

Human Services Commission
Meeting December 9, 2010
3rd Floor Resource Room, 51 Inman Street
5:30 to 7:30

Commissioners Present: Marian Darlington-Hope, Reverend Lorraine Thornhill, Lori Likis, Claudia Hill, Christopher Hall, Khari Milner, Kati LaBraico,

Regrets: Ayse Atasoylu, Nan Stone, Paulina Mauras

DHSP Staff: Ellen Semonoff, Stephanie Ackert, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder)

Presenters: Barbara Kibler, Executive Director, and Kessen Green, Food Pantry Director of the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House (MFNH), and Michelle Holcomb, Development Director of Food For Free (FFF)

Michelle Holcomb presented first describing the three programs Food For Free currently runs: Produce Rescue and Distribution, Home Delivery, and the Transportation Partnership. The Produce Rescue and Distribution program currently serves 76 programs ranging from local food pantries, emergency shelters, 15 youth programs, several agency drop-in centers, and a number of special needs programs in Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville. 80% of the food is delivered in Cambridge. The program also purchases staples and fresh produce.

The Home Delivery Program delivers food monthly to 50 housebound elderly and disabled individuals who are low income, frail and generally isolated. FFF is looking to expand the program from 50 to 60 individual deliveries per month.

Food For Free, in partnership with a farmer in Lexington, runs a ¼ acre farm, "Field of Greens." In the summer it hires a part-time graduate student to oversee the program and to manage over 100 volunteers from families to groups. This past summer it had a record harvest.

Funding for these programs comes from the City of Cambridge via the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee (CEOC), and CDBG.

Funded by CDBG since August 2010, the Transportation Partnership picks up food orders at The Greater Boston Food Bank and delivers to 9 food pantry programs in Cambridge. FFF took over the delivery from the Red Cross when the Red Cross pulled back leaving the agencies in the city without a means of getting the food from The Food Bank. This program started in June and received CDBG funds in August.

Food For Free moves an average of 720,000lbs of food yearly.

Claudia asked, given that the CDBG grant is temporary, how will FFF sustain this program in the future? Michelle answered that FFF will apply for a grant from The Boston Foundation and is hopeful that given their partnership with the various agencies involved their application will be looked upon favorably.

Barbara Kibler thanked the Commission for the long term support and funding of the MFNH food pantry. The food pantry gives out approximately 18,000 lbs of food every month. Most of its funding comes from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Project Bread, and private foundations.

While he has only worked for the MFNH for less than one year, Kessen Green has seen an increase in Haitian families, refugees from the earthquake in Haiti, coming to the pantry. A major challenge they face is the language barrier, given that a substantial number of the pantry clients are Kreyol or Spanish speaking. Between 150-200 families, mostly single parent households, come to the MFNH food pantry in a month. On a typical Wednesday 50 families will come to the food pantry. The food pantry serves approximately 800 people in a month. Most newcomers are referred by other families who have been coming to the food pantry regularly. As the need spreads throughout the community, more unemployed people are coming to the food pantry; 25% to 30% of the clients are new to the food pantry.

In the Thanksgiving season, the food pantry distributed 275 turkeys plus trimmings for Thanksgiving dinner.

Barbara stated that funding is down from private foundations at a time when the demand for food pantry service is up. In order to make the funds stretch, MFNH has cut back on the purchase of meat, fish, chicken and cooking oil.

Some of the Commissioners were interested in hearing about summer programs that specialize in special needs children (Daybreak Day Camp), maybe having a panel presentation for the next meeting.

Ellen stated that the Department runs 13 summer programs and all programs incorporate special needs children with mainstream children.

There is also interest in hearing from Greater Boston Legal Services' Cambridge Abuse Prevention Program, which also received a temporary CDBG grant. Ellen suggested inviting Ronit from Transition House to come to the same meeting to talk about domestic violence.

Marian thought that it would be time to get a demographic update from the 2010 Census which should be available in February.

The next Human Services Commission meeting is scheduled for January 13th, 2011.

Meeting adjourned.