



PRINCETON HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes

March 15th, 2023

Zoom Meeting * Princeton, NJ 08540

Board Members – Present

Veronica Olivares-Weber,
Chair
Leticia Fraga, Council Liaison
Mayor Mark Freda
Larry Spruill
Ming Kuang

Maya Wahrman
Rebecca Balaguer
Khristina Gonzalez
Nakia White Barr
Ari Meisel
Greg Sarjeant
Jean Y. Durbin

Staff – Present

Rhodalynn Jones
Salum Hur Bukhari-Board
Secretary

Board Members Absent

Ericka Delgau

Call to Order:

The Regular Meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission was called to order by Chair Veronica Olivares-Weber at 6:03. Commissioner Greg Sarjeant then recited the acknowledgment: *“We gather today on the land of the Leni 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. Maria Juega was present as a member of public, along with students from the student board.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: February 2023

Meeting Minutes for the month of February 2023, were approved unanimously after a motion was started by Commissioner Nakia Barr and were seconded by Commissioner Jean Durbin.

Director’s Report:

Director Jones informed the Commission that:

- **COVID-NJ Medicaid Renewal & NJ SNAP Emergency Allotments:** Director Jones reminded the Commission that beginning April 1st, 2023, all Medicaid applications will need to be renewed in-order for individuals to continue receiving their medical benefits. She encouraged all members to spread the word among their networks, so that no one lapses behind on receiving their medical benefits. Furthermore, she highlighted that SNAP will be ending their extra-allowance program under the EBT cards, however, GOV. Phil Murphy has increased the basic allowance threshold for an extra 95 dollars per month.
- **Summer Youth Employment:** Director Jones briefed the Commission on the 23rd Summer Youth Program that will be organized by the Department. She noted that under this year’s program, 35 eligible students will be selected to work for the Municipality and other non-profits. These students are expected to garner a vast range of experience through various workshops, particularly those that will help them develop skills such as resume writing and ways of participating in career job-fairs. Furthermore, there will be facilitators called in on a bi-weekly basis who will hold workshops for these students on the dynamics of interviewing, communication, money management and more.
- **Women, Infants, & Children- Outreach:** Director Jones briefed the Commission members about the Women, Infants, and Children’s clinic, which partners with both the Human Services and Health Departments, holds space once a month at 400 Witherspoon to see the eligible residents of Princeton and assists them in connecting with nutritional education, breastfeeding courses, and cash assistance programs. She noted that last month the clinic announced the opening of their mobile clinic and had invited Director Jones for a visit. The Department of Human Services is now working on ensuring that the mobile unit is brought to Princeton on a more frequent basis for our residents.
- **BaseCamp:** Director Jones further touched on the initiative of the Basecamp, which is precisely a Project Management tool, that will be used to enhance the communication between community partners. Community



partners like the Housing Stability have already boarded on the team and more partners are expected to come on board next month. This process will allow various Human Services partners to share real-time information regarding the services/programs that they provide and will also enable them to answer certain questions of the residents with the aim to make the process feasible for all.

- **Discussion:**

- While answering Chair Veronica's query, Director Jones shared that new/old non-profit partners of the Municipality are contacted by the beginning of April in-order to see who would be willing to assist as hosts in the Summer Youth Employment Program. She further noted that some of the non-profits from the previous year had expressed interest in the program.
- Director Jones specified that only the Communications platform of Basecamp will be used by the Department and its community partners. She stated that she will send out a light description regarding the basic features and purposes are of this tool to all the Commissioners.

- **Council Updates:**

- **TigerTransit:**

- The Council Liaison updated the Commission about her meeting with the Princeton University. She expressed her excitement over learning new information about the other routes which the TigerTransit provides their services for, many of which the residents are not familiar with. Outreach programs for both English and non-English speakers are now being worked on. Council Liaison further added that the service is trying to set up ways through which they can increase their ridership. This is because more ridership directly correlates with the greater number of routes that the service can cover. She addressed the limitations that the TigerTransit has in what routes they can cover as NJ Transit is not in favor of this free transport service, specifically if it is along the NJ Transit route.

- **Community Building Event:**

- Council Liaison Fraga informed the Commission that the Loteria Community Building Event has been scheduled for April 15th, 2023, at the Hulfish Art Gallery. She further noted that some of the community partners have agreed to provide gift baskets to be given out as prizes, each worth of 25-35 dollars. As an act of expressing gratitude, the Community Partners will be advised to put flyers in these gift baskets that can incorporate information regarding what services these community providers offer. Furthermore, the Department will itself have tags on each gift basket that will acknowledge who the gift was from.

- **Goals/Initiatives/Scope of the Commission:**

- The Council Liaison briefed the Commission again on the general guidelines for setting goals and that they need to fit within the scope and mission of the Human Services Commission. While doing so she expressed her profound gratitude towards all Commissioners who have taken up this job as volunteers and work profusely hard.
- She also notified all new members about the Orientation session which the Commission will have once all new members have joined the board formally.

- **Subcommittee Reorganization/Goals & Priorities:**

- Chair Veronica requested Commissioner Jean to brief the Commission on the SMART Goals that had been narrowed down by the Commissioners for the Subcommittees of *Mental Health & Wellbeing*, *Community Needs*, and *Immigration/Welcome week*.
- Commissioner Rebecca highlighted the need to expand the collaborative/coordinating efforts, along with increasing channels through which information is shared with community partners. She stated that the HSC



can provide a platform through which community partners can engage in discussions and share resources regarding social/emotional support that are available for the community, especially for those belonging to lower income groups.

- Commissioner Larry Spruill highlighted the fact that everyone involved in the Food Security meeting spoke about a shortage of volunteers, therefore, he personally visited a few pantries to see if there is anything that the Commission can do. For instance, by encouraging individuals to participate in these pantries where most visitors are young-single men.
- He further dived into the matter of community centers which have been shut down since before and during the pandemic. Commissioner Larry expanded that these centers were used by people to socialize and now they cannot do that anymore, thus there is a need to see if these community centers can be reopened. Commissioner Larry further touched on the issue of a second Laundromat, whose location is a crucial matter.
- Commissioner Greg advised the Commission to enhance the outlook and information portal for the Commission of Human Services site, as it will allow people to get a better understanding of what the Commission's mission is. Additionally, he emphasized on the need to have a Directory too.
- Commissioner Ari suggested that free or low-cost counselling services must be made available for the residents. He highlighted that individuals can be trained through certificates to be able to provide some of these services, like crisis management, and they do not have to be always a psychiatrist.
- He further suggested that the Commission should hold informative workshops, for instance, one such that will help people deal with FAQ's around Affordable Housing/Immigrants.
- Commissioner Jean noted that one of the goals must revolve around figuring out why the number of Medicaid service providers are so low in the Municipality.
- Her second goal resided on the notion of developing a central webpage/Directory/resource guide for these providers that will be used by the residents for assistance. She added that a list of commonly asked documents must be made to let residents know about the list of documents which will be required of them while filing for benefit applications. She also suggested the Commission to have a Liaison for the community workers who will facilitate the applications of our region.
- Commissioner Ming suggested to draft goals that will focus on immigration. She noted that the public schools have and should continue to have programs that will assist immigrant and refugee students. Commissioner Ming expressed her desire to provide voluntary services for the Welcoming week and organize a Cultural Fest.
- Chair Veronica shared her aspired goals with the Commission. Her goals encompassed aspects like identifying the gaps like those of Commissioner Rebecca's goals. Her second goal was centered around community needs, specifically surrounding tenant rights and workshops related to them by collaborating with experts. She highlighted the issue of displacement and relocation and the resources that are available to tackle with these issues. Chair Veronica noted that there is a need to continue to connect residents with resources that are available in Mercer County. Discussion panels and partnerships with experts will yield fruitful results.
- In her goals she aspires the Commission to work on grants like the CBDG of HUD for the Affordable Housing projects for low-income groups, along with continuing to partner with legal experts who provide legal assistance to immigrants and refugees.

Discussion:



- Council Liaison added that the University expressed an interest in providing display screens that will help riders track the busses if the Municipality can identify locations where they could be installed.
- Chair Veronica shared her concerns regarding the meeting among the Chair, Vice Chair, Mayor, and the Council Liaison.
- Mayor Mark Freda and Council Liaison addressed her concerns and those of other members.
- Commissioner Ming requested the Council Liaison to give more information regarding the gift baskets for the Loteria Community Building Event and the price range that they each should be worth of.
- Director Jones noted that typically larger gifts, like bicycles, are placed as grand prizes. However, other gifts can include kitchenware and other household items.
- Council Liaison highlighted that Commissioner Rebecca's goal comes under the umbrella of not just the Human Services Department but also that of Corner House and the Health Department. Thus, she should collaborate with all three should the Commission decide to move forward with this goal.
- Director Jones suggested Commissioner Rebecca to see if they can develop a directory for mental health providers, as this will help the residents see if they are eligible for the service based on their insurances or not.
- Council Liaison noted that with the coming initiatives of Affordable Housing, the HSC can play a crucial role by helping people navigate the process of once an applicant has been notified a unit, they qualify for is available.
- Mariah Juega highlighted the need for educating residents about the process that happens once the numbers are declared, so that it reduces the chances of relocation or displacement as little as possible.

Discussion-PHSC Retreat:

- The Commission was not able to unanimously agree on meeting in-person for the next Board Meeting, thus members decided to coordinate over the meeting for further discussion.

Vice Chair Position:

- Chair Veronica informed the members about the opening of the Vice-Chair's position and asked to contemplate if anyone would like to nominate themselves for the position.
- Council Liaison advised interested candidates to reach out to colleagues and let them know before the next meeting.
- Commissioner Ari expressed his interest for the position.

Adjournment

The motion to adjourn at 7:43p.m was made by Commissioner Larry and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by:

Salum Hur Bukhari

Recording for Princeton Human Services Commission.