



EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL MINUTES

**REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, March 9, 2022**

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) convened on Wednesday, March 9, 2022.

Board Members in Attendance: Chair McHorse, Vice Chair Worthington, Council Members Alvarez, Demby, Gordon, Hedrick, Hosking Pulido, Huston, Paver, and Schennum

Staff in attendance: Caitlin Oliver, Donna Sundstrom, Cindy Gamez, and Michelle Rodriguez

CALL TO ORDER – Chair McHorse called the meeting to order at 8:37 a.m.

CITIZEN COMMUNICATION: GENERAL

No citizen communication.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from February 9, 2022, meeting – Member Huston moved to approve the minutes from the February 9, 2022, regular meeting. The minutes were approved by a unanimous vote of 8-0 (Vice Chair Worthington and Member Demby not on the dais at time of vote).

2. PRESENTATIONS

a. Briefing from the Housing and Planning Department and discussion on the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Action Plan Community Needs Assessment

Presenters:

- Jamey May, Housing and Community Development Officer, Housing and Planning
- Natasha Ponczek, Program Manager, Austin Public Health
- Helen Howell, Public Health Program Coordinator, Austin Public Health
- Katie Horstman, Senior Research Analyst, Housing and Planning

The Housing and Planning Department (HPD) and Austin Public Health (APH) presented an overview of the City’s federally funded HPD programs in fiscal year 2021-2022 and requested feedback on the FY22-23 action plan. Under the FY20-21 action plan, HPD served over 3,500 individuals. Many of the programs ran into difficulties during the pandemic. For example, some programs were paused because activities were not able to be held in-person. For the Tenants Rights Assistance program, which offers repair remediation services, some tenants fell behind with paying rent during the pandemic which meant they were not in “good standing” to petition repairs. Some programs, like Child Care Services CV, are ongoing, whereas some programs, like RENT, have concluded. The presenters reported that over 3,000 households served by the following programs had children under 5:

- Down Payment Assistance
- Architectural Barrier Removal

- Minor Home Repair
- Homeowner Rehabilitation
- RENT 2.0, 3.0, 4.0

The presentation slides with additional details and program statistics have been posted to the Early Childhood Council website as backup material.

Helen Howell works closely with HPD to manage the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Special Needs Assistance contracts. She provided an update on FY20-21 activities and outcomes related to child care assistance. Services under this contract that relate to child care are the following programs:

- Early Head Start Program (service provider is Child Inc.)
 - 80% of children at or exceeding developmental benchmarks at end of the program
- Teen Parent Child Care Program (service provider is Austin ISD)
 - 93% of parenting students earned grade promotion and 100% of the teen parents graduated high school
- Bridge Child Care Voucher Program (service provider is YWCA)

In total, these 3 programs served 103 families of the 175 family goal for FY 20-21. Howell provided household and income data and was asked by the members to follow up after the meeting with the number of families served by the programs that are homeless and how these program outcomes compare to pre-pandemic. Vice Chair Worthington asked if the spending for the CARES Act funding is on track. HPD said it varies by program. The Emergency Solutions CARES act grant program has had trouble spending down the dollars given the HUD restrictions placed on the funds. The rent program has spent all money and has been on track. Howell said there is a longer expenditure/performance period for the CDBG-CV (6 years to expend funds) than for other CARES Act funds and that they are on track with spending. Member Hedrick asked if the current funding for these programs is enough to meet community need. Howell agreed to provide specific data and stats as a follow up to the meeting, but that she does know that the level of funding does not cover the need. The presenters clarified that the City of Austin does not fund these programs, but does have personnel to manage the contracts.

Howell also presented on the services provide through the CDBG-CV Child Care for Essential Workers program and FY 20-21 highlights. The program promotes continuity of quality child care, to help prevent disruptions in care that might impact employee's ability to work. This funding also applies to child care and education workers. APH general funds are limited to people with income below 200% of the federal poverty level, whereas these funds extend to families that have incomes greater than that. The program had very low use because many essential workers lost their jobs because of the pandemic, making them ineligible for the program. However, ever since they amended the contract to extend eligibility to those searching for jobs or in a training program, the enrollment has increased from 20 participants to over 100.

Katie Horstman gave an overview of the federal funding reporting timeline. The department is currently operating under the consolidated 5 year plan from 2019-2024.

A draft of fiscal year 2022-23 plan is scheduled to be released in May. The grants that go into the plan are:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME)
- Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)

- Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)

HUD has not released the amount of funding available, but HPD expects the City will be eligible for a similar amount in previous years, which is about \$13 million across all the grants.

Jamey May presented on the HPD programs included in the action plan, including:

- The Homelessness Assistance programs for those experiencing homelessness that includes services for victims of domestic violence, unaccompanied youth, people with chronic substance abuse, veterans, people living with HIV/AIDS, and people experiencing mental illness.
 - Member Huston asked if families with children are given priority in the homeless assistance program. Rapid rehousing is not specifically tied to families, but if a 3 bedroom is available, then a family would be prioritized.
- Special Needs Assistance activities assist moderate to low income Austinites by providing services to children, seniors, and other vulnerable populations.
- Renters Assistance activities assist with making rent more affordable in Austin.
- Homeowner Assistance is designed to maintain safety and livability of housing for low-income home owners and improve aging housing infrastructure. These are part of the City's displacement prevention initiatives.
- Homebuyer Assistance programs include counseling to potential homebuyers and loans for down payments for qualifying home buyers.
- Developer Assistance includes developer assistance programs for nonprofits and for-profit organizations.

HPD will be meeting with community groups and having two public meetings between now and April 15th. The public is invited provide comments on the action plan at the public meetings or on the Speak Up Austin! webpage. HPD will provide a social media toolkit for boards and commissions to share with their networks about the upcoming public engagement events. Chair McHorse proposed the ECC discuss potential recommendations for HPD for their FY22-23 action plan at the upcoming April 12 ECC regular meeting. Members can share recommendation ideas with the ECC policy workgroup ahead of the April 12th meeting, and the work group can craft a resolution based on those suggestions. McHorse suggested that one recommendation be to expand the Teen Parent Program beyond AISD, to Del Valle ISD and public charter schools. Vice Chair Worthington expressed support for that proposed recommendation.

3. NEW BUSINESS AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS

a. Fiscal year 2022-2023 City budget recommendation to maintain current Austin Public Health funding for early childhood

Member Huston moved to approve the proposed budget recommendation. The recommendation was approved by a unanimous vote of 10-0. Chair McHorse noted that there are additional recommendations the ECC may want to make to City Council that are budget-related, at the next regular ECC meeting.

b. Topics to bring to Joint Inclusion Committee

Member Alvarez and Chair McHorse discussed asking the JIC to endorse the approved ECC budget recommendation and sharing with the JIC how the recommendation aligns with the JIC's affordability and resiliency priorities.

c. Community Engagement Work Group updates

i. Discussion about establishing a work group to connect community members to the Early Childhood Council

Member Gordon proposed shifting the strategies of the Community Engagement Work Group. Rather than inviting community members to attend an ECC work group, ECC members would instead engage with existing community engagement groups facilitated by local early childhood collation and systems agencies. At their last meeting, the ECC work group identified a need to connect those existing community engagement groups to the Early Childhood Council. ECC members were asked to suggest local groups that they think the ECC Community Engagement Work Group should build relationships and support the work of. Chair McHorse noted that she received recent interest from other City boards and commissions in engaging in collective efforts to capture community voice.

d. Discuss times and locations for the April 12, 2022, and August 13, 2022, ECC regular meetings

The members discussed site options to hold the next ECC regular meeting on Tuesday, April 12th. The intent of having an evening meeting on Tuesday is to give community members an alternative meeting day and time to engage with the ECC. Staff liaison Caitlin Oliver shared that it is best to reserve City meeting rooms if the ECC wishes to hold a hybrid meeting. The Texas Open Meetings Act (TOMA) requires specific videoconferencing capabilities and technology (e.g., cameras and microphones) that community spaces like libraries, schools, recreation centers do not always have. The Austin Energy building in Mueller and the Permitting and Development Center (PDC) have spaces with videoconferencing capabilities. A PDC event room is available the evening of April 12th. The members asked the staff liaison to reserve the PDC meeting room from 6:00-7:30 p.m. on April 12th and agreed that the ECC will try to hold the Saturday, August 13th regular meeting in a community space, such as a library or school.

e. Preliminary results of the Austin-Travis County Child Care Staffing survey

Chair McHorse shared preliminary results of a local child care staffing survey. Ninety-one programs responded, 95% of which are licensed centers. Two respondents were registered home providers. Most respondents accept child care subsidies (68%). Beyond staffing issues, the survey captures data on staff COVID-19 vaccination rates. Highlighted findings:

- Majority had issues hiring and filling staff vacancies
- 43% have had to limit hours due to staffing shortages
- 56% are under enrolled due to staffing shortage; 90% of programs that said they are under enrolled have a waitlist
- 68% are able to cover their operating expenses
- 75% have received COVID relief funding; Majority (76%) of those that said they received COVID assistance said they could not have broken even financially without that assistance.

Member Paver said that she asked Stepping Stone School's HR department to search for child care job postings in the Austin area. As of today, there are 1,013 child care job postings on Indeed. 500 daycare jobs and over 600 preschool teachers. Member Demby said that she knows of a child care workforce development program in Austin ISD. Students that complete the Akins Early College High School child development program graduate with an associate degree and a child development certification. Chair McHorse expressed interest in inviting the Akins High program to present to the ECC, to learn more about possible replication of the program.

4. STAFF UPDATES

a. COVID-19 updates

Austin-Travis County is in Stage 2 of the COVID-19 risk-based guidelines. The 7-day average of new hospital admissions is 10. Local transmission level is moderate, with a community transmission rate of 39.6. The percent positivity of COVID-19 tests is 4.3% for the public. The child age groups have lower positivity rates- 2.3% among children under 1 year; 2.8% among children 1-9 years old; and 3.5% among 10–19-year-olds. It is important to continue to encourage people to get their children vaccinated and for people 12 and up to get boosted, as this downward trend is not guaranteed, transmission is still happening, and immunity is waning. The percentage of people boosted in Austin-Travis County is still relatively low. The CDC has updated their mask guidance, with a caveat for communities facing unique circumstances. With spring break and South By Southwest next week, APH is still recommending wearing a mask indoors during the spring festival season. For this reason, APH has not updated the child care COVID-19 guidance and is still recommending masks be worn by people 2+. Earlier in the month, APH, in partnership with Workforce Solutions Capital Area, successfully distributed PPE and bottled water to approximately 136 child care providers. APH has recently added some CDC Foundation temporary staff to help support the child care nurse line, child care and schools COVID-19 group, and other response areas.

b. Child care center at the Dove Springs Austin Public Health facility

The Early Childhood team at APH is helping to design the interior space and the playground for the Dove Springs Public Health Facility child development center. In March, the City will be seeking Requests for Information (RFI) for child care providers looking to enter into a service agreement with the City to operate the program. The City will review the RFI screening questionnaire responses and then send out a Request for Proposals (RFP), which will likely be due in June 2022. Once proposals are reviewed, the City plans to select an operator in early fall 2022. An opening date is to be determined.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- a. Member Wren resigned from the ECC. Chair McHorse asked member to make suggestions about who they think should represent District 4. The person does not need to live in D4 for the City Council member's office to appoint them.
- b. Update from the City of Austin about the child care task force and recommendations that came from a 2017 City Council resolution, along with updates on other early childhood- and child care-related Council resolutions and memos.

ADJOURNMENT – Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 10:01 a.m.