

Cambridge Human Services Commission
Minutes of Meeting 5/10/2012
5:30 – 7:30pm
3rd Floor Resource Room
51 Inman Street

Commissioners present: Ayse Atasoylu, Khari Milner, Nan Stone, Christopher Hall, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, Kati LaBraico, Cambridge Police Department Sergeant Kathleen Murphy in lieu of Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow, Katharine Emilie Thomas

Regrets: Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow, Lori Likis, Claudia Hill

DHSP staff: Ellen Semonoff, Janice Alger, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder)

Ellen Semonoff announced that the Cambridge Police Department is postponing their test group for the planned series of community discussions that was originally scheduled to be held on May 23rd. The test group will be rescheduled for a later date, and more details will be sent out as soon as they are available.

After introductions, Ellen and the Commission welcomed Katharine Thomas, who is a newly appointed Commissioner. Katharine is a lifelong Cambridge resident, a mother with children who attended the Cambridge Public Schools, and she has a grandchild who was enrolled in DHSP's Baby U program. For the past 15 years, Katharine has been the Assistant Director of the Cambridge-based Institute for Health and Recovery (IHR). IHR provides substance abuse treatment and counseling to individuals, youth and families struggling with addiction and mental health issues.

Ellen then confirmed that for Fiscal Year 2013, there would be level funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Public Services grant allocations.

A general discussion ensued about the invitation-only CDBG applications from current CDBG funded programs. In reviewing this year's CDBG applications, some Commissioners were concerned that many of the agencies did not provide programmatic outcomes. It was noted that most applicants had provided output measures rather than outcomes. Commissioners suggested that in the future, questions in the application could be asked more pointedly about how programs intend to measure outcomes.

Ellen referred to an email she received from Lori Likis. In the email, Lori said she was enthusiastic about the new changes at The Young Peoples Project moving towards Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) program curriculum.

Khari Milner asked how the Commission could measure how many families from the Cambridge Public Schools district are served by CDBG grantees. He also wanted to know how many children in families who are receiving services from the programs CDBG funds are of school age. Jose Soares and Jolyon Cowan said they would approach these agencies to see how feasible it would be to collect this data if it is not already being collected.

Ellen stated that the Cambridge Community Foundation (CCF) runs a series of breakfasts called “Tuesday Talks” during the year focused on specific issues such as Immigrant Services, Arts, Emergency Services, and inviting over 100 local agencies, thus connecting to the majority of local community based agencies. Nan will get information about next year’s schedule for the Tuesday morning talks for Commissioners who are interested in attending. Nan suggested the Human Services Commission could possibly co-host a session to review outcome measures and discuss evolving trends in the community.

Among the new FY2013 CDBG applications, the most recurrent needs listed included mental health services, domestic violence services, emergency food and food pantries, and homeless services. When Ayse asked how Commissioners could be most helpful beyond allocating these modest CDBG awards, Jolyon mentioned that Commissioners could be very helpful as advocates. It was agreed given the time constraint that we should leave sometime at a later meeting to continue this conversation.

Ellen talked of the City’s concern about CASPAR’s emergency shelter moving away from being a strictly wet shelter. The capacity of the emergency shelter has been significantly reduced as more beds in the shelter are set aside for case management clients and newly sober participants in their ACCESS transitional program. She also spoke of Cambridge data showing an increasing number of their ACCESS clients coming from outside of Cambridge and Somerville. At the same time, there have been reports of an increase in homeless people with substance abuse issues being taken to the Cambridge Hospital and police station as their shelter is full.

Ellen told the Commission the original purpose of ACCESS was to serve as a temporary destination for CASPAR shelter clients from Cambridge & Somerville moving to sobriety. She proposed that the current CDBG grant to the ACCESS program be used to fund the program in the spirit in which it was originally designated. Ellen went on that as a first step, ACCESS should submit accurate and timely reporting in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database. HMIS participation by the ACCESS program is important to the City as a whole as it strengthens Cambridge’s annual application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for homeless services and housing funding. When properly implemented, HMIS also provides useful information about ACCESS clients as well as the demographics and needs of all homeless clients in the Cambridge Continuum of Care. Commissioners agreed that continued ACCESS funding be contingent on the program being in compliance with HMIS.

Commissioners present then voted unanimously to level fund the remainder of the current Cambridge CDBG grant-funded programs.

A discussion followed about potential topics for upcoming Human Service Commission meetings. Chris Hall said that he would like to hear more from the Guidance Center and about its children’s behavioral programs. Nan expressed interest in learning from Centro Latino if their staff changes have impacted the Cambridge site. Ayse said that if we anticipate major funding cuts for FY2014, we should discuss the impact these cuts would have, and if appropriate, give ample warning time to agencies so that they can be prepared to apply for other grants.

Meeting adjourned.