

HOUSING, NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES & REDEVELOPMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

January 28, 2021

Members Present: *Council Member, Chair Nicole Johnston*
Council Member, Vice-Chair Alison Coombs
Council Member, Marsha Berzins

Others Present: Bobbi Abbotts, George Adams, Andrea Amonick, Brian Arnold, Daniel Brotzman, Kerstin Claspell, Lana Dalton, Liz Fuselier, Todd Hager, Lindsay Hammond, Karen Hancock, Jeff Hancock, Allison Hiltz, Chance Horiuchi, Tim Joyce, Daniel Krzyzanoski, Heather Lamboy, Brittany McGaughy, Rodney Milton, Crystal Murillo, Mindy Parnes, Jessica Prosser, Melissa Rogers, Melinda Taylor, Reenie Terjack, Lizzy Ullman, Lizzy Ullman, Roberto Venegas, Sandra Youngman, Cecilia Zapata

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Council Member Johnston welcomed everyone to the meeting and acknowledged Council Member Crystal Murillo for her accomplishments in chairing the Committee previously. Director Prosser introduced new staff: Rodney Milton, the new Manager of Community Development; Lana Dalton, the new Homelessness Program Manager; and Liz Fuselier, who has recently moved into the role of Community Development Planner.

MINUTES

Acknowledging the recent rotation in Committee Members, Council Member Murillo approved the minutes with Council Member Coombs.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

No announcements.

NEW ITEMS**Intergovernmental Agreement with Colorado Legal Services****Summary of Issue and Discussion**

On December 12, 2018, the Colorado Legal Services (CLS) Eviction Pilot Project started providing a clinic to reduce preventable evictions, mitigate eviction-related consequences, and connect tenants with community resources. During the timeframe of December 12, 2018 – February 28, 2020, CLS:

- Improved processes and trained staff
- Hired a grant attorney and paralegal
- Attended court 3-4 times per week to provide clients information about the clinic (in person and virtually)
- Partnered with Maiker Housing Partners to provide expedited rental assistance to low-income tenants
- Provided various levels of representation to a total of 363 households (955 people in those households and 450 children were represented)
 - In Aurora, there were 68 households and 160 people assisted.
- Out of the total number of households assisted, CLS has an:
 - 85% success rate on households that have retained their housing, retained more time to move or retained a housing voucher
 - 85% of households do not have an eviction judgement.

At the January 28, 2021 meeting, CLS representatives Lizzy Ullman and Reenie Terjack presented on the data as it pertains to the City of Aurora.

Questions/Comments

CM Coombs thanked the presenters and stated she was supportive of not only funding the program at current levels but possibly more due to the importance of preventing evictions and keeping evictions from appearing on renters' records. She asked whether expansion would be furthered by including Arapahoe County and appealing to its commissioners. Ms. Terjack remarked upon the unmet need in Arapahoe County and her openness to facilitate collaboration between the City of Aurora and Arapahoe County with regards to program expansion. Director Prosser added that Arapahoe County has been convening cross-jurisdiction groups that address homelessness with some overlap; but at this time there is nothing formal with regards to the CLS program. CM Berzins expressed her support for programs that keep people in their homes and its ease relative to finding homes for people who have already been evicted. CM Johnston asked Ms. Terjack to comment on the program as it relates specifically to unique challenges faced by individuals living in mobile home communities. Reenie responded that there are additional protections for those in mobile home communities and that there are no distinctions in CLS's treatment of mobile home clients, and their assistance is available to all. Ms. Ullman added that mobile homeowners are sometimes prioritized not only because they risk losing the lot they rent for their home, but the home itself (sometimes resulting in tandem eviction and foreclosure action).

The Committee was asked if they wish to approve and move to study session the intergovernmental agreement between Adams County, Colorado Legal Services, the City Of Aurora, Thornton, Federal Heights, Brighton, Commerce City, Westminster, Northglenn, and the City and County Of Broomfield regarding contributions toward a landlord/tenant legal services program?

Outcome

This item was unanimously approved to forward to study session.

2021 FUNDING OF THE AURORA COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER, INC.'S HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Summary of Issue and Discussion

On November 11, 2020, notification was given to the Nexus and Victim Assistance programs of the substantial surcharge revenue shortfall the City of Aurora faced. With that shortfall, the City's Office of Budget and Financial Planning recognized this deficit early and began working diligently on a plan to handle the revenue shortfall in the Court Surcharge programs.

Both the Nexus and Victim Assistance programs will have spent the entire program fund balance by the end of 2020 at the current rates. These programs are critical to the community and many of them are experiencing more strain due to the impact of COVID-19. With this mind, the City will request that these agencies apply for funding through the homeless services process in later years, and implement the following:

- Agreements with Aurora Mental Health Center (AUMHC)/Street Outreach and Mile High Behavioral Health (MHBHC)/Comitis Crisis Center are to be extended and funded using marijuana homeless funding for 2021 and 2022 up to the 2020 amount. Starting in 2023, these funds will become part of the homelessness RFP process. Draft agreements will be sent reflecting this change.
- AUMHC/Detox, Gateway Domestic Violence and SungateKids will continue to be funded by surcharge revenue and be part of the new Public Safety Support Agency (PSSA) program. At this time, six-month award extensions totaling \$133,450 will be awarded in 2021.
- This will provide enough funding for each agency to be awarded half of the 2020 full year amount for the first 6 months. Our hope is that after the first quarter of 2021, the City can move forward with funding for the second half of the year.
- There are many unknown factors causing us to move ahead cautiously. This program is currently funded solely by surcharge collections which are impacted by Public Safety sentiment and legislation, both of which pose a risk to the forecast at the moment.

The following is the status of the agency funding that was formally in the Nexus program, where awards totaling \$599,906 were made in 2020:

- AUMHC/Outreach - \$70,980 (move to marijuana funds)
- MHBHC/Comitis - \$262,025 (move to marijuana funds)
- AUMHC/Detox - \$106,186
- Gateway Domestic Violence - \$109,095
- SungateKids - \$51,620

At the January 28, 2021 meeting, Director Prosser provided background on this item and the related resolution to fund the Comitis Crisis Center.

Questions/Comments

CM Berzins asked whether this money is included in the 1.5 million designated annually, or whether this is a new allocation of marijuana revenue. Staff clarified it was a new allocation that would have gone through the RFP process, but these decisions arose after that process was completed for the year. In the future, these agencies have been notified that they will be expected to apply for the funds via the RFP process. CM Berzins appreciated the clarification, noting that many budgetary deficiencies for such programs resulted from the government’s reduction and waiver of other costs to the public such as fines. CM Coombs reiterated her support for the initiative, having been involved in previous discussions about moving marijuana funding.

The Committee was asked if they wished to approve and move to study session the six-month funding agreement between the City of Aurora, Colorado, and Aurora Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center, Inc. DBA Aurora Mental Health Center (AUMHC)?

Outcome

This item was unanimously approved to forward to study session.

2021 FUNDING OF THE COMITIS CRISIS CENTER, INC. USING MARIJUANA SALES TAX FUNDS

Summary of Issue and Discussion

This item was discussed along with the funding of the Aurora Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center, Inc.’s Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Programs.

Questions/Comments

The Committee was asked if they wish to approve and move to study session a resolution of the City Council of the City of Aurora, Colorado, to Fund the Comitis Crisis Center, Inc. for the year 2021 using marijuana sales tax funds?

Outcome

This item was unanimously approved to forward to study session.

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AURORA, COLORADO, TO AWARD CITY FUNDING FROM THE CITY’S HOMELESS PROGRAM TO THE AURORA FLEXIBLE HOUSING FUND PROGRAM FOR 2021 AT THE CURRENT FUNDING LEVELS

Summary of Issue and Discussion

The City of Aurora Homelessness Program was initiated in 2017, with the overarching goal of making homelessness brief, rare and non-reoccurring, with the ultimate goal of ending it altogether. City Council initially set aside \$4.5 million over three years to address homelessness. With these initial funds the city:

- Renovated the old police gym on the Fitzsimons Campus to be used as an interim site for the Aurora Day Resource Center
- Funded the operations of the Aurora Day Resource Center through Mile High Behavioral Healthcare (MHBHC)
- Funded a mental health worker from Aurora Mental Health Center
- Funded Aurora@Home's Landlord Recruiter to bring the position to full-time
- Purchased 2 vans for outreach services; one for Aurora Mental Health Center's Outreach Program, and one for the MHBHC/Comitis new outreach team
- Funded the operations of MHBHC's outreach team
- Funded the Colfax Community Network

In the summer of 2017, City Council approved an additional 2% special sales tax on recreational marijuana sales. This special tax was approved to fund the Homelessness Program ongoing. The 2% tax has been generating about \$2 million/year. Funding from the City of Aurora is an investment in evidence-based best practices that are proven to lead to ending homelessness.

In order to make progress toward this goal there needs to be a continuum-of-care to provide services that meet the varying needs of our individuals and families. Some households experience a financial crisis, and do not qualify for other funding streams based on rigid federal eligibility criteria; therefore, without this flexible fund, they may become homeless or stay homeless.

Questions/Comments

There were no comments or questions about this item.

The Committee was asked if they wish to approve and move to study session the resolution of the City Council of the City of Aurora, Colorado, to award city funding from the city's homeless program to the Aurora Flexible Housing Fund Program for 2021 at the current funding levels?

Outcome

This item was unanimously approved to forward to study session.

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

Metro Center

CM Berzins, new to the Committee, remarked on the desire to further discuss the progress of the Metro Center which was presented upon at the December 8, 2020 meeting and duly reflected in the minutes. She believes the ownership of the property has changed hands many times due to owners' frustrations with perceived stilted progress and lack of incentives. CM Coombs emphasized the need to balance avoiding "micro-managing" development with staying true to the City's vision for the Metro Center. All agreed discussions fall into the purview of this and Planning and Economic Development Committee(s) and will revisit the topic in meetings to come.

Housing Strategy Update

Mr. Milton thanked his team for their work and stated they are in the implementation phase. He emphasized the importance of communication, clarity, and prioritization of the 12 strategies and 6 policies envisioned by the Strategy. Mr. Milton broke the Strategy down into people-related, place-related, production, and preservation. Ms. Fuselier thanked the Committee for its support and concluded that it is an exciting time for the City in light of the progress made in its Housing Strategy.

Updates from Community Members

CM Johnston introduced the new standing agenda item that will provide community members an opportunity to interact with the Committee. The importance of feedback from community members is especially important given

the growing frequency with which matters like homelessness have been in the news. Director Prosser suggested community members contact the policy committee's meeting administrative liaisons prior to the meeting at which they would like to comment to ensure they can be heard. Community members may contact administrative liaisons Lindsay Hammond at lhammond@auroragov.org or 303-739-7287 and Cecilia Zapata at czapata@auroragov.org or 303-739-7293.

Future Committee Topics

CM Johnston invited remarks from fellow Council Members about topics they would like to discuss in future months. CM Coombs would like to address expanding eviction protections; collective impact with respect to housing and homelessness; and revisit an ongoing discussion on waste and recycling. CM Berzins congratulated the Second Chance Center for its new location in Ward II and its good use in what would have been an otherwise empty building. Director Prosser addressed moving forward on CM Murillo's initiative of "Housing is a Human Right" and the need for further discussion on the allocation of rental assistance.

CM Hiltz stated the Mental Health Co-Responder Program Updates and the Youth Violence Prevention Program Updates are two items that will be new to the committee. These will be added to the agenda as standing items.

CM Johnston stated that Committee meetings in 2021 will be on the first Thursday of each month (excluding February) at 8:30 a.m.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 4, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

Meeting adjourned: 9:33 a.m.

APPROVED: *Nicole Johnston*

Committee Chair, Nicole Johnston