

## **Princeton Human Services Commission Minutes**

Monthly Meeting

**November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015**

Monument Hall - East Meeting Room

One Monument Drive, Princeton, NJ 08540

### **Present:**

#### **Board Members:**

Ross Wishnick, Chairman  
Elizabeth Bidwell Bates  
Leticia Fraga  
Robert Hackett  
John Heilner  
Stacy Mann  
Larry Spruill  
Thomas Parker

### **Staff**

Elisa Neira, MSW  
Michael Soto

### **Liaison & Guests**

Jasmine Charles (Student  
Board at Corner House)  
Katie Vazquez (Student  
Board at Corner House)

### **Absent**

Laura Encinas  
Heather Howard, Council  
member

## **I. Open Public Meeting Statement and Call To Order**

At 7:10 PM, Chairman Ross Wishnick called the meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission (HSC) 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 Meeting Act." There was no response to his request for public comment.

## **II. A Minute of Silence in Memory of Charles Rojer**

A minute of silence was held in memory of Charles Rojer, Chair of the Health Board. Ms. Bates also suggested writing a letter of appreciation to the family. All eligible members voted in favor of this action.

## **III. Approval of October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015 minutes**

Ms. Bates motioned to approve the minutes with corrections, seconded by Mr. Heilner. All eligible members voted in favor of this action.

## **IV. Public Comment**

There was no response to the Chairman's request for public comment.

## **V. Strategic Plan 2016**

To start the discussion, the members of the Commission reviewed a document that Ms. Neira sent to the administration about the Human Services Department.

Ms. Bates suggested that for 2016 the Commission should determine which events Board Members should attend. All the eligible members voted in favor of this action.

Mr. Wishnick suggested having The Block Party and the SHUPP fundraiser in different months, tentatively scheduling the Block Party in July. Mr. Spruill will check if there are conflicts with this month.

### **New Initiatives**

Mr. Wishnick presented the methodology to be followed for the planning discussion. The initial set of projects to be discussed and prioritized was chosen in a previous meeting between the Chair, Vice-Chair and Ms. Neira. In this meeting, the Commission discussed which projects would be prioritized and who would work on each.

### **Landlord/Tenant Issues**

This is an important issue in Princeton. In the coming year, the commission would like to work on this area through advocacy and education. Ms. Bates expressed interest in being a part of this project.

### **Princeton Resources Guide**

Ms. Neira informed that the Department of Human Services is compiling the Resources Guide, incorporating the ideas that Mr. Hackett had provided in previous meetings. This guide will build upon the *Bienvenido Folleto* and will also be in English and it will focus on the low-income community and the new comers, not only to Princeton but also to the country.

The guide will include, but will not be limited to sections on: Resources, laws, transportation, and 'know your rights and responsibilities' (employment and housing).

Ms. Neira will send the guide to the commission members so they can give suggestions.

### **Communication Outlets**

The Commission would like to find more effective mechanisms to reach out to the maximum number of people for key announcements. The Commission will work on having the emergency messages in Spanish to facilitate outreach to this community.

Ms. Neira highlighted the importance of understanding how the community is getting access to information, in order to more effectively delivery it. Ms. Mann suggested a network analysis approach documenting the commission's set of contacts and the respective communities that they serve. This also would be useful for the dissemination and updating of the Resource Guide.

## **Prisons/Juvenile Centers**

Ms. Bates proposed getting more information on what is taking place in juvenile centers, in order to know if the Town's children are getting the proper education, health care and mental health services.

## **Education**

Mr. Hackett emphasized the importance of taking a cradle to career perspective when tackling the achievement gap challenge. He said that the Bonner Foundation is developing a list of programs that are working at different stages of the process. Ms. Neira said that Department of Human Services has worked on a similar list for My Brother's Keeper and she will share it with the Bonner Foundation.

Mr. Spruill shared information about Big Sib, a new student-led mentorship project connecting University students with elementary school students in Princeton Public Schools. Mentors build long-term relationships with individual students and help foster academic and social and emotional growth. The school provides the transportation for the students, who come from low-income families in Princeton.

Ms. Mann highlighted the need to learn more about what is occurring in the Rubino Academy, since there have been accounts which merit further exploration. The Rubino Academy serves students who were not successful at their previous public high school. Ms. Fraga will bring this issue to the Public School's Action Committee on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

Mr. Hackett will take a lead on the Education area.

## **Case Management Task Force**

Ms. Fraga introduced a new LALDEF (Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund) initiative that she believes the Commission could work jointly on. The initiative consists in creating a Case Management Task Force for immigrant families that are facing obstacles, including abusive working environments, inflated rental fees, inadequate living quarters, lack of information and little access to local resources.

The Case Management Task Force will bring together multiple service organizations of interest to immigrant families in the form of a clearinghouse for referrals. The first action will be a conference in March 2106 with representatives of different organizations that serve immigrant families to discuss and implement a plan.

Ms. Mann brought up cases related to housing and education. Some students have been at risk of being removed from the school because their addresses could not be confirmed, in most cases due to a lack of cooperation from the landlords. Ms. Neira said that she has been helping students that have had this issue by providing a notarized letter as proof of address and they have been successfully enrolled at the school.

Ms. Neira also explained that youth that are detained at the border when crossing over to the U.S. have to call a number twice a day in order to check when they have a court date. She said that it is important to help them get legal assistance through local organizations like LALDEF so they can have adequate legal counsel and representation when they go to their court hearing.

### **Food Distribution / Hunger initiatives**

Ms. Bates pointed out the importance of having food resources to fill the gap from Thursdays to Tuesdays. There is also a more general need to supply fresh food throughout the week. She suggested that the Commission should look into other programs beyond Send Hunger Packing, and the corresponding need for coordination among such programs.

Ms. Neira mentioned that the contract between the Office of Aging and Mount Pisgah is ending as of January 2016. Ms. Neira is helping them to find a new place to distribute their lunches. She will keep the Commission updated about this issue.

Ms. Bates will organize a stakeholders meeting on food hunger in the first quarter of 2016, in order to explore new sources of food.

### **Immigration Committee**

The Commission discussed the viability of planning one or two consulate on wheels a year in town. This initiative could be in partnership with LALDEF and the YWCA. The Immigration Committee will reach out to the Guatemalan and Mexican consulates to check if it is possible for them to come to Princeton.

Mr. Heilner mentioned a wage theft case involving two restaurant workers that New Labor initiated in January of this year that went to the Department of labor, and has now been resolved. The appointed judge decided that the employer should pay \$8,500 between the two employees.

Mr. Heilner asked for consensus regarding whether he should participate in an interview with the press and Lou Kimmel from New labor to highlight the case of the restaurant workers as a deterrent for future wage theft cases. Ms. Neira said that she would check with the Legal Department.

The Commission agreed that if the Legal Department approves, Mr. Heilner should limit his comments to statements indicating that Princeton does not tolerate wage theft and leave it to Mr. Kimmel to talk about the case.

## **VI. Adjournment**

Mr. Heilner seconded Mr. Spruill's motion to adjourn. With no further business to discuss, all voted in favor of this action. The meeting adjourned at 9:35 PM.