



PRINCETON HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes

February 15, 2023

Zoom Meeting * Princeton, NJ 08540

Board Members – Present

Veronica Olivares-Weber,
Chair
Ericka Deglau, Vice
Chair
Leticia Fraga, Council Liaison
Mark Freda, Mayor
Larry Spruill
Ming Kuang

Nakia White Barr
Ari Meisel
Greg Sarjeant
Jean Y. Durbin
Staff – Present
Rhodalynn Jones, Director
Salum Hur Bukhari, Board
Secretary

Board Members Absent

Rebecca Balaguer
Khristina Gonzalez

Call to Order:

The Regular Meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission was called to order by Chair Veronica Olivares-Weber at 6:01. Vice Chair Ericka Deglau then recited the acknowledgment: *“We gather today on the land of the Leni Lenape. As members of the Princeton Human Services Commission, we aspire to show appreciation, respect, and concern for all people and our environment. We honor the Lenape and other Indigenous caretakers of these lands and waters, the elders who lived here before, the Indigenous today, and the generations to come.”* Roll Call was completed with those present indicated. There were no members of the public present, but students from the Corner House Student Board were present.

Introduction of the newly appointed Commission member:

Council Liaison began the meeting by formally introducing Ari Meisel to the Commission of Human Services and vice versa.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: January 2023

Meeting Minutes for the month of January 2023, moved for approval Jean Durbin, seconded by Larry Spruill and approved unanimously.

Director’s Report:

Director Jones informed the Commission that:

- **NJ Count=Point in Time Survey/Homelessness Prevention:** The Department of Housing and Urban Development requires a nationwide survey to be conducted by the end of January each year. It is upon the collection of information through this survey that the determination about what proper and relevant services are needed is made, along with the decisions about how funding should be allocated by the government. For this purpose, Mercer County conducted its Point in Time Survey on January 25th, 2023, but the report will disseminate sometime during Fall of 2023. Director Jones stated that this was the first time that the Department of Human Services was directly involved with this survey and that she will share the results with the Commission once they are released.
- **NJ Family Care/Medicaid Expansion:** Director Jones reminded the Commission of Gov. Phil Murphy’s Cover All Kids initiative which envisions to expand Medicaid coverage for children under 19 years of age regardless of their immigration status, went into effect on January 1st, 2023. Director Jones further stated that in mid-January the Human Services Department had organized a Medicaid-expansion workshop at the Princeton Highschool, where the Department was able to fill around 40 applications. She noted that the department is waiting to hear back from NJ Family Care now for additional documents and activation update for these submitted applications. A second workshop will be held at the Princeton Public Library as soon as the department will hear back from NJFC on the previously submitted applications.



- **COVID - NJ Medicaid Renewal & NJ SNAP Emergency Allotments:** Director Jones informed the Commission about the status of the pandemic-oriented services which were placed during Covid-19. She noted that some of these pandemic programs are now coming to an end. Beginning April 2023, the Medicaid applications will be needed to be renewed and thus, the Department will work closely with residents to ensure that this process is made as smooth as possible. Furthermore, she highlighted that SNAP will be ending their extra-allowance program under the EBT cards, however, GOV. Phil Murphy has increased minimum allowance to 95 dollars per month, from a pre-pandemic minimum allowance of 50 dollars. The discontinuation for the emergency allotment will likely increase the demand on local food pantries.
- **Social Services Clinic:** Director Jones informed the Commission that the Department of Human Services is initiating the establishment of a Social Service Clinic at the Princeton Public Library once a month, with the aim to increase its outreach efforts and contacting people to the right services. The frequency and the designation of other locations will depend on the success rate of this program. Lastly, other partners like the Health Department and United Way were invited to the first clinic.
- **Discussion:**
 - Upon the Vice Chair's request, Director Jones informed the Commission that the Human Services Department served six unsheltered individuals on its' own and the Police Department assisted another 9 individuals in the month of January 2023.
 - Commissioner Jean enquired Director Jones if the Commission has the authority to go around Princeton and try to persuade local health providers to accept NJ FamilyCare/Medicaid.
 - Director Jones informed Commissioner Jean that Capital Health's Child Health Conference and Zufall Center have been providing medical for Princeton residents who are uninsured and accepts Medicaid, however, request letters can be sent out to local providers to encourage them to expand their list of acceptable insurance programs.
 - Council Liaison suggested that a formal Directory could be created and given out, which the residents can use for navigation of which providers accept NJ FamilyCare.
 - Commissioner Ari requested Directors Jones to expand on the reasons as to why several local providers do not accept NJ FamilyCare, for instance if it is an economic reason or a difficulty to navigate the system?
 - Director Jones highlighted how dental and vision services are covered by the town for low-income people. The services for vision can range from an entire examination to prescriptions, and providing glasses, however, the list for dental services is quite extensive but is available in the application.
- **Council Updates:**

Council Liaison Fraga began her update by debriefing the new Commissioners on her role as Liaison to the Commission. She reported on the recent presentation by the Director of Transportation for Princeton University, Charles Tennyson, on the University's new Transit Mobility Plan. Councilwoman Fraga confirmed that the transit buses are available to all members of the public and then suggested that it would be a helpful resource to members of our community who lack their own transportation. It was agreed that the University would reach out to our Human Services Department to coordinate an outreach initiative.
- **Commission Goals:** Council Liaison Fraga informed the Commission and its' new members that recently She, Mayor Freda and the Municipal Administrator met with the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Human Services Commission to discuss the role, responsibilities, and limitations of the Commission.
- **BCC Handbook and new members Orientation:** Council Liaison informed the Commission to go over the updated handbook for the BCC's. She further notified that once the remaining vacancy is filled, the Commission will host an orientation for all new members with the aim to familiarize them with their goals and duties.



Subcommittee Reorganization/Goals & Priorities:

Mental Health and Wellbeing:

- Vice Chair Ericka briefed the Commission on how the subcommittee members have decided to reach out to those community partners who are concerned about the issue of mental health and wellbeing. A meeting has been set with these community partners for March 4th, and so far 7 people have joined.
- She further expressed her gratitude towards Director Jones and her Social Work intern for helping the subcommittee to get in touch with people. In her briefing about the *Needs Assessment*, Vice Chair Ericka Deglau noted that the Needs Assessment, initiated prior to the pandemic, was paused because of urgent priorities. It was resumed in the fall of 2020 with several listening sessions conducted with community partners on a range of human service needs and service access, from basic necessities to emotional and social well-being. To further these efforts the members reached out to Princeton Survey Research Center to conduct a survey with service providers and later a data analyst was asked to analyze the results. The Needs Assessment, focused on service providers, followed the earlier 2014 Needs Assessment that had focused on recipients of services. The written report can be found online on Princeton's website. She highlighted how the Needs Assessment provides a snapshot of how Princeton addressed community needs during a moment of crisis, in the hopes of preparation for future challenges.

Community Needs & Immigration and Welcoming Week: Chair Veronica informed the Commission that both Committees did not meet this month, as they are waiting for the Mayor and Council to identify the overarching goals. She stated that once after the goals are shared, the committees will align them with their own and begin working then.

Discussion:

- The Council Liaison recalled how transportation to the hospital had become an issue and the Department tried to sort it by issuing vouchers that residents could use to pay taxis with for the hospital. Additionally, the University continues to allow residents to use Tiger Transit for transportation to the hospital. She further noted that information regarding all new transportation services offered by the University will be made available in Spanish too.
- Mayor Freda added that the Tiger-Transit was available to residents for all kinds of purposes and not just to visit the hospital.
- Chair Veronica requested Council Liaison to provide some clarification on a few key points surrounding the needs assessment presentation. Mayor Freda further added more information to this.
- Council Liaison mentioned how in a recent meeting the Chief of the Police Department showed the statistics for the calls that involved mentally disturbed people. In 2019, only 6 such calls were reported; however, this number rose to 25 in 2022. She noted that a sharp shift has been noted nationwide and action must be taken both nationally and at a local level. The Human Services can connect people to services that can help them.
- Council Liaison requested Commissioner Ari Meisel to expand on how the Human Services Department or individuals can respond to people with mental distress.
- Commissioner Ari stated that several training programs have been set for EMS responders to undertake in-order to be able to deal with such situations. Furthermore, just recognizing individuals who need help is extremely crucial to this process.



- -Commissioner Larry Spruill asked Commissioner Ari if there was any basic training that regular civilians could undertake in-order to become better at identifying people with such needs? Commissioner Ari confirmed that there are basic trainings available.
- -Vice Chair Ericka expanded on the issue of mental illness and its' correlation to homelessness.
- -Council Liaison informed the Commission that one of her other Commissions are planning an in-person retreat, with the aim to be able to set goals for the Commission. She advised the Human Services Commission to consider doing the same if everyone would like to.
- -Suggestions and discussions continued about the time, place, date for the goal-setting retreat by the Commission members.

Adjournment

The motion to adjourn at 7:02p.m was made by Chair Veronica and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by:

Salum Hur Bukhari

Recording for Princeton Human Services Commission.