

Princeton Human Services Commission Minutes

Monthly Meeting

April 27th, 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

Robert Hackett

Stacy Mann

Staff

Elisa Neira, MSW

Gary De Blasio

Michael Soto

Liaison & Guests

Heather Howard, Council

Member

Lew Maltby, ACLU

Absent:

Laura Encinas

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." Chairman Wishnick introduced and welcomed the guests in attendance.

II. Approval of March 2016 minutes

Mr. Hackett motioned to approve the minutes, 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

Ms. Neira reported that 4 new cases were opened, 3 were closed, and some cases are pending. A total of 25 cases were open at the end of March. Ms. Neira also highlighted that the numbers usually go up in winter months since many homeless people are looking for emergency assistance housing during this season.

A big recognition was giving to Sam Husth, intern from Rutgers University School of Social Work, who finished his internship with the Department of Human Services last

week. He did a great job in looking for housing and job related resources especially for homeless clients. Mr. Husth will be at Corner House next fall. Ms. Neira also said that thanks to the work that Mr. Husth did, the Department has a really good system to help support public assistance clients locate housing options.

Ms. Neira is currently interviewing with the applicants for a new intern to start in the fall.

Community Relations

Ms. Neira said that the Department of Human Services has played a key role helping refugees families in the resettlement process and linking them to resources such as food stamps, Medicaid, housing, etc. Last month the Department of Human Services helped a refugee family from Pakistan and at the end of May a family coming from Syria will be assisted.

Ms. Neira and Mr. Wishnick highlighted how the Princeton community has helped the Pakistani family so much, and were pleased to report that they have been able to find jobs and housing.

Parent Liaison

Ms. Neira reported that the Parent Liaison position got funding for another year. Ms. Morenilla will work until the middle of June and come back at the beginning of the school year.

Ms. Fraga asked who would replace Nina Lavado in her position at the Middle School and lead Latinos en Progreso. At the moment no information was available. The Commission also inquired whether Ms. Morenilla would have the capacity to take on some of this work. Ms. Neira will reach out to Jason Burr from John Witherspoon School to get clarification in these matters.

Welcoming America

Last week Ms. Neira attended the Welcoming America Interactive Conference in Atlanta, GA. The conference was held for 3 days and more than 75 cities around the world were present and had the opportunity to show the work that they are doing in building inclusive and welcoming communities. Ms. Neira said that it was great to find that Alaska is doing similar work as Princeton related to wage theft and that she had the opportunity to share ideas and resources.

Among the workshops that Ms. Neira attended were:

1. Addressing Race in your Welcoming Work: Ms. Neira said that she received an entire toolkit focusing on building communities that are respectful and appreciate diversity, how to start conversation and how to engage community leaders. Ms. Neira will share the toolkit with the Commission members. Ms. Neira also distributed a map (specific for NJ) that shows the impact across the nation on how

immigrants are contributing to the economy. More information is available at www.maptheimpact.org

2. Learning from Each Other: Refugee and asylum polices in Germany and the USA.
3. Important information on unaccompanied minors from Central America coming to the U.S.

Ms. Neira also gave an overview to the Commission about the status of the unaccompanied minors in Princeton and what would be the next steps to help them according with their needs. Ms. Neira will follow up with the school, and interested parties, to help to come up with a list of things that the students might need assistance with.

V. Human Services Committee Reports

Civil Rights

- **Stand Against Racism**

On Friday, April 29th, there will be a legislative breakfast at the Nassau Inn from 8:15 am to 10:00 am. Ms. Fraga said that registration is required but there are some spots still available. This year there will be speakers followed at the end by different groups getting together to have a discussion. Human Services has been helping the YWCA with the organization of this event.

The youth of Princeton will congregate at 4:00 pm at the Hinds Plaza for a youth rally to Stand Against Racism.

- **Civil Rights Commission**

At Monday's Council meeting there was an ordinance to introduce the Civil Rights Commission, however, Ms. Fraga indicated that the Civil Rights Committee had not seen the drafted ordinance before it had been added to the agenda. The Committee had only been able to read the ordinance a few hours before the Council meeting and realized that what was being proposed only included education and outreach, but did not include mediation and conflict resolution.

Some members of the Civil Rights Committee went to the Council meeting and spoke during the public comments to request the ordinance be tabled in order to have time to discuss why these points were not included. Ms. Howard said that during a meeting with the Administrator Marc Dashield and the Committee this issue had been discussed and it was understood that they would move forward with an initial ordinance introducing the Civil Rights Commission and later would add the mediation and conflict resolution part. Ms. Fraga said that the Committee expected that they would see the ordinance and have time to review and provide input before it would go to Council.

Mr. Parker gave an overview of the historic events that had taken place with prior attempts of establishing a Civil Rights Commission and why he believed municipal employees should not be involved in these cases. Ms. Howard also said that is important to maintain

the confidentiality of the cases and that this is a big concern for the administrator. Mr. Maltby said that he would research if mediation processes are an exception to OPRA (Open Public Records Act). Mr. Maltby was authorized to do research on the mediation process and conflict resolution and will report back to the HSC.

The Commission discussed of other organizations doing outreach and education in Civil Rights and how to avoid duplication of services. Nevertheless most of these organizations are based on volunteers, who do a great job but do not have a mandate to have to do it. The Civil Rights Commission could also play an important umbrella role, coordinating and bolstering the work of these organizations.

Mr. Wishnick suggested the Sub-Committee of Civil Rights develop a light quarterly plan in order to bring different groups to talk about these issues. Mr. Parker said that the Committee is already organizing these dialogues in the community. The Sub-Committee will send a program for the dialogues in the next weeks.

There was a brief discussion about recent events that have occurred in Princeton related to race and discrimination concerns and the need for dialogue and community conversations. These are opportunities for the HSC and the committee on Civil Rights to address the community's concerns through outreach and educational programming.

Wheels Rodeo

The event will be on May 14th, 2016, with the rain date set to May 15th, 2016. Volunteers are needed to cover the signup table. Ms. Bates will distribute a list for people to sign up to volunteer.

VI. Discussion regarding student funding for extracurricular activities and trips

Ms. Mann brought this issue up to the Commission for discussion. According to Federal Law all students are entitled to an education as long as they are residents. It is slowly becoming apparent that a not insignificant segment of the population is unable to participate in the full range of activities at the schools; in particular, school trips are not accessible to everyone.

Ms. Howard said that the Middle School has a fund to help students that cannot pay for these activities, but it is not institutionalized. The same situation happens among the elementary schools, but it is not clear if the High School has this kind of fund.

The Commission discussed the different initiatives that have existed among the schools and the importance of institutionalizing a solution that can help close the achievement gap.

Ms. Mann believes that it is important to bring this issue to the attention of the School Board. Mr. Wishnick suggested writing a letter on behalf of the Commission to the School Board expressing interest and concern, and offering a willingness to find solutions. Ms. Mann and Mr. Parker will draft the letter.

VII. Adjournment

Ms. Bates seconded Mr. Parker's motion to adjourn. With no further business to discuss, all voted in favor of this action. The meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM.