



PRINCETON HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes

February 16, 2022

Zoom Meeting * Princeton, NJ 08540

Board Members – Present

Rebecca Balaguer
Ericka Deglau, Vice Chair
Leticia Fraga, Council Liaison
Lina Genovesi, Alt.
John Heilner
Ming Kuang
Veronica Olivares–Weber, Chair
Larry Spruill

Board Members Absent

Bryan Hill
Khristina Gonzalez
Loydes Nieves, Alt.

Guest Speaker

Kathleen Cassidy
Maria Juega

Staff – Present

Rhodalynn Jones, Director
Soorya Baliga, Chair of Youth
Advisory Committee

Call to Order

The Regular Meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission was called to order by Chair Olivares–Weber at 6:01 pm. John Heilner recited the announcement: *“We gather today on the land of the Lenni 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.

Approval of Meeting Minutes– January 19, 2022

Councilwoman Fraga had two minor edits to the January minutes. She clarified on the Presentation of the Need Assessment Survey Results and the COVID-19 rapid tests comments. Chair Olivares–Weber motioned to approve the reorganizational and regular meeting minutes dated January 19, 2022. The minutes were approved with those two edits, first moved by Mr. Heilner, seconded by Larry Spruill, without opposition.

Public Comments

Maria Juega, a Spanish interpreter and one of the founders of the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund (LALDEF), commented on the issue of language barriers in Princeton. She noted that the Mercer County newsletter had important free tax preparation information, which stated that services are available for qualified citizens, and was only in English. Many noncitizens file taxes and there is a need for translation options of these notices from the county. The Mercer County website currently offers no translation feature and has little outreach for non-English speakers. She highlighted that 12% of residents in Mercer County -over forty thousand, do not speak English well, and do not have equal access to services as English speakers. Mr. Heilner showed his support for Ms. Juega and bringing this to the attention of the county. Councilwoman Fraga and Chair Olivares–Weber also weighed in on this issue. Ms. Juega will draft a letter and circulate it to Mr. Heilner, Councilwoman Fraga and Chair Olivares–Weber to be presented to counsel to sign off in support of bringing change to these language barriers.

Community Presentation by Kathleen Cassidy from Solidaridad

Kathleen Cassidy spoke about Solidaridad’s background. She shared the screen with all present and elaborated on the purpose of Solidaridad and assistance offered by this group. Solidaridad Central New



Jersey is a group of volunteer community support for our immigrant neighbors, with its primary work to assist them in completing asylum applications and increase their chances of finding legal representation. She also went over the values of those who volunteer, which includes no judgment about who should be here, the strength or weaknesses of a case, and no judgment about the personal story of a neighbor, family or community.

Ms. Cassidy elaborated on Solidaridad's cause and how immigrants can use their assistance to seek asylum pro se, along with asylum benefits. She also provided her contact information with Solidaridad's hotline: (609)937-0100 and email: solidaridadproseclinic@gmail.com

Councilwoman Fraga thanked Ms. Cassidy for her presentation and asked her if she provides services with other cases. She also addressed the privilege of assisting immigrants in need and showing support. She then commented on immigrant outreach with John Heilner. Ming Kuang thanked Ms. Cassidy and Councilwoman Fraga, and mentioned that minors in Princeton public schools may have parents who could benefit from Solidaridad's assistance. Vice-Chair Ericka Deglau also weighed in on juvenile status in regard to visas.

Mr. Heilner mentioned that one way to think about what Solidaridad does is it primarily assists with asylum cases, whereas the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund (LALDEF) actively assists with legal services in most fields except asylum cases, though both groups are now working together.

Rebecca Balaguer asked about a juvenile applying for asylum with Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS). Councilwoman Fraga and Chair Olivares-Weber recommended she check with legal services. Chair Olivares-Weber then asked Ms. Cassidy what Solidaridad's main struggle is and how the Princeton Human Services Commission can be helpful. Ms. Cassidy stressed the importance of people being conscious that there are people in our community who may need these asylum services, and for the outreach staff to be conscious of this as well. Mr. Heilner also weighed in and added that the human services office has flyers on the group which it circulated. Vice-Chair Deglau highlighted the harder times undocumented immigrants have getting access to government benefits, and that the local food programs, Princeton Mutual Aid and Solidaridad has been helpful in this regard.

Director's Report – Rhodalynn Jones

Director Rhodalynn Jones gave a brief update on the 2022 Summer Youth Employment Program. The Human Services Department is already beginning to prepare for its 22nd annual program to support low-income youth, ages 14-18, with employment assist workshops and will match them to employments sites. This is an eight week program and currently, it is in the budget to support 40 youth from July through August 2022.

The Human Services Department is partnering with Affordable Housing and the Health Department to identify how we will allocate our Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. Previously, those funds were used to support rental assistance through the housing initiative of Princeton, though we currently are looking to expand this to include support for people who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and need assistance with childcare, utility assistance, and increase of personal protection equipment (PPE). Dental and vision are also part of the package.



There is an increase in the community of people experiencing homelessness, as well as being in danger of eviction. People who are eligible for rental assistance are being referred to the Housing Initiatives of Princeton (HIP) program, or the county or state level programs. Volunteers of America are also assisting with this. She continued that the utility moratorium will end on March 15, and we are making a huge outreach push to take advantage of PSEG's assistance program before that date. Ms. Juega asked what has been the relationship with VOA working out so far with homeless folks. Ms. Jones elaborated that they are responsive and have been actively assisting every time she seeks their help, though there are times when some homeless individuals are not interested in the VOA offered housing units. Nevertheless, this housing option is still being offered during this hard time when emergency housing is very limited.

Regarding other outreach efforts, the PHSC is still spreading the word on PSEG assistance and the Excluded New Jerseyans Fund (which has been extended to the end of February) and existing food pantries. Free tax preparation services are also being promoted, which is available at the Princeton Public Library, through AARP, and at the Princeton Senior Resource Center. Ms. Jones clarified that there are no Spanish speakers at these locations, so they are asking people to be accompanied with an interpreter to assist. Ms. Juega added that United Way has Spanish-speaking tax assistance at Salvation Army in Trenton on Thursdays from 12pm-4pm, and at the Boys and Girls Club in Lawrenceville on Saturdays from 11am-3pm. Mr. Heilner asked how outreach is being done to the Spanish speaking community regarding the Excluded New Jerseyans Fund. Ms. Jones explained that Kim, the local outreach coordinator, is actively going to the local Affordable Housing community and stores that are frequented by the immigrant population to spread the word on this. Ms. Balaguer asked for the information on this to be given to the director of school services to distribute at the local high school.

Additional outreach efforts include the Emergency Rescue Mortgage Assistance program which has just opened. Through this program, homeowners can receive up to thirty-five thousand dollars to cover mortgage arrears or any other housing delinquencies (such as taxes).

Council Updates

Councilwoman Fraga gave a brief update of what the council has been working on, and that they recently met to set our goals. A time to meet with other chairs of the Boards, Commissions and Committees (BCC's) is anticipated to take place after they had an opportunity to review what council's general goals are, what the department goals are, and then see where their goals fit. She shared that there were six goals identified, the main one is social equity. She mentioned how important this goal is to her and her continued advocating to get an accessible laundromat for the residents of the John Witherspoon neighborhood. Access to basic services and quality of life initiatives were also highlighted. The second goal was on resiliency and climate crisis. The third goal is on transit parking and streetscape, which includes expanding the transportation we provide, addressing parking issues and our streetscape. The fourth goal is on housing affordability and would include not just additional affordable housing stock that is already being worked on, but also addressing workforce housing (also known as middle-income housing). The fifth goal is regarding better use of technology, which includes having the process for residents to file municipal applications in an electronic format rather than having to do so in person. The sixth one is legacy goals, which are goals identified in the past but still being worked on, and includes harmonizing all of the ordinances and codes, and many others legacy goals.

Subcommittee Reorganization/Goals and Priorities



Councilwoman Fraga noted three goals for Human Services, outreach, communication coordination and program development. She noted that some of the updates from Ms. Jones minutes earlier fall under those goals, and then discussed the other PHSC goals identified. She gave this as an example of how some department goals can fall under council goals. Chair Olivares–Weber thanked her for having the goals from the Mayor and council finally set, and said she looked forward to that council meeting in particular to set these goals.

Mr. Spruill emphasized the need for transportation to Penn Medicine Princeton Medical Center. He stressed that there is no option currently available to provide vouchers or transit from the local university to this hospital. Councilwoman Fraga will follow up on this issue at the next meeting.

Immigration

Mr. Heilner spoke about the Immigration subcommittee goals and priorities for 2022. These include ensuring that low-income and undocumented immigrants' needs are considered in other town and non-profit programs; be active with wage theft claims through Ms. Jones and directing people to her if they have these claims; making sure that legal services are available; collaborate with the Princeton school system to provide assistance and resources to immigrant and refugee students; assist with finding employment opportunities for low-income immigrants; and focus as we can on immigrant workers' right (through collaborating with the Civil Rights Commission, New Labor and Unidad Latina en Acción).

Chair Olivares–Weber asked about doing outreach on social media. Councilwoman Fraga did not recommend it, though she highlighted submitting outreach information for the Princeton newsletter and putting it on the municipal website.

Outreach/Needs Assessment

Vice-Chair Deglau gave a brief update that they will be presenting to the partners next Wednesday at noon, and have invited members of the community center taskforce to listen in and will have a discussion afterwards. The idea, as discussed, is to get input from partners and add it into a presentation that can subsequently be brought to council.

Housing Stability & Food Insecurity

Chair Olivares–Weber noted that last time the name was change to Community Needs, she wanted to see if it can be changed to Community Needs & Social Equities because it will cover housing, food, education and the rest of the work that is being done by this subcommittee. This would also remove the need for the Outreach Needs Assessment subcommittee, reduce extra subcommittees and meetings, and promote working together more. She asked for comments and more members.

Welcoming America

Chair Olivares–Weber explained this is just one week in September. The community outreach coordinator is working with Human Services and the idea is to collaborate with different organizations for this year's event. Councilwoman Fraga added that it was mentioned at the recent council meeting, and this year Welcoming Week is going to take place September 9th through the 18th in Princeton. Palmer Square Management took note to make reservations for any events that we may partner with for these dates if they are done in person this year. Ms. Kuang asked if the culture sharing event is done by the township. She shared that families participate in this event directly with the municipality and non-profits.



Mental Health and Well-being

Chair Olivares–Weber discussed with board members who was interested in being the chair of this subcommittee. Vice-Chair Deglau offered to support Ms. Balaguer if she wants to be chair. She expressed interest to be in the subcommittee, but not as chair. Chair Olivares–Weber offered to be in the subcommittee. Ms. Balaguer and Ms. Kuang joined this subcommittee. Chair Olivares–Weber thanked both of them for joining. Soorya Baliga stated she also wants to be involved with this subcommittee.

Health Department Liaison

Chair Olivares–Weber stated that Bryan Hill is the Health Liaison for this subcommittee, though we have not received any reports lately. She suggested having a commissioner from the Mental Health and Well-being subcommittee attend those meetings. Councilwoman Fraga commented that she is the liaison to the BOH, and can include the health department updates in her council updates.

Discussion

Goals & Priorities

No discussion held on this topic.

Adjournment

The motion to adjourn at 7:46 p.m. was moved by Vice-Chair Deglau, seconded by Mr. Spruill, and affirmatively carried by all those present.

Respectfully submitted by:

Paula Alexeev
Recording Secretary
Princeton Human Services Commission