

Princeton Human Services Commission Minutes

Monthly Meeting Minutes

March 15th, 2017

Monument Hall-East Meeting Rooms

One Monument Drive, Princeton, NJ 08540

Present

Board Members:

Ross Wishnick, Chair
Veronica Olivares-Weber,
Vice Chair
John Anagbo
Janet Estes
John Heilner
Anastasia Mann
Omar Nishtar
Larry Spruill
Matthew Trujillo

Staff:

Elisa Neira, MSW
Ben Strauss
Jacalyn Barnes, MSW intern
Christina Merlin, MSW
intern

Guests:

Absent

Board Members:

Heather Howard, Council
Liaison

Minutes submitted by Ben Strauss, Recording Secretary

I. Call to order

At 7:06 pm, Chair Wishnick calls the meeting to order: “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

Chair Wishnick recognizes the two guests: Ms. Barnes and Ms. Merlin, Rutgers’ MSW program interns. The guests and committee members introduce themselves.

Ms. Barnes and Ms. Merlin have been working on the Princeton Resource Guide, a directory of resources at various agencies in the Princeton area for Princeton residents, the culmination of work from many past Human Services Department interns. Ms. Barnes and Ms. Merlin want to create a condensed, logical, easy-to-access guide. The amount of information can overwhelm clients and even agencies. Many agencies in the area have requested the guide. For instance, a

housing agency might want to know about resources in different areas like employment or mental health. A comprehensive directory will help them to serve their clients.

Ms. Barnes and Ms. Merlin share their three challenges creating the guide:

- 1) Lack of continuity: different people have worked on the guide over the years with different formats and different styles.
- 2) Lack of time: in their fifteen hours a week, in addition to creating the guide, they have clients and other projects. Still, they aim to complete the document by the end of their internship. They currently have been completing final edits.
- 3) Balancing the right amount of information: they want to have all the information clients need in the document. Yet, they do not want to overwhelm clients with the amount of information. They created one-page summaries of different areas like food and housing to complement longer lists of resources.

They have condensed the guide from almost one hundred pages to about fifty pages. They share two sections from the guide with the committee.

Ms. Barnes and Ms. Merlin talked to the library about taking responsibility for the project after its completion. The library has been open to it. Future interns will not have enough time work on the guide. The library has more resources and employees. So, after they complete the project, they will meet with the library to discuss the best approach to manage the project going forward.

They aim to have it translated into Spanish upon completion. They have worked with the Princeton University Language club on translating other projects into Spanish. A committee member asks about translating the guide into other languages. They might include, in the guide, the languages spoken by agencies. Members think that information good to include in the guide.

A member asks what determines what enters the document. For instance, that member mentions including in the document organizations that handle tenants' rights. Ms. Barnes and Ms. Merlin want to include those organizations. Even so, they believe the guide cannot include everything and solve every problem. It can only provide essential information. For instance, they decided to only include non-profits, because if they included some for-profits, they might need to include all for-profits, overwhelming clients. Once the clients go to an agency, people at that agency can connect the clients to further resources.

A member suggests online applications that determine a document's reading grade level. Ms. Barnes mentions that marketing standardizes documents' reading grade level at a sixth grade level but clients probably require a slightly lower reading level. She thinks the document currently reads at an eighth grade level. They have been re-editing sections for clarity for clients.

Commission members thank Ms. Barnes and Ms. Merlin and applaud their efforts on the guide.

III. Approval of February Meeting Minutes

The committee tables the February minutes.

IV. Director's Report

General Assistance (March 2017)

Director Neira reports no major changes in the number of cases, 21 at the end of the last month.

First Welfare Audit

The state will audit the Department's welfare program. Next week, for a whole day, two state auditors will examine all the Department's General Assistance files. Director Neira, Ms. Merlin and Ms. Urias have been reviewing the files. They do not expect any issues. Director Neira will report on the results of the audit at the committee's next meeting.

Princeton Area Community Foundation (PACF) Grant

The Summer Youth Employment Program, which offers about 40 lower income, 14 to 18 year old kids an employment opportunity at local nonprofits or municipal departments, received a \$20,000 PACF grant. Director Neira submitted the proposal in September. The grant will allow the Department to give employment opportunities to more students. Members congratulate Director Neira for her work to get the grant.

V. Committee Reports

Chair Wishnick asks sub-committee chairs to share with all Commission members their meeting dates and then minutes.

b. SHUPP

Chair Wishnick reports that he has been seeking approval to use the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church and the Pannell Center to serve Trenton kids free breakfast in the morning, from June 26 to August 25. He has been answering a lot of questions about using the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church site. Chair Wishnick prefers the Church site. Yet, if SHUPP cannot serve food at the Church, it can serve the food at the Pannell Center.

Chair Wishnick wants to add a lunch component in the future. Not having a centralized location for serving lunch like for serving breakfast makes serving lunch more difficult. Members discuss lunch service logistics.

Mr. Trujillo asks if SHUPP might provide other food-related services like visits to grocery stores with education on how to buy healthy food cheaply. Director Neira thought such an initiative

would require a person with responsibility for it. The SHUPP board has no staff besides herself. Director Neira has interviewed two interns for the summer, one of whom does research on the topic, for instance, of teaching people to shop smart. She expects to have one of the two interns work for her this summer.

c. Immigration

Director Neira reports on the immigration sub-committee and some of the efforts to continue Know Your Rights education for residents and workers. Director Neira has continued to remain up-to-date with any immigration changes under this administration and how they can potentially affect some of our residents. Director Neira, Mr. Nishtar and Mr. Trujillo will be attending a Know Your Rights Train the Trainer session by the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice.

d. Housing

Director Neira reports that the Housing Stability Committee finalized their intake and referral form. They then used it for the first time to help a single mother, who had been laid off from her job and was behind on rent payments. The process went quickly and successfully. They will be tracking client demographics, situations and need, and agency's ability to help and eligibility criteria. They want to see if any gaps exists in their help. The group will work together in defining the need for housing stability services and other programs/practices/policies that could also address this issue.

e. Youth Matters

Mr. Spruill reports that the sub-committee members met last month. They discussed the former youth center in Princeton. As a kid, Mr. Spruill spent a lot of time there. Today, New Brunswick has the Hub center, which serves as a youth center. Some members of the sub-committee want a new youth center in Princeton. They feel kids in Princeton do not have a place to go and be kids. Mr. Spruill thinks the back building in Valley Road could be converted into a youth center. Ms. Olivares-Weber suggests places like the Arts Council could have space when it is available for youth.

Mr. Spruill and the sub-committee members want input from kids in Princeton. Director Neira suggests they reach out to the Youth Advisory Council, the Summer Youth Employment kids or the Corner House kids.

Committee members discuss the current situation for children in Princeton. Director Neira asks the sub-committee to discuss its priorities given the number of different issues they'd like to address.

f. Welcoming America

Mr. Trujillo reports that the sub-committee has been looking at the Welcoming America toolkit. Director Neira mentions that, given the Department's membership in the organization, it has access to all of their resources. Director Neira will give the subcommittee members information

on how to access those resources. She will also forward to the sub-committee members Welcoming America's webinar and call opportunities.

Director Neira goes to Atlanta for a Welcoming America interactive in April. She can bring one person with free registration and any number of people without free registration. Mr. Nishtar expresses interest in attending.

VI. Discussion

Communication

Mr. Anagbo asks about members helping with Department communication. Director Neira thinks members interested in communications can sign up and then she can ask them for help when she needs it.

Diversity Events in the Schools

Members discuss the lack of diversity events in schools as well as that the few, current diversity events rarely have attendance from a diverse group of students.

VII. Updates

Calendar of Events

Chair Wishnick created a calendar of events for the committee. He will try to share it with committee members.

VIII. Closed Session

The committee does not enter closed session.

IX. Adjournment

At 9:11 pm, Mr. Spruill motions to adjourn. Mr. Heilner and Ms. Olivares-Weber both second. Members unanimously vote to adjourn.