forgotten that the Commissioners do not vest the authority to direct the way in which the staff functions and any communication needs to go through the Liaison first. Council Liaison noted that there will be a formal orientation held for all new members once after everyone is on board. Finally, she emphasized on the significance of attendance.

Subcommittee Reorganization/Goals & Priorities:

- Chair Veronica highlighted that the Commission has three sub-committees, and it was recently decided to add Welcoming week alongside Immigration, however, it required the approval of all commission members.
- She further noted how Food Insecurity was no longer a subcommittee but will rather be under Community Needs alongside childcare education, homelessness, and housing.
- She further briefed the Commissioners on the role of each committee.

Community Needs:

- These will be identified regarding residents who are not connected to adequate food resources, continue collaborating with the Housing Stability Coalition to identify affordable and sustainable housing programs, the focus will also be on provisions to reduce and handle situations of homelessness.

Immigration and Welcoming Week:

- Helping low-income immigrants/refugee with their needs through facilitating them through different resources, for example on legal services and by collaborating with different Princeton schools, workshops for immigrant workers rights are also a part of this sub-committee.
- Director Jones briefed the commission on Welcoming America week and how it was established by Princeton in 2016 with the aim to make the immigrant population feel included and welcomed in the community. The Commission identifies events that would promote inclusivity amongst the population and work alongside the Department.



Mental Health and Wellbeing:

- Vice Chair Ericka highlighted the decision to add mental health and wellbeing as a subcommittee. Post pandemic the need for addressing mental health and children's social isolation has increased. The wellbeing of the elderly population will also be addressed under this subcommittee.

Discussion:

- Chair Veronica informed Larry Spruill that Food Insecurity will be under Community Needs now. Larry Spruill responded by letting the Chair know that he would love to be on the committee, however, will not be able to do it alone.
- Vice Chair Ericka elaborated more on the roles of sub-committees of Community Needs and Immigration.
- Council Liaison emphasized on how significant the role of the Commission and its' sub-committees is, by reminiscing the time when the Commission set guidelines for the police to not ask people of their immigration status while making stops. This direction is still held in place and several other departments and municipalities have used it as an example.
- Larry Spruill asked if Corner House was working with the Human Services Department for the mental health and wellbeing.
- Director Jones clarified that Corner House is a hybrid partial department of the Municipality, while being a non-profit. Currently their main focus of Corner House is on drug and alcohol counseling, however, they work on mental health if it is a co-occurring issue. They are further getting their license probably in Spring or summer. They further have collaborative meetings in place for commissioners to join, such as for Princeton Alcohol and Drug Alliance (PADA).
- Chair Veronica encouraged everyone to think about what committee everyone would want to join and if they would like to become the leader.
- Commissioners Larry Spruill, Jean Durbin, and Nakia Barr joined the Community Needs sub-committee, along with Chair Veronica to complete the quorum. Chair Veronica and Jean Durbin showed interested in co-chairing.
- Council Liaison pointed out that there are two vacancies open for alternates.
- Commissioner Rebecca Balaguer and Khristina Gonzalez showed interest in joining the Health and Wellbeing committee along with Vice Chair Ericka. Vice Chair Ericka and Rebecca showed interest in co-chairing.
- Ming Kuang joined the Immigration and Welcoming week committee, along with Chair Veronica.
- Director Jones and Council Liaison answered Vice Chair Ericka's queries about the Affordable Housing and briefed the commission on the guidelines for applying.

Adjournment

The motion to adjourn at 7:40 p.m was made by Chair Veronica and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by:

Salum Hur Bukhari

Recording for Princeton Human Services Commission