

PRINCETON HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

Monthly Meeting Minutes

October 19th, 2016

Monument Hall-East Meeting Room
One Monument Drive, Princeton, NJ 08540

Present

Board Members:

Leticia Fraga, Vice Chair
Elizabeth Bidwell Bates
John Heilner
Anastasia Mann
Thomas Parker
Larry Spruill

Staff:

Elisa Neira, MSW
Ben Strauss

Guests:

Absent

Board Members:

Ross Wishnick, Chair
Robert Hackett
Heather Howard
Laura Encinas

I. Call to Order

At 7:01 PM, Vice Chair Fraga called the meeting to order by reading: "This is to affirm that the regularly scheduled meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission has been duly notified and is being conducted in compliance with all provisions of the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act."

II. Public Comments/Guests

Seeing no guests, Vice Chair Fraga moved to the next agenda item.

III. Approval of September Meeting Minutes

The Commission noted some needed corrections in the draft September minutes. Ms. Bates moved to approve the minutes with corrections. Mr. Heilner seconded. The Commission unanimously approved the minutes, with Ms. Mann and Mr. Spruill abstaining given their absence September.

IV. Director's Report

General Assistance (September)

Director Neira reported Human Services had 28 General Assistance (GA) cases at the end of last month. The Commission had no questions.

Meetings with Division of Family Development

Director Neira also attended two meetings organized by New Jersey's Division of Family Development (DFD) Director Johnson and a second meeting organized by the Rescue Mission and other housing organizations in Mercer County:

Division of Family Development: Emergency Assistance (EA)

At the meeting on October 19, Director Johnson wanted to hear feedback about the program from all (about forty) municipal welfare directors across the state. They focused on the following four items:

1) *Concerns about EA/GA pilot program (of which Princeton participates)*: The EA/GA rules remain the same: GA has always been a temporary housing entity. The EA/GA process changed; the state not the municipality now approves cases.

2) *Challenges accessing affordable housing*: Director Neira mentioned to DFD the challenges when assisting clients in getting permanent housing in Princeton and Mercer County, let alone the entire state. She requested housing resources throughout the state be shared with all Municipal Welfare Directors to better assist with this process. DFD will try to create such a list of resources.

3) *Difficulties with Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ)*: The State funds LSNJ to help clients in the process of applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The challenge is that clients have hard time even meeting with Legal Services due to the long waiting time periods for LSNJ staff to get back to them. Director Neira instead sends her clients to the Family Guidance Center's SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach and Access and Recovery) program, Ms. Hirko, the coordinator, is efficient and successful in assisting GA clients eligible for SSI in the application process.

4) *Unemployed clients receiving job training and opportunities*: employable clients should receive job training and help finding work. The new head of the Department of Labor (DOL) talked to Director Johnson and they acknowledged challenges that the GA population has with employment services through the county career services offices. Director Johnson will organize meetings between the county DOL and municipal welfare directors to work on ways to improve this system so GA clients can received better services. If the county only offers computers for job searches, it offers nothing different than the Princeton Public Library. She recommended that the DFD and DOL also look into programs that can distinguished between low-skilled and skilled individuals that are low income. Some of the resources available seem to be primarily for clients with very low skill sets.

DFD and municipal welfare directors will now meet quarterly to discuss ongoing issues and will have more communication throughout the year.

Division of Family Development: Rescue Mission in Trenton

On September 29, Director Neira and other Mercer County housing partners attended a meeting organized by the Rescue Mission. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Rescue Mission's financial challenges and its current status. They expect it to only remain open until June 2017. If the Rescue Mission closes, this will create a major housing and shelter challenge for the county. There were no follow-up or action items after the meeting, they will be reaching out to partners with further information.

Wage Theft

Director Neira reported on 3 wage theft cases. In two of the cases, the department was able to recoup \$900 and \$207, a third case was referred to New Labor. The complainants worked for landscaping, a restaurant and commercial cleaning company.

Financial Literacy

Director Neira learned that Crown Financial Ministries trained the financial coaches from Stone Hill (the training included biblical references but the program will not). There is a pilot program being proposed, led by Princeton Community Housing, Stone Hill Church and Human Services. The goal is to begin with a pilot to measure its effectiveness and usefulness in a period of 6-8 months which will help figure out next steps of how to handle financial coaching services for the community at large. The Commission discussed the different possible approaches of the training: learning about budgeting versus negotiating to reduce credit card debt burden. Members preferred the latter. Director Neira will ask for more detail about the program. Commission members can also attend Stone Hill Church's workshop on the training or a one-on-one session with the agreement of the participants.

Mixed Status Family Housing

Director Neira mentioned a mixed status family was up for an apartment through Princeton Housing Authority. The Housing Authority received a memo from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that mixed status families need at least one United States citizen to be at least eighteen years old to receive housing, so the mixed status family could not be eligible for the apartment, since the head of household for this particular family was undocumented. Director Neira called a meeting with the housing organizations (Princeton Community Housing, Princeton Housing Authority, and Princeton Affordable Housing). During the meeting, the housing organizations confirmed that these were the Housing Authority's policies. The Commission recommended to update Mayor Lempert and Councilwoman Heather Howard and see what they recommended.

Welcoming America Spark Fellowship

Director Neira went to Atlanta to start her fellowship. She enjoyed the people there and enjoyed seeing their great work. They focused on concepts of welcoming new immigrant communities to a town while communities within the town might still not feel welcomed. The fellowship specifically looks at Racial Justice and Immigrant Inclusion and how these two interact.

Holiday Gift Drive

The Holiday Gift Drive has 63 applicants so far and 160 donors on only day 4, the deadline for applications is November 4th.

Educational Material Recommendations

Director Neira recommended Commission members watch [The Danger of a Single Story](#) and [Spent](#).

V. Committee Reports

Civil Rights

Vice Chair Fraga discussed recent events regarding the ordinance to establish a Civil Rights Commission:

September 7: the Civil Rights subcommittee met with Mayor Lempert, Administrator Dashield and Municipal Attorney Maddox. They had a productive meeting about redrafting the ordinance and accompanying policies and procedures.

September 22: They received the new drafts, which still had some concerning elements.

September 26: They provided public comments in a Council meeting. The Council asked the Civil Rights subcommittee to meet with administration to improve the ordinance and policies and procedures.

October 4: Vice Chair Fraga sent a message to administration, copying Council. No response.

October 19: Administrator Dashield sent the new documents to the subcommittee's members, Director Neira, Mayor Lempert and a few council members

October 19: Vice Chair Fraga gave this report to the monthly PHSC meeting.

The subcommittee supports the ordinance but does not support some aspects of the accompanying procedures: the intake process only taking place in Human Services (and not also in the Civil Rights Commission) and the lack of reporting requirements to the Civil Rights Commission.

The Commission discussed their next steps. They will respond to Administrator Dashield's email from earlier today. They will now need to give public comments to Council. Yet, many members expressed disappointment at administration not following Council's words at their last meeting to reconvene and work on revising the process. They stated that the Commission had unanimously approved the recommendation over one year ago.

On Monday, Council will read the ordinance for a second time. They do not need to vote on it then. Commission members will attend the meeting.

VI. Discussion

Access to School-Related Programming

Ms. Mann reported on how the issue remains unaddressed while trips happen every week. This Friday, a letter, written only in English, came home from a Middle School drama class about a \$140 per person trip. The letter contained two sentences about how everyone could participate regardless of financial situation. When reading the letter word-for-word, the teacher skipped those two sentences. Ms. Mann spoke to a guidance counselor who spoke to the teacher. The Counselor said the teacher deliberately skipped those sentences. The teacher did not want the extra work of finding money to fund a big response among kids whose parents cannot pay.

Ms. Mann might speak to Principal Burr about it. At the Diversity Council meeting that met three weeks ago, among other items, Director Neira heard Princeton Public Schools planned to create an equity fund.

The Commission also formed a subcommittee to address the issue last month. Director Neira will also follow-up with the superintendent the next day to alert him of this issue and figure out if something can be done regarding this trip coming up soon.

VII. Updates

Board of Health (see minutes [here](#))

Ms. Bates told the Commission that the Board of Health gives flu shots to residents who are uninsured or underinsured as well as residents without a legal status.

VIII. Closed Session

The Commission did not enter closed session.

IX. Adjournment

At 8:50 PM, Mr. Parker motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Bates seconded the motion. The Commission unanimously agreed to adjourn.