

Princeton Human Services Commission Minutes

Monthly Meeting

June 15th, 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

Laura Encinas

Robert Hackett

John Heilner

Thomas Parker

Larry Spruill

Staff

Elisa Neira, MSW

Michael Soto

Absent:

Stacy Mann

Heather Howard

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 May 2016 Minutes

Mr. Parker 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

No questions were asked of Ms. Neira about the General Assistance Report.

Ms. Neira went to her first Fair Hearing regarding a client that was terminated for Emergency Housing and did not agree with the decision made by the Division of Family Development (DFD). The GA recipient did not show up. According to the Division of

Family Development (DFD) that happens very often, and a new hearing is rescheduled if the client requests it. At the moment, Ms. Neira has not received any such notification.

On June 23rd there will be an Assessment Meeting to go over the State's pilot program to approve emergency assistance cases. There have been some concerns and some challenges that need to be addressed, sometimes DFD does not approve clients that are perceived to have a need or they have to wait for a response before being placed.

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

At the moment there are 37 youth enrolled in the program. A very successful job fair was held at the beginning of the month. The structure of the job fair this year changed where students were broken into three categories (new, returning students looking for new job opportunities and returning students who hoped to continue with the same employer) and this made the job fair much smoother. Ms. Neira received a lot of good comments from the employers, who said they had really good interviewers.

Ms. Neira announced that the Princeton Area Community Foundation (PACF) contacted the Human Services Department. They wanted to have a meeting with their board members, their Executive Director, and the Department of Human Services to learn more about SYEP. According to Ms. Neira, PACF is visiting different programs and organizations that work with youth in Mercer County. Ms. Neira has invited 3 students (one alumni and 2 current participants) and prepared a presentation about the program to inspire the donors and maybe get some funding from them.

Community Relations

The refugee family from Syria sponsored by the Nassau Presbyterian Church came to the Department of Human Services to be helped them with applications and be connected with resources. This time the process was very smooth due to the learning that the Department has had with the previous refugee family. Mayor Lempert came to meet and welcome them.

Ms. Neira also reported about a meeting that she had with Micki Crisafulli, Director of Student Services for the schools. She is in charge of child study team and housing. Ms. Neira said that it was a great meeting and she is going to meet with the social workers and counselors at the beginning of the next school year in order to share what Human Services does and learn more about what they do.

Ms. Neira also informed that Princeton Community Housing and Affordable Housing are concerned about the major impact that credit scores have on determining the eligibility of affordable housing applicants. It was suggested that the financial literacy workshops that were being hosted in conjunction with Isles as a one-time event could be extended to have ongoing credit repair counsel. The Commission discussed different mechanisms that could be implemented in order to provide a reliable service.

Mr. Heilner informed that the next Local Assistance Board –LAB meeting will be held in July.

V. Human Services Committee Reports

Civil Rights

Ms. Fraga gave an update about the research that the Civil Rights Committee is doing. She said that the interviews with other municipalities on how they handle the Open Public Record Act (OPRA) requests and the insurance are still pending. On the other hand the Commission has been working on identifying how many municipalities have a Civil Rights office or a Human Rights office.

The Committee will continue working to research which municipalities have mediation and how much their insurance cost. Also the Committee asked if there are other issues that need research, since they have been researching about the Civil Rights Commission for 2 years and they would like to move to the next phase to start the Civil Rights Commission.

The Chair will initiate contact with the Administrator and Mayor to report what has been done with respect to the issues that have been raised (OPRA and insurance) for the commissioners to review.

Immigration

Mr. Heilner informed that the subcommittee has been monitoring the Alliance for Immigration Justice, which are getting ready for the day the Supreme Court makes its decision about the extension of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA). The state varies widely in different amounts of legal capacity. Mercer County is the 8th county out of 21 with the most people that could benefit from DAPA, with around 7,500 people that potentially could be eligible for DAPA. The county with the largest number of eligible people is Middlesex County.

Mr. Heilner highlighted that in case that the Supreme Court approves DACA and DAPA, it is important to know how the screening and legal process would be organized in order to be able to help these people. The concern is that in Mercer County there are just a couple organizations that have a lawyer that could help with the DACA and DAPA application process. The Commission discussed ways to address these issues with some pro-bono lawyers and trained volunteers who can screen applicants before going to a lawyer. Ms. Neira suggested training the volunteers with a Train the Trainer that is available through New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice. Ms. Neira will connect with Joanna Calle from New Jersey Alliance in order to start volunteer training in Princeton.

Ms. Neira and Mr. Heilner reported on a legal lunch that was held at the high school with unaccompanied minors and Santos Flores from American Friends Service Committee, who specializes in juvenile immigration. Mr. Flores came from Newark and gave a presentation about DACA, immigration, and asylum. About 18 students attended the lunch, and the students were able to ask questions and were pretty engaged with the information that was delivered.

Send Hunger Packing (SHUPP)

Mr. Wishnick announced that the first SHUPP distribution for the summer will be starting. He said that there some logistics that have to be addressed, but they are being worked on.

Block Party

Mr. Parker and Mr. Spruill suggested cosponsoring with the Princeton Safe Streets Festival, a 5-day festival that occurs during the month of August. The idea is to have a Block Party on Saturday, August 13th at Race Street instead of a Block Party at Redding Circle.

VI. Updates

Dr. Muhammad Khalil Gibran Event

Mr. Wishnick highlighted that the event was a success and that it had good media coverage. Ms. Fraga suggested that the Civil Rights Committee put together a series with diverse speakers to target different audiences. Ms. Bates reiterated the importance of creating an advisory committee that represents different creeds. Mr. Wishnick proposed making business cards with information about Human Services to distribute to the community in case someone needs help.

LGBT Stakeholders Meeting

Mr. Wishnick announced that there is an event coming on July 13th at Robert Wood Johnson with LGBT Stakeholders. The event is sponsored by the Pride Center of New Jersey, Department of Justice, Department of Education and Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Human Rights Campaign

Ms. Neira said that Mayor Lempert had sent an email to Mr. Wishnick, Ms. Howard and her that announced that Princeton had been selected for inclusion in the Human Rights Campaign's 2016 Municipal Equality Index. The Human Rights Campaign is an organization that works to achieve equality for the LGBT community. The municipality has to send back a scorecard by August 15th. Ms. Neira will share the scorecard with the Board as soon as she receives it.

Annual Report

Mr. Hackett suggested that the Commission should write an annual report to give an overview of all the work that the Human Services Department has done during the year.

Committed and Faithful Annual Dinner

Mr. Spruill invited all the Commission members to the Committed and Faithful Annual Dinner on June 16th from 5pm to 8pm.

Mercer County Prison

Ms. Bates gave an update on the Mercer County Prison. The Mercer County Freeholders's minutes are not available except by OPRA request. A very exhaustive research must be undertaken to know which meeting discusses the prison.

Ms. Bates believes that it is important to have information available regarding the number of prisoners, beds, and quality of healthcare, education, etc. Nevertheless this information is not accessible. The only information that she has been able to ascertain is that visitation rights are set by where the prisoner is bunked, meaning that the visitor's hours may not be convenient with their family members' schedule simply because of where their bunk is located. Ms. Bates asked the Board for help in making a list of information that it is important to know.

VII. Adjournment

Mr. Parker seconded Ms. Encinas' motion to adjourn. With no further business to discuss, all voted in favor of this action. The meeting adjourned at 9:08 PM.