



**EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2023**

The Early Childhood Council convened in a regular meeting on Wednesday, September 13, 2023, at City Hall, Board & Commission Room #1101, 301 West Second Street in Austin, Texas.

Chair McHorse called the Early Childhood Council Meeting to order at 8:47 a.m.

Board Members in Attendance: Chair McHorse and Members Hamilton and Hedrick

Board Members in Attendance Remotely: Members Cormie, McCollum, Schennum, and Vargas

Staff in Attendance: Caitlin Oliver, Rachel Farley, Cindy Gamez, and Michelle Rodriguez

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: GENERAL

The first five speakers to register prior to the meeting being called to order will each be allowed a three-minute allotment to address their concerns regarding items not posted on the agenda.

Jelina Tunstill, Program Coordinator for the Community Advancement Network (CAN), gave public comment on CAN activities in 2023 and plans for 2024. CAN is comprised of 26 governmental, non-profit, private, and faith-based organizations that work collectively to leverage mutual resources to improve social, health, educational, and economic opportunities in the Austin area. The CAN data dashboard tracks 18 community indicators, including kindergarten readiness. The Wecanatx.org website shares community resources and information in ten languages. The Race Equity Action Framework tool registration for the Race Equity Principles training are available on the website. The CAN Language Access Team works to provide information for immigrants about living and accessing resources in Austin and information about language access rights. CAN produces weekly podcasts on community engagement activities. Soon to be launched are mental health toolkits, in multiple languages. The next regional summit will be in 2024.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve the minutes of the Early Childhood Council Regular Meeting on August 12, 2023
The minutes from the meeting of 8/12/2023 were approved unanimously on Member Hedrick's motion, Member Hamilton's second, on a 7-0 vote.

STAFF BRIEFINGS

2. Updates from Caitlin Oliver, Austin Public Health (APH), regarding community meetings about child care at Civitan Neighborhood Park and the Dove Springs Public Health Facility, and a Back-to-School Children's Mental Health Forum hosted by Integral Care and APH
Caitlin Oliver, Early Childhood Council (ECC) staff liaison, shared information on September community meetings, including:
 - **Dove Springs Public Health Facility- Community meeting**
 - September 21, 2023, at George Morales Dove Springs Recreation Center
 - In partnership with APH, Austin Public Works will be managing construction of this new public health facility in southeast Austin to address the needs identified by the community and [City Council in 2018](#). The new two-story facility is funded by the 2018 Bond Election and will consist of a Neighborhood Center, Food Pantry, WIC and Immunization Programs, and a High-Quality Child Care Center.
 - **Civitan Neighborhood Park- Community input opportunity**
 - September 23, 2023, at Montopolis Recreation Center
 - APH is requesting that Austin Parks & Recreation Department transfer to APH a portion of Civitan Neighborhood Park land where child care operations currently exist. Approval of this request would allow the child care operation to continue and potentially expand to provide high-quality, affordable child care to about 60 children.
 - **Supporting Kids' Mental Health During Back-to-School- Virtual community forum**
 - September 18, 2023
 - Integral Care and APH partnered to host a panel of experts to talk with parents, school staff, and other community members about how to spot a mental health issue, tips for talking to kids about mental health, suicide prevention, and provide information on resources.

Members asked questions about the City of Austin's (COA) processes for the child care plans at Civitan and Dove Springs. Rachel Farley, APH Early Childhood Program Supervisor, shared that Mariposa is currently serving 25 children at Civitan and that APH staff is drafting a Chapter 26 application that will be presented to the Parks and Recreation Board and the ECC to weigh in on before the application is submitted to City Council. Cindy Gamez, APH Public Health Program Manager, shared that the Dove

Springs facility child care operator RFP is set to be released later this fall, with vendor selected in 2024.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

3. Updates from related groups (as needed), including Austin Chapter of the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children, Austin ISD, Child Care Regulation, Child Inc, E3 Alliance, Success By 6 Coalition, Workforce Solutions Capital Area, and other groups in attendance
Chair Cathy McHorse made announcements on behalf of three related groups, including:
 - **The annual TXAEYC conference will be November 2-4, 2024, at the Kalahari Resort in Round Rock.**
 - **Children at Risk Texas is facilitating a data discussion in Austin at Open Door on October 5 at 10:30 a.m. Preceding the discussion, at 10 a.m., there will be a press conference about the statewide Proposition 2 ballot initiative, which, if passed and then later approved by City Council and Travis County, would give property tax relief to some center-based child care providers.**
 - **Go Austin/Vamos Austin (GAVA) is planning an early childhood townhall with Mayor Watson on November 1.**
4. Presentation from Alyssa Tharrett, Parks and Recreation Department (PARD), with an overview of the Feasibility Study: Intergenerational Resource and Activity Center Pilot Program at the Nash Hernandez Building
The presentation from Alyssa Tharrett, PARD project management supervisor, included information on the following:
 - **Nash Hernandez Building history**
 - **Feasibility study objectives**
 - **Existing building condition**
 - **Program and design needs**
 - **Conceptual floor plans for the upper and lower levels**
 - **Cost estimates & timeline**
 - **Additional considerations**
 - **Alternative locations for an Intergenerational Recreation & Activity Center (IRAC) pilot program**
 - **Status of the project and next steps**

Tharrett shared that child care licensing standards were not considered at the time of the study, but they are currently being explored by APH. The pictures in the presentation of the current building conditions are outdated by one year, as are the cost estimates. PARD reached out to the COA Real Estate Office to see if there were other building options available. As of a year ago, there were no other buildings available. Other zip codes in

Austin have been identified as higher needs areas compared to 78702, where Nash Hernandez is located. The darkest colors on the map are the zip codes with the highest density of older adults living below 200% of the federal poverty level. Responses to the community engagement study related to this project can be viewed online.

The members discussed space concerns at the Nash Hernandez building, to be able to house child care and older adult services. Member Cynthia McCollum, said that the program she directs, Open Door, has signed a letter of support for the IRAC pilot program and that she has been involved in discussions with the IRAC Advisory Group for several years. McCollum shared that the plan is for a child care program at Nash Hernandez to be a full-service, onsite child care center that especially meets the needs of infant-toddler care in the area. The upper and lower levels of the building both have ground level entrances, so she does not expect that to be an issue with child care licensing. The program would be designed to have enough enrolled to support operations without outside funds and the program would accept WFS scholarships and children with disabilities. Rachel Farley shared that APH has met with Cynthia McCollum and also Amy Bryan of UT Lab School to discuss a sustainable plan for a child care model at Nash. They determined the program would need to serve at least 68 children to be self-sufficient. And the child care program could need 6,200 square feet of the available 9,000. Aging service partners who have expressed interest in being a part of the adult day services at an IRAC, have their own concerns about self-sustainment and space at this location.

Members also discussed the need for child care and older adult services in that neighborhood. Based on the child care desert maps created by Children at Risk, 78702 is a subsidized child care desert and a Texas Rising Star (TRS child care quality-rating) desert. Member Leonor Vargas shared some information she heard at a recent Hispanic Quality of Life Commission meeting from people in 78753, where the Gus Garcia Recreation Center is located. The attendees talked about their desire for more older adult day services at the center and also an increase of young mothers with infants in the Colony Park area. According to Rachel Farley, neither the feasibility study nor the APH response to Council explores the demographic projections of where people will be living in the next 4 years, when the IRAC pilot program would likely launch.

The APH response to City Council with an implementation proposal for an IRAC is due October 9. Still more work needs to be done to understand what partnerships with organizations who work with older adults could look like at Nash.

5. Discussion about the comments provided to the ECC by Austin-Travis County family-based child care providers at the ECC Regular Meeting on August 12, 2023
Member Choquette Hamilton led discussion on ECC member reflections on the comments from child care providers. Members heard the family-based child care (FBCC) providers

say they had feelings of being used during COVID-19 to stay open and provide child care but now feel their needs are being ignored. The providers asked the COA to consider ways to support the sustainability of the child care home model with concrete, financial forms of assistance. Financial assistance included things like addressing low reimbursement for care, health insurance, upkeep of their grounds and home, pest control, director training, among others.

Members also discussed what structures exist to support FBCC providers. Chair McHorse shared that the COA, through the COVID-19 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, supports subcontracts with AVANCE and GAVA to work with FBCC, and the COA also contracts with WFS Capital Area. The ARPA funding will end soon, however. The Success By 6 Coalition has a Shared Services Alliance and an FBCC workgroup which includes Black Mamas ATX, child care providers, GAVA, AVANCE, and others. One child care provider in the workgroup is the Texas representative to the national association for child care homes.

Members then discussed ideas for future structural support. Much of the support right now through the Shared Service Alliance comes by way of coaching, but financial support is needed. Member Vargas expressed hope that the ECC can be a place for conversation circles on this issue so that the ECC can be an advocate for the providers. Chair McHorse suggested a potential collaboration on a proposal between the organizations involved in the FBCC workgroup for the upcoming COA early childhood social service solicitations.

Cindy Gamez provided an update on the solicitation timeline. Current contracts will last through the end of March 2024. New contracts will start April 1. In the fall of 2023, APH plans to release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for qualified social service providers with demonstrated experience in early childhood services. Areas of work may include:

- Direct child care
- Staffing, wages, or child care subsidies for attracting and retaining qualified child care teachers
- Child care quality improvement activities
- Wraparound services for families with young children, which could include parent education, case management, early childhood intervention, direct financial assistance
- Transportation to/from child care or medical appointments for families with young children

Members proposed a potential agenda item to hear more from providers and the groups already supporting them, such as a presentation on the landscape of work from the FBCC

workgroup. The ECC would like to consider moving the meeting time for that discussion to a time more convenient for home providers.

6. Updates from the ECC Budget Committee and Joint Inclusion Committee (JIC) representatives regarding the JIC Budget Workshop held on September 9, 2023

Member Vargas updated the members on the JIC Budget Workshop. The workshop was an opportunity to network with other JIC commissioners and to learn more about the COA budget timeline and process. There was a discussion among commissioners about advancing equity, the importance of meeting with department staff about recommendations, and how the commissions often receive public comment about the budget at their June and July meetings even though the commissions have submitted their recommendations by the end of March and COA department staff start submitting their recommendations by May. The JIC asked commissioners to promote upcoming community budget townhalls on October 18, October 24, and November 4, 2023.

Member Tom Hedrick provided an update on the fiscal year 2024 COA budget. The 20% inflation-related increase for early childhood social service contracts providers that the ECC recommended was approved by City Council. The COA also initiated a fund to pay fees for child care providers that want to open programs.

Jeremy Garza, COA Equity Office business process consultant, shared updates on the ECC Quality-of-Life (QoL) study procurement process. The funds allocated for fiscal year 2023 for the study have been rolled over into FY 2024. The process has been delayed due to staffing shortages, but new staff members have been hired at the Equity Office and will be involved in the studies. Currently, the procurement liaison is reformatting the scope of work the ECC submitted in the spring and then will likely release the RFP in the next month or two. The Equity Office is discussing plans to bring commissions together to discuss collaborating on the QoL studies.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

ECC members listed the following future agenda item(s):

- Presentations from people and groups supporting local family-based child care**
- Approve 2024 ECC meeting calendar**
- Discussion regarding collaborating with other commissions on the ECC QoL Study**
- Potential action regarding the City of Austin Chapter 26 application related to child care at Civitan Neighborhood Park**

Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 10:03 a.m., without objection.

The minutes were approved at the October 11, 2023, meeting on Member Tom Hedrick's motion and Member Cynthia McCollum's second, on a 7-0 vote.