

Princeton Human Services Commission Minutes
Monthly Meeting
February 4, 2015
Monument Hall – East Meeting Room
One Monument Drive, Princeton, NJ 08542

Present:

Board Members:

Elizabeth Bidwell Bates
Laura Encinas
Leticia Fraga
John Heilner
Stacey Mann
Robert Hackett
Larry Spruill
Ross Wishnick, Chairman

Absent:

Thomas Parker

Staff:

Diana Forero
Elisa Neira, MSW
Vanessa Romero
V Bea Snowdon

I. Open Public Meeting Statement and Call To Order

At 7:03 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”.

II. Reorganization of the Board – Nominations

John Heilner nominated Ross Wishnick to direct Human Services Commission proceedings, in the role of Chairman. Bobby Hackett seconded this motion. All voted in favor of the nomination of Mr. Wishnick as Chairman.

Larry Spruill seconded Elizabeth Bidwell Bates’ nomination of Leticia Fraga to serve as Vice Chairman. All voted in favor of the motion to appoint Leticia Fraga to the post of Vice Chairman of the Human Service Commission.

III. Oath of Office

The Oath of Office for all returning Commission members and officers was distributed and reviewed. A formal copy was personalized, signed by each Commission Member present, and submitted for the record.

IV. Public Comments & Guests

There was no response to the Chairman’s request for public comments. A previously scheduled guest was not in attendance.

V. Approval of November 19, 2014 minutes

John Heilner’s motion to accept the minutes was seconded by Stacy Mann. All voted in favor of acceptance.

VI. Director's Report

General Assistance Report

In January, three clients were granted citizenship. The General Assistance Report will be attached to the minutes.

Community Needs Assessment Presentation

Director Neira and Diana Forero presented a comprehensive PowerPoint summary of the 75 page Community Needs Assessment Report. Vanessa Romero, MSW candidate intern from Rutgers, was commended for her work in summarizing the anecdotal reports of survey participants.

211 households were surveyed for the Community Needs Assessment. It was noted that 204 of these households are eligible for assistance. Region VI affordable housing criteria were used to determine income eligibility for this survey. The households surveyed contain 443 people. 337 of those residents are adults and 116 are children.

22 households were represented in smaller focus groups. The four focus groups interviewed represented singles, senior citizens/the disabled, families, and Latino residents:

Hispanics	8 households
Singles:	4 households
Seniors/Disabled:	5 households
Families:	5 households (1 Hispanic)

Survey respondents in all groups felt the following services were needed and hard to access:

- Job search assistance
- Housing assistance
- Legal Help
- Job Training
- Affordable Medical Care
- Financial Education
- Affordable Food

The availability of affordable medical care & transportation are ranked as the most important of all services for sustainable living. Many respondents reported that finding a good paying job locally is challenging. In terms of difficulty, attaining good employment was ranked as the top challenge. Job training was ranked as the second hardest challenge. Locating rental assistance, mortgage assistance, and the need for help with utility bills were noted as very stressful challenges for respondents. The employment status of respondents was noted as:

- 32% Retired
- 32% Working for pay
- 21% Unemployed but Looking for Work
- 10% Disabled
- 2% Homemakers
- 2% Student

More than half of those surveyed reported some type of housing stress. Those with a history of homelessness at some point in life were included in this group and represent 16% of all respondents.

Food Assistance was a reported need, as more than half of the respondents have been afraid of having enough money for food. 40% of those surveyed have cut their meal intake sometimes, due to lack of food. Of those surveyed, 36% have used food stamps and 9% have been assisted by SHUPP.

Legal matters discussed included concern about safety, security, discrimination, assault, robbery, and theft. Respondents did not know where to go for legal assistance or reported it as hard to access.

Regarding other services that were considered “hard to access”, respondents identified lack of transportation and adequate communication available services as the most frequent barriers to attaining needed assistance. Education and the tendency to lock children into ESL coursework were concerns noted by parents and public school students.

70% of the survey respondents have a bank account. 47% use credit cards. Many commented that they have no money to budget. They identified financial education and financial case management as needed services. ISLES and FAMILY GUIDANCE CENTER were discussed as possible providers for these services.

Stressing that we need to know all of our available resources, our effectiveness in providing service, and where service expansion is needed, Director Neira concluded that the Community Needs Assessment is a good first step in the discovery and planning process.

The need for a working group of Commission members, to refine the report, was discussed. Bobby Hackett, John Heilner, and Heather Howard agreed to serve on a Community Needs Assessment Committee for this task.

Diana Forero and Director Neira were commended for their excellent work and presentation.

C. Human Service Goals for 2015

A preliminary plan of priorities and plans for the Human Services department was distributed. **General Assistance, the Summer Youth Employment Program, Send Hunger Packing Princeton, The Back to School Backpack Drive, The Holiday Gift Drive, Medicaid/NJ Family Care assistance, NJ SNAP assistance, WIC Clinic, Affordable Care Act education, outreach, and advocacy** for under-represented groups will continue.

Director Neira noted a desire to work with local non-profits to identify new areas for the expansion of services. **Job development, improved tracking services, and the need to identify grants** for possible service expansion was noted. Research and assessment of community needs in Princeton will continue. **The need for a standing Emergency Trust fund** was also discussed.

VI. Human Services Committee Reports

Civil Rights Subcommittee Report

Vice Chairman Fraga reported that the Civil Rights subcommittee has been busy reviewing the history and handling of complaints of civil rights violations in Princeton. A historical timeline was presented to chronicle the work of the standalone Civil Rights Commission from 1968 to 1996. Vice Chairman Fraga noted that, in 2006, there was a proposed ordinance about the filing of complaints with the Civil Rights Committee. Throughout the recorded history, enforcement power was never granted to this Committee.

After careful consideration, the subcommittee recommends that the Civil Rights Commission be reestablished as a standalone commission. Commission members should have knowledge of Civil Rights and should receive additional training on Civil Rights. A Police and Community Relations subcommittee is a possibility, with a police officer as a member.

Chairman Fraga shared the sentiment that the establishment of a Civil Rights Committee will honor the spirit of civil rights preservation. John Heilner noted that mediation really works, in this area of community action.

VI. News and Upcoming Events

On February 25th at 7PM, a panel discussion of Princeton Immigration Issues will convene in the Princeton Public Library.

After a review of all events scheduled in February, those present agreed to reschedule the February HSC meeting. It will be held on Thursday, February 19th at 7PM.

VIII. Adjournment

Laura Encinas' motioned to adjourn was seconded by John Heilner. With all voting in favor, the meeting adjourned at 9:30PM.

Respectfully submitted, V Bea Snowdon

Cc: attachment: General Assistance Program Report of December 2014