

**Princeton Human Services Commission Minutes**

Monthly Meeting

**March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Monument Hall - East Meeting Room

One Monument Drive, Princeton, NJ 08540

**Present:**

**Board Members:**

Ross Wishnick, Chairman  
Leticia Fraga, Vice chair  
Elizabeth Bidwell Bates  
John Heilner  
Larry Spruill  
Thomas Parker  
Laura Encinas  
Heather Howard, Council  
Member

**Staff**

Elisa Neira, MSW  
Gary De Blasio  
Michael Soto

**Liaison & Guests**

Liliana Morenilla  
Jasmin Charles  
Wilma Salomon, Not in  
Our Town  
Brian Batrulis

**Absent:**

Robert Hackett  
Stacy Mann

**I. Open Public Meeting Statement and Call to Order**

At 7:00 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." Chairman Wishnick introduced and welcomed the guests in attendance.

**II. Approval of February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016 minutes**

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

**III. Public Comment**

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

**IV. Director's Report**

**General Assistance**

There are 6 cases pending at the moment, the most that the Department has had in a while. Three people are in emergency housing, one is at Home Front and two are at the motel since there are not enough rooms available at Home Front. These cases are not approved yet, so it is possible that they will not be reflected until April's report. In February 2016,

three cases were closed; one because the Department lost contact with the client and the other two because the clients started receiving social security benefits and were no longer eligible for assistance.

### **Community Relations**

Ms. Neira met with Brett Bonfield, the new Executive Director at the Princeton Public Library. Mr. Bonfield wants to continue existing programs with the community and find more ways to collaborate with Princeton Human Services. At the meeting he mentioned that part of his 5-year plan includes hiring a social worker on his staff. Ms. Neira and Mr. Bonfield are working together on the job description and in getting an intern from the Rutgers' Social Work Program who will work at the Library under Ms. Neira's supervision. Rutgers Camden is already working with the Camden Public Library and they have shared the job description with Princeton. This year Rutgers will provide two interns one that will be at Princeton Human Services and one at the Princeton Public Library.

The Wheels Rodeo will be on May 14<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. The Rain Date is May 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)**

The Application process for SYEP starts after Spring Break. This year we are hoping to add more employers and grow the program to provide jobs for 40 students. Ms. Neira has been talking with several municipal departments in order to get new job sites. The Historic Preservation Society has already responded indicating they would like to receive an intern. The department is waiting to hear back from two funding requests regarding SYEP.

## **V. Human Services Committee Reports**

### **Immigration**

Mr. Heilner observed that it appears that the raids have slowed down in New Jersey since February. There have not been new raids in Princeton since the two that occurred on Wiggins Street.

Mr. Heilner mentioned that the Immigration Committee and others involved with immigration issues have compiled a list of items with which Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman can provide assistance. Mr. Heilner said that this group put together this list following Ms. Watson Coleman singing off on the letter to President Obama with 150 other congressmen, and based off of the suggestion of one of her staff, Calvin Reed, that they reach out to see what other ways she can support the cause. The group has about 10-12 suggestions and they have been in contact with Calvin Reed and other members of her staff to set up a meeting. At the moment there are three dates that work for most of the people who were involved in the brainstorming.

Mr. Heilner and Ms. Neira also talked about the meetings with the day labor workers that have been held since last year at the Pannell Center every two weeks. These meetings serve as tool to build a relationship with them and let them know of the services that the Department offers, such as wage theft.

Unidad Latina en Acción (ULA), which is the organization that has been helping with the outreach and the OSHA training, has begun conversations with the workers about setting up a Workers Committee/Center and the workers are really interested. ULA is going to take the lead and the Department of Human Services will offer support. ULA has a list of workers who wants to create this Workers Committee, representing a range of sectors such as restaurant workers, landscapers and domestic workers. At the moment a survey is being developed in conjunction with some of the workers who have been available to provide input.

Ms. Neira met with Jorge Torres from ULA and Mr. Heilner to review the survey and perhaps the Dream Team and some volunteers can help us to get the word out about the survey. We hope to hold an event to get the workers to complete the survey. Ms. Neira highlighted that the results will help us learn more about their challenges and what is important to them as we move forward with a plan to develop a Subcommittee. The data will be collected via outreach at the bodegas and with the event previously mentioned.

### **Organizational Structure**

Mr. Wishnick talked about the e-mail that the Mayor will be sending to all the commissions and boards regarding chain of command. Mr. Wishnick read the communication policy on page 4 and 10 of the handbook which highlights that any correspondence to the Municipal staff on behalf of any board or commission has to be done through the chairperson.

Ms. Howard said that there have been cases where commissioners have contacted the town attorney and asked for work to be done that cost the town money. She said that this is one of the reasons why is important to follow the chain of command in conversations.

Mr. DeBlasio also highlighted the importance to the administration that everyone follows the proper flow and structure of communication.

The commission discussed perceived exceptions, cases when they have not followed the procedure and why. Nonetheless, it is recommended that all questions go through the chairperson, Ms. Neira and Ms. Howard.

### **Civil Rights**

- **Civil Rights Commission**

Ms. Fraga thanked Mr. Heilner for following up after Monday's meeting regarding the timeline for the Civil Rights Commission. Ms. Fraga said that during the month of March the draft of the Ordinance and operational procedures would be developed; she is hoping that the Civil Rights Committee will be involved in reviewing the drafts. In April, the Ordinance will be reviewed with an estimated adoption in May. By law, two readings and public comments are required.

Ms. Howard gave an updated about the meeting that she had with Princeton's Administrator Marc Dashield. During this meeting 4 main concerns were discussed:

1. There has been push back on the Joint Insurance Fund (JIF) provision on handling specific complaints. Ms. Howard said it had been suggested that the Town could continue working on the rest of the Ordinance while it figures out the legal piece of this issue.
2. How to ensure the confidentiality of the complainants
3. How to ensure that both parties will want to participate in the process
4. How to ensure that it would respond to the Open Request Act (OPRA) and keep confidentiality

Ms. Howard highlighted the importance of continuing with education and outreach with the community, and being responsive to all the stakeholders. Ms. Fraga also emphasized that even if the Civil Rights Commission has not yet been created, they have been informally working on cases such as school mediations and wage theft. According with Ms. Howard a New Affirmative Action Officer will be appointed to handle internal complaints with the Ordinance.

The next step is to schedule a meeting with Marc Dashield to discuss these points. Ms. Neira will send a doodle to set up a meeting with the Committee and the Municipality.

- **Stand Against Racism**

Ms. Fraga and Ms. Neira have been meeting with the YWCA and other community members to organize the Stand Against Racism event that will be held on April 29<sup>th</sup>. The theme for this year is “On a mission for girls of color”. In the morning there will be a legislative breakfast at the Nassau Inn, and in the afternoon there will be an event at Hinds Plaza for the entire community to participate. Ms. Fraga asked the Commission to approve of the Department of Human Services participation in this event. All eligible members vote in favor. Ms. Fraga also said that at the legislative breakfast she would share that the Civil Rights Commission is a priority for the Council and give a brief timeline.

Mr. DeBlasio said that Corner House has two teams of students doing programs on racism and bullying in the schools during the school year. Each team does about 15 workshops per year. This is part of the ‘Growing up Accepted as an Individual in America’ (GAIA) Project, which has been operating over the past 15 years.

## **TASK**

Ms. Bates said that TASK is now providing enough food at the Baptist Church. She said that there is a concern that the lunches previously provided by the County at Mt. Pisgah have been discontinued. Ms. Neira explained that the Director of the Mercer County in Aging is working on getting a new location in Princeton, and one of the options being considered is a space at one of the Y’s. Ms. Neira said that she would get an update about the status of this work.

## **Parent Liaison**

Ms. Neira introduced Ms. Liliana Morenilla who is the Parent Liaison since January 2016, working two days a week at the Princeton Human Services Office and three days a week at Johnson Park School. Ms. Morenilla has been doing an amazing job with families and pointed out things that we were unaware of or that we did not know the magnitude of, especially with issues related to housing and emergency relocation.

One of the big issues at this moment is that in order to get a unit through Princeton Community Housing (PCH) it is necessary that all members of the household have a social security number in order to get a criminal background check and credit history. The Departments of Human Services and Affordable Housing had a meeting with PCH to find alternative ways to prove credit history and background check through fingerprints.

Next month there will be a meeting with Steve Cochrane, the Superintendent, and Lewis Goldstein, Assistant Superintendent, to talk about the progress of the position. The trial period will end in June.

Ms. Morenilla explained her role as the Liaison for all the Public Schools Pre-K to High School and the Community, even though her office is located at Johnson Park. She also said that she is contacted by the school staff (nurses, teachers, etc.), parents or through the Human Services Department. One of the main concerns around keeping the position has to do with the budget, since it was an issue at the beginning.

Mr. Wishnick and Ms. Howard highlighted the great job that Ms. Morenilla is doing to help SHUPP and for earned sick leave.

## **Community ID Card**

Mr. Wishnick pointed out that there are some policemen that do not know about the Community ID Card. Ms. Fraga also said that some businesses do not know that it is a valid form of ID. The Commission discussed the importance of training the Police Department and educating the community about the Community ID.

## **Send Hunger Packing (SHUPP)**

This year's fundraiser event will be on September 18<sup>th</sup> and it will be an "empty bowls" initiative (<http://www.emptybowls.net/>). Mr. Wishnick distribute a ticket of a similar event in Hightstown, NJ that had RISE, the food bank in Hightstown, as the beneficiary. The initiative consists of having people buy an empty bowl for \$35 dollars filled with soup by local restaurants. The idea is that people that buy the bowls will get a ceramic bowl to take home as a reminder that there are many people that do not have enough food to eat. Mr. Wishnick will meet with the person that makes the bowls Adam Welch, Lecturer at the Lewis Center for the Arts.

Mr. Wishnick said that there is also a discussion with Megan Mckeever, Farmers Market Manager, who wants to grow the program by having farmers provide more produce. She is also looking at having a chef create recipes with the food that is taking to the YMCA, to

give people ideas on what to prepare with this food. Ms. Bates suggested that this initiative should be extended to adults that may not be able to buy fresh produce. Ms. Neira said that Mercer Street Friends has a mobile pantry that goes once a month to the Pannell Center to distribute food to people in need and suggested connecting people from the community with this program. The Commission also discussed how to provide transportation for food. This matter will be followed up on further.

### **Community Event – Race Relations**

On June 8<sup>th</sup> there will be an event about Race Relations at 7:00 pm with Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library and Associate Professor of History at Indiana University. The venue has not yet been confirmed, but there is a lot of support from different organizations in town such as: YMCA, YWCA, Not in Our Town, Princeton Public Library and other organizations that are considering participating.

### **Board of Health**

Ms. Bates shared an updated from the Board of Health meeting she attended, indicating that the public schools will be testing their water faucets and fountains. Ms. Neira and Mr. Jeff Grosser, the Health Officer, have informed the Director of Princeton Clinic about this testing.

### **Citizenship Classes**

Ms. Encinas informed that a new venue for the Citizenship Classes while the Library is being renovated has been determined. The classes will be held at the Assembly Room in Nassau Presbyterian Church starting on April 8<sup>th</sup>. This year the classes will run 6 weeks instead of 8 weeks. Ms. Neira will send the flyer and a press release about the new venue.

### **Refugee Families in Princeton**

There will be two refugee families coming to Princeton, one from Pakistan and the second from Syria. Ms. Neira will meet the Pakistani family on Monday to help with any applications that they may need. This family has been persecuted in Pakistan because of their religion (Ahmadi) and is sponsored by the Jewish Center.

### **Next Commission Meeting**

Since Ms. Neira will be at ‘Welcoming America Interactive’ in Atlanta, GA on April 20<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Wishnick proposed rescheduling the meeting to April 27<sup>th</sup>. All the eligible members voted in favor.

## **VI. Adjournment**

Ms. Fraga seconded Mr. Spruill’s motion to adjourn. With no further business to discuss, all voted in favor of this action. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.