



PRINCETON HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

Monthly Meeting Minutes

March 17, 2021 by Zoom

Monument Hall, East Meeting Room, Princeton, NJ 08540

Present: Moriah Akrong, Khristina Gonzalez, John Heilner, Monique Jones, Jorge Narvaez, Alt., Loydes Nieves, Veronica Olivares–Weber, Larry Spruill

Absent: Ericka Deglau, Bryan Hill

Also Present: Leticia Fraga, Council Liaison, Melissa Urias, Director, Ex-officio, Gary DeBlasio, Corner House

Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission was called to order by Chair Veronica Olivares–Weber at 6:04 pm. She recited the announcement: *In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act: “In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, adequate notice of this meeting has been provided as required by the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice was provided of the date, time and location of this regular meeting by posting a copy with the Clerk’s Office and by emailing copies to the Princeton Packet and the Town Topics.”* Chair Olivares–Weber recited the Land of Acknowledgement for Indigenous People.

Public Comments:

Community Presentation

Blair Miller, Founder – Mr. Rogers’ Neighbors Kindness Project

Ms. Miller provided an overview of services offered by Mr. Rogers’ Neighbors Kindness Project to the community and where their support comes from. They assist approximately 85–90 families per day; to date, they’ve assisted 485 families and 35 local businesses. She explained how they are working with local businesses to assist the community. Councilwoman Fraga commented that this group also assisted with the Census outreach. She would like their assistance in getting the word out regarding the vaccine into the community. Ms. Miller stated that they have 35 volunteers who see a lot of undocumented residents who have no access to the vaccine; she would like to partner with the Municipal to assist with the communications. Their services are offered 3 days a week; Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 12 – 1 pm.

Councilwoman Fraga asked if they have a location where the vaccine can come to them; Ms. Miller is a member of Mt. Pisgah Church and will speak to them regarding the use of their parking lot for vaccine distribution if vaccines can be made available. Per Councilwoman Fraga, they are considering a mobile clinic. Mr. Heilner commented that at the Immigration subcommittee meeting they discussed COVID outreach; is there a flyer in Spanish available? Ms. Urias believes the Dept. of Health has flyer in Spanish; they have been working with the community in getting information out. Ms. Urias has been working with Ms. Miller to get the information out. Mr. DeBlasio reported that testing is being done at the YMCA daily. Chair Olivares–Weber stated that Gwen Krol, the Vulnerable Population Coordinator for the Dept. of Health has been getting out the information in Spanish. Ms. Akrong is Vice Chair of the Stewart Board at the Mt. Pisgah Church and will explore the vaccine distribution at the Church. Councilwoman Fraga commented that kids are looking to be productive; they can assist with communications distribution; Ms. Miller agrees and is willing to utilize the kids.

Approval of Meeting Minutes – February 17, 2021

The motion to approve the regular meeting minutes dated *February 17, 2021* was first moved by Mr. Heilner seconded by Mr. Spruill, all in favor by voice vote.

Director’s Report – Melissa Urias

General Assistance 2021

Ms. Urias reported they ended February with 6 cases. Currently she has 7 cases; she opened a new transfer case from Trenton. No changes from the state; waivers are still in place.

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

Ms. Urias reported that the application process started on Monday. This year, the students will gain in-person work experience with virtual job readiness training; it will be a hybrid program. Application closes April 30.

Minimum wage went up, making funding only available for 36 students and will require working papers. Students will be paid \$11.10 per hour; 25 hours per week. Students will be paid separately for the job readiness training since it will take place outside work hours. Ms. Urias has funding requests to Princeton Community Housing (PCH) and Princeton Housing Authority (PHA); funding would sponsor one student living in their neighborhood. Applications were sent to 150+ community partners, all schools, community liaisons, churches, etc. Ms. Urias is working with a consultant to assist with expanding the job readiness trainings. Students will be divided into 2 groups: first time participants and participants 2+ years with program. Ms. Urias described the training. Arm In Arm is interested in offering a financial fitness series specific for the teenagers; Ms. Urias will meet with Arm In Arm for details.

Ms. Urias recorded a short clip for the Princeton University Library. The Library participated in a conference for the National Association of College and Research Libraries. She highlighted the Summer Youth Employment Program in her video clip.

Chair Olivares–Weber asked where the funding is coming from and past when we had 40 students. Ms. Urias responded that the Summer Youth Program is 100% funded by the Municipality. In past, 2 additional positions are funded by PCH and PHA; she is still waiting for their response. This would bring us up to 38 students. Participants start at maximum, finishes off with less students. Mr. Spruill commented there were issues in the past for the physician sign off on the working papers; has this improved? Ms. Urias explained how it will be handled this year and hope it will resolve the past problems. The Princeton University Library is willing to take on two students; however, it will be remote since they are not open and staff is working remote. The positions will be offered to students; however, we are not sure if they would be willing to participate remotely. Councilwoman Fraga suggested we look into an employment training program where businesses' pay half the salary and Municipal pays half; this could increase number of participants. Ms. Urias responded that we may be able to consider next year. The participating worksites are non-profit groups and are struggling with the pandemic so not something she wants to consider for this year. Ms. Urias recited the list of participating worksites; currently we have 35 positions.

Ms. Urias is working with the consultant regarding professional development workshops; she is waiting for proposal from the consultant. Ms. Gonzalez stated that Princeton University has about 15 workshops and can partner with Human Services to provide the workshops virtually.

Ms. Miller has background in business and offered her time to assist. Consultant coordinates four workshops; SYEP Coordinators run two workshops. SYEP Coordinators usually will bring in speakers for their workshops. The SYEP Coordinator position will be coming open for the summer.

Council Updates, Leticia Fraga

Councilwoman Fraga reported on the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) activities. In collaboration with the Civil Rights Commission they hosted the Youth and Police Community Forum on February 25. It was well attended and has been asked to host again. She explained what was discussed. In collaboration with the school district along with a Corner House representative, on March 11, YAC hosted a forum on mental health wellbeing. Mr. DeBlasio stated that student mental health sessions have increased. Corner House has been bringing in speakers 1–2 per month to speak to the students. They are providing support for the leadership team for anxiety and depression.

Councilwoman Fraga reported that she was contacted by McCarter Theatre; they are offering a virtual performance, *The Maniac Monologues* for anyone to view.

Councilwoman Fraga reported at their March 8 meeting, Princeton University group has been working on an Affordable Housing map showing the history and development of Affordable Housing. The map can be found on the Civil Rights Commission web page.

Councilwoman Fraga reported that Marc Dashield will be retiring as the Municipal Administrator. Bob Bruschi will be interim Administrator.

Mr. DeBlasio reported that the state is considering a joint agency licenses and provided a description of the licenses and how it would provide services to the community. Councilwoman Fraga requested a resolution so the Council can consider advocating. Corner House is the only Municipal-funded counseling center in NJ. Chair Olivares–Weber has been in conversation with the Board of Health’s Chair, Meredith J. Hodach Avalos, MD regarding the activities both groups are addressing and found overlap in activities. Mr. Narvaez asked about Princeton Family Institute; Councilwoman Fraga stated they attended the forum and traded information. Mr. DeBlasio commented that they are providing bilingual services to the high school students and students. Ms. Urias believes they were working mainly with unaccompanied minors.

Subcommittee Reports

Outreach and Needs Assessment Subcommittee, Khristina Gonzalez

Ms. Gonzalez explained the activities of the subcommittee. The final draft of the preliminary report is complete for the Commission to review for feedback. Dr. Deglau is working on the survey and received approximately 67–71 responses to date. The subcommittee is considering engaging graduate students to perform analysis and draft writing of the final report; we should anticipate a report in June.

They had initial conversation about ways in recognizing community child care providers and other essential workers. Chair Olivares–Weber mentioned that during one of the listening sessions, it was mentioned that the Municipal can consider creating a mural to recognize them; however at this time they are trying to find ways to support the local businesses.

Food Subcommittee, Larry Spruill

Mr. Spruill reported that the subcommittee has not had the opportunity to meet. He opined not much has changed except that the need for food may have gotten better. He noticed the food has increased. Mr. Spruill has been reviewing the food distribution calendar and has been in touch with the other organizations also distributing food for updates on their activities. Mr. Spruill commented that there are a number of organizations distributing food but not listed in the calendar. Ms. Urias reported that she is working on updating the calendar. Ms. Urias reported that they had the monthly Food and Security Task Force meeting; she explained what this task force does and how they are planning on getting the word out for food distribution. Ms. Akrong is willing to assist with outreach. Chair Olivares–Weber suggested that Princeton Mutual Aid representative be invited to attend the monthly task force meeting.

Immigration Subcommittee, John Heilner

Mr. Heilner reported that the subcommittee has met and explained their activities. He announced that the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund (LALDEF) selected a new Executive Director. He reported that the subcommittee met with Police Dept., PMAN and ULA and discussed the wage theft and renewed outreach. Flyers are distributed in Spanish. Chair Olivares–Weber suggested we invite the commission or representative of NJ Dept. of Labor and Work Force Development and Legal Services of NJ for panel discussion. The subcommittee also discussed COVID outreach to the immigrant community. LALDEF is willing to assist with outreach for many things; the Mercer County Community ID at the Princeton Public Library. LALDEF received a large grant from the state to provide services such as outreach which includes information on testing and in cooperation with Catholic Charities, vaccinations at their Trenton site. The subcommittee discussed getting flyers out for school lunches. They discussed hosting an immigration table on Witherspoon Street covering various information pamphlets.

Mr. Heilner is doing work with Solidaridad on asylum assistance; they have been helping people for 2+ years now. Chair Olivares–Weber suggested to Mr. Heilner to invite a LADALF representative to present their services at a meeting. Mr. Heilner reported that there has been an increase in unaccompanied children. They will partner with other organizations to assist services this population. Mr. Spruill asked about the free tax services for low-income families. United Way is offering tax preparation services.

Ms. Urias recorded video for Princeton Police monthly training focusing on immigration and wage theft; video describes what Human Services has done with wage theft and non-collaboration.

Housing Subcommittee, Veronica Olivares–Weber

Chair Olivares–Weber reported that the subcommittee has not met this month. They have been meeting with interface groups and advocating for the community. Ms. Urias explained the process when Human Services is contacted seeking housing assistance and how Ms. Oluwafemi is helping. Ms. Urias provided an update of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grant; there is approximately \$100,000 remaining. HIP is considering additional applications; they will do more outreach into the community. Ms. Urias reported that there will be an announcement for a county program providing rental assistance. There may be a state program to be announced shortly for rental assistance. Chair Olivares–Weber commented that HIP has Spanish speaking staff and are able to respond. Chair Olivares–Weber reported that the housing task force committee has not met this month; however, they are working on a proposal for a financial counseling pilot program for Council. Ms. Urias explained that it is a pilot program; they will provide financial counseling up to 20 individuals to those living or on wait list for specific Affordable Housing developments managed by Princeton Community Housing (PCH).

Welcoming America Subcommittee, Moriah Akrong

Ms. Akrong reported that the subcommittee did not meet this month. Ms. Akrong has reached out to Laura Lacomb, Policy Director and founder of the Filipino American Youth organization to discuss their participation. Councilwoman Fraga suggested the theme “*Neighbors Helping Neighbors*”.

Discussion - Emergency Fund

Chair Olivares–Weber stated that the funding is low for Human Services’ Emergency Fund. We cannot fundraise as a municipal department. She suggested we create an ad-hoc subcommittee to look into creating *Friends for Princeton Human Services* non-profit to raise funds; she asked for volunteers. Councilwoman Fraga suggested we work with the Princeton Area Community Foundation; she suggested we explore setting up something where can be the repository for donations for the *Friends for Princeton Human Services*; volunteers do not have to be limited to this Commission. Chair Olivares–Weber has several residents interested in participating; at least one can handle legal services.

Miscellaneous

Mr. Spruill brought up residential heating problem where residents lost heat; who can they contact for emergency services. Councilwoman Fraga responded; residents can contact the Emergency Management division. When the issue arose recently, the Council members and Housing Authority was contacted by the residents; we need a better emergency plan in place. Jason Burr, Princeton Schools, stated that they were hosting people who also lost power and unable to charge phones or use computers during the Sandy storm. Mr. Burr is willing to meet with the Director of Emergency Management to help build protocols for emergency situations. Per Mr. DeBlasio, the Director has a plan in place. Mr. Heilner stated that he recalled during Sandy storm, directing people to the schools. There is a Local Emergency Planning Committee who meets quarterly. Councilwoman Fraga suggested we figure out how to get the information into the community, available resources and locations.

Adjournment

The motion to adjourn at 7:37 pm was first made by Mr. Spruill seconded by Mr. Heilner, all in favor by voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Julie Moy
Recording Secretary