

**HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES**

**February 9, 2021**

**6:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

**Virtual Meeting via Cisco Webex**

**Members Present:**

Wanneh Dixon, At-Large Member and Chair  
Amanda Schwartz, At-Large Member  
Deborah Moore, Consumer Member  
Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member

Mark Pascu, At-large Member  
Laura Kaplan-Weisman, At-large Member  
Leon Suskin, At-large Member  
Stacey Gold, Caregiver Member

**Members Absent:**

Laurie Gira, Caregiver Member

**Mayor and Council Liaison Present:** Councilmember Mark Pierzchala

**Staff Present:** Allison (Ali) Hoy, Community Services Program Analyst  
Niambi Powell, Community Services Referral Coordinator  
Frederika (Rika) Granger, Community Service Manager

**RE: Call Meeting to Order**

Wanneh Dixon, At-large Member and Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

**RE: Community Forum**

No discussion.

**RE: Approval of Minutes from January 12, 2021**

Mark Pascu, At-large Member, moved to approve the minutes, as drafted. Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member, seconded. The motion was unanimous.

**RE: Community Services Division Report**

Niambi Powell, Community Services Referral Coordinator, provided the following updates regarding the Community Services Division:

- The Youth and Family Counselor (YFC), Linkages to Learning Community School Coordinator and Community Services Manager have been hired and began employment in January. County has requested and provided funding for Therapeutic Recreation Program (TRP) to be administered for six students by Youth and Family Counselor, with a 9-12 hr/wk temp assistant, to be hired. Temp Youth and Family Counseling Specialist (up 30 hr/week) to serve Twinbrook ES, to be hired. Temp Youth Program Assistant Practitioner III (20 hr/wk) for Mentoring program has not yet been hired.
  - Frederika Granger, Community Service Manager, introduced herself to the group. She shared that her past experience includes working with Linkages to Learning and working at Aspire Counseling, which receives funding from the City of Gaithersburg and City of Rockville for Aspire’s Positive Aging Program, for

which Ms. Granger managed as well as served as an individual and group counselor.

- Major donors and partners of the 2020 Rockville Holiday Drive were recognized on February 8 by the Mayor and Council.
- The Grants and Program Analyst attended the final meeting of the county's Holiday Giving Coalition for the season and provided feedback about operations for the next Holiday Drive season.
- No referrals have been received for the Rockville Emergency Assistance Program (REAP) or Bridge programs since the last meeting. Residents have called about County assistance applications that have already been submitted.
- Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has been in the process of disbursing checks for approved COVID Rent Relief applicants and reported that 2,000 are still pending. DHHS has noted that future COVID rent assistance will be more restricted and will be property-specific.

Laura Kaplan-Weisman, At-large Member, asked for an update about the Youth and Family Counselor referrals and expressed that she has been worried about the lack of referrals from the schools served by the City. Niambi responded that the new YFC is currently completing the onboarding process and will soon make introductions to school staff at Richard Montgomery HS, Rockville HS and Twinbrook ES. TRP will start soon as well and is to be in person.

#### **RE: City of Rockville FY22 Budget Testimony**

Wanneh Dixon, At-Large Member and Chair, began the discussion by asking how to testify at Mayor and Council budget hearings. Councilmember Pierzchala responded that community members can sign up to testify with the City Clerk's office and that a representative from the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) can speak for five minutes, while others can speak for three minutes.

#### Human Services Needs Assessment

Nancy Sushinsky, Caregiver Member, motioned to approve the needs assessment testimony, as drafted. Motion withdrawn to allow further discussion. Laura Kaplan-Weisman asked Councilmember Pierzchala if it would be recommended to reference specific Mayor and Council member priorities and how they may align with funding a needs assessment. He responded that is helpful to address each member individually and other commission members agreed.

Deborah Moore, Consumer Member, moved to approve the needs assessment testimony, as drafted. Amanda Schwartz, At-Large Member, seconded. The motion was unanimous.

Deborah moved to assign Laura to make final revisions, as discussed, and present the needs assessment testimony. Amanda seconded. The motion was unanimous.

Amanda volunteered to provide testimony about her professional experience with needs assessments and their efficacy. She will include that a needs assessment should accompany the

grants process, in order to better inform their funding recommendations. Deborah added that she will provide written testimony about the need for a needs assessment.

#### Rockville Eat Fresh Program

Deborah moved to approve the Rockville Eat Fresh program testimony, as drafted. Stacey Gold, Caregiver Member, seconded. The motion was unanimous.

Stacey volunteered to present the Eat Fresh, as discussed. Deborah seconded. The motion was unanimous.

#### **RE: HRC Community Survey Partnership**

Wanneh Dixon shared information about an ongoing collaborative community survey project with the Human Rights Commission (HRC). The intention of the survey is to gather data and solicit feedback from the community concerning matters of racial justice, racial inclusion, and general health and wellness in the Rockville community during the COVID-19 pandemic. She said that they have finalized a survey draft and will be presenting it to Mayor and Council during the March 1<sup>st</sup> meeting. The survey draft was distributed to the HSAC, via email.

During the discussion about the survey draft, the following comments were made:

- Amanda Schwartz suggested adding a question to the COVID-19 section about what services the survey responder has recently needed and if they have experienced an increase in needs.
- Nancy Sushinsky praised the work done on the survey. She suggested that clarification be added to the questions where the survey responder must provide a numbered rating from a set scale.
- Stacey Gold recommended rephrasing questions about rent, mortgage or utility payments.
- Laura Kaplan-Weisman recommended adding a comment box at the end of the survey.
- Amanda and Deborah made recommendations to the demographic section. Councilmember Pierzchala recommended adding a marital status question. Commission members recommended that the demographic questions align with census formatting.

Wanneh asked if further edits can be made to the draft, after the HSAC meeting, but prior to the Mayor and Council presentation. Councilmember Pierzchala responded edits are allowable without an additional HSAC vote because it is not a final draft and will be reviewed publically, in the near future.

#### **RE: Federal Legislation Advocacy**

Laura Kaplan-Weisman began a discussion about the Commission potentially endorsing a resolution that is being sent by the Maryland Progressive Healthcare Coalition to the Montgomery County Council. The resolution asks the Montgomery County Councilmembers to sign a resolution in support of Medicare for All and the timing of the resolution aims to support the new 2021 Medicare for All bill in Congress being introduced in February. She highlighted that the bill would have significant benefits to the City of Rockville government and its residents because local governments and businesses spend a significant amount of money on healthcare plans each year, money that could be spent on other services.

In response, several HSAC members expressed their support for universal healthcare or expanded healthcare access, but posed an issue with the specific “Medicare for All” language referenced throughout the resolution. Reasons included the heavy politicization of the phrase and past public opposition to similar bills that have been previously introduced, especially by the current presidential administration.

Laura motioned for the HSAC to support of the [Maryland Progressive Healthcare Coalition’s resolution](#) to the Montgomery County Council. Deborah seconded. The motion passed with a majority vote of 5-4 (five members voted in favor).

Amanda Schwartz volunteered to put together a one-page summary of relevant federal legislation that can be discussed during the next HSAC meeting. She shared the following federal and Maryland General Assembly initiatives as potential discussion topics:

- On the federal level, there are education groups lobbying for [emergency funding](#) to be allocated to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to support children with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On the state level, an income tax rebate of up to \$250 for purchasing school supplies.
- On the state level, implicit bias training for the Office of Minority Health employees.

#### **RE: Caregiver Grants Update – FY22 Applications**

Ali Hoy shared that the FY22 Human Services Nonprofit Grant (“Caregiver” grant) review panel convened on February 1 to discuss the grant applications and arrive at funding recommendations for each applicant. The panel included two members from the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC), one member from the Environment Commission and one member from the Human Services Advisory Commission. The panel highlighted a focus on food distribution, shelter and mental health because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Grant administration staff relayed those recommendations to the City Manager for consideration when formulating his budget, which will be announced during the February 22 Mayor and Council meeting.

Wanneh Dixon and Amanda Schwartz both stated that they would have liked a needs assessment to accompany the grants process, in order to better inform their funding recommendations.

Wanneh wondered about if there are any gaps in the applicant pool and if there are any reasons why applicants might not apply for City of Rockville funds. She also commented that more funding should be available for the Caregiver grants.

Amanda commented that she noticed an overlap in some services and thinks there could be better collaboration between nonprofits. Specifically, she noted that some of the health clinics serve special populations and may want to consider collaborating at one facility to reduce costs and not compete for funding.

Leon Suskin suggested that the City provide smaller grants to provide services to residents. He also recommended that staff resume site visits, accompanied by HSAC members, which had originally been put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wanneh recommended that Caregiver grantees attend HSAC meetings to share information about the services they provide. Deborah Moore agreed and shared that those types of visits to the HSAC meetings used to happen regularly in the past. Stacey Gold also agreed and recommended that the City hold monthly or quarterly providers meetings.

**RE: Other Items**

Deborah Moore asked about the recruitment of new HSAC members and emphasized the need for an additional consumer member on the commission. Amanda added that advertising through Rockville reports is limiting and suggested posting paper ads at places where consumers are using services, in order to gather interested parties at the source of consumer services.

Nancy Sushinsky asked if past-consumers of services are eligible because she noted that sometimes past-consumers are interested in supporting groups that provide services after they have had some separation from being a consumer of services. Stacey Gold said she may have some potential applicants in mind, if past-consumers are allowed. Ali Hoy said that she would follow up and get back to the group with answers about this question.

Leon Suskin asked if HSAC members can switch roles to the consumer role, if they procure human services during their term. Ali Hoy said that it is unlikely, because the applicants are appointed to the role by Mayor and Council and are assigned a role when their term begins, but that she will check with the City Clerk's office.

Amanda commented that sometimes membership recruiting can be limited by a person's circumstances and lack of availability, rather than lack of interest in serving on a commission. She asked if the City has considered providing childcare or a stipend to commission members. Councilmember Pierzchala shared that Councilmembers Ashton and Myles have brought this up in the past, but it has not been resolved.

**RE: Plan Agenda for March 9, 2021 Meeting**

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

- Update on the HRC/HSAC survey
- Caregiver grants update
- FY22 budget testimony
- Federal legislation and advocacy

**RE: Adjourn**

Mark Pascu motioned to adjourn. Deborah Moore seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.