

HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

MEETING

February 23, 2010

Commissioners present: Marian Darlington-Hope, Christopher Hall, Lori Likis, Khari Milner, Nan Stone, Claudia Hill

DHSP staff present: Ellen Semonoff, Stephanie Ackert, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder)

Jolyon Cowan provided an update on the 2010 U.S. Census. Since last summer, the Complete Count Committee, comprised of representatives from for profit and from non-profit agencies, universities, and social service agencies, has been meeting to coordinate a census count that best reflects the population of Cambridge. Immigrants and students generally have been hard to reach. Cambridge has a population of 105,000, 20% are university students. CDBG is based on formula grants and we need to get every resident counted. The Committee got a list of social service contacts and the Election Committee sent a mailing. The Census was also publicized through the City's newsletter, the City's web, and through 5,000 leaflets in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Kreyol. The School Department recently sent leaflets in the students' backpacks home to alert parents. In April and May the census will hire between 200 and 300 enumerators in Cambridge for 20 hours per week (evenings and weekends) at \$20-\$23 per hour. The state requires that the City also run its own annual census. The City census questionnaire is green; the federal questionnaire is blue.

Stephanie reintroduced a handout of the history of the CDBG Request for Proposals for the Commission to decide on how to proceed with the March 23rd annual event. Since 2006, there has been a multi-year decrease in funding resulting in a \$93,325 cut. In the past the Commission has been reluctant to have an open RFP when funds have been dwindling. Current agencies are doing a good job with staff and funding cuts. Ellen suggested that the March 23 event could be a discussion and information gathering as to how the earthquake in Haiti is impacting the sizable Haitian community in Cambridge. Claudia Hill suggested having someone from Google come to speak at the event in an effort to bring new companies to Cambridge involved and meet social service agencies. Claudia has a couple of contacts at Google. Ellen suggested that if there is an increase in CDBG funding, which we won't know until the end of March, we could still have a mini RFP and a community meeting.

Many agencies depend on volunteers to deliver their services. It was also proposed that we invite agencies to bring their "volunteer of the year" to be recognized. For the March 23rd annual event, it was decided to have a celebration and recognition of the social service agencies, invite Google to send a speaker to introduce the new applications and their nature and use, and to recognize each agency's "volunteer of the year." Claudia offered to contact Google as soon as she has more details about the event.

Jolyon informed the Commission that every year the Department has to write a One Year Action Plan and every five years a Five Year Action Plan to be submitted to HUD. He asked for input into this year's Five Year Action Plan, particularly around the gaps or needs in services in Cambridge. He handed out the 2006 results of the community dialogue for review and as a base for the discussion. The following human service needs were indentified:

- It was agreed that there are some gaps in mental health services.
- There is an increase in the numbers of people needing emergency food.

- There is a need for affordable childcare from early age to school age.
- There has been an increase in substance abuse, particularly among younger women (20's) and gaps in the prevention and treatment.
- There are gaps in the transition for young adults from school to work; there is a need for elder services to help them stay in their homes.
- There is a need for entry level jobs and affordable housing.

After last year's drop-off in the number of homeless individuals, the January 2010 census reported a shelter count (193 persons) that was back to levels seen in 2007 and 2008; a "street count" (61 persons) that paralleled the street count in 2008; and a sharp decrease in the number of homeless families, reflecting a reduction in the number of State funded units of family shelter in Cambridge (from 32 to 27 units), and a 48% decrease (from 73 to 38) in the number of homeless metro-Boston families temporarily sheltered by the State at the Cambridge Gateway Inn." Overall, the census recorded an overall 12% decrease in homelessness in Cambridge, from 637 persons in January 2009 to 559 persons in 2010. Weather affects the count, with more people seeking shelter in the coldest weather.

Stephanie gave an update on the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP) run out of the City's Multi-Service Center since September, 2009. This program requires extensive back up documentation and tracking in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), HUD's mandated database. This is a two and half to three year funded program. The City hired a full time position and contracted with HomeStart for another full time position to work exclusively with HPRP. Of the \$860,128 stimulus funds allocated for homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing, as of February 9, 2010, a total of \$321,389 has been spent serving 138 client households. Of these clients, 23 are ongoing "soft subsidies." Most people come on the brink of eviction and in some instances have substantial utility arrearages which, in public housing, will lead to eviction. Many of the clients are referred by their landlords who already have a relationship with the MSC staff. Every Thursday afternoon, Stephanie attends case conferences at MSC when staff discuss what assistance to give and share best practices. There has not been a slow down of requests for financial assistance and most likely the money will be spent before the 2 ½ years. The Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee (CEOC) also received funding to run financial literacy and money management trainings. HPRP clients are referred to CEOC for financial counseling and budgeting, to LIFT, and to the Cambridge Employment Program for job search.

In a lot of instances families have found themselves in financial difficulties, particularly in public or subsidized housing by having grown children move in with them, not declaring their income, or the children not contributing to the rent when their income is counted towards the rent determination. Families in public housing face eviction due to huge utility arrearages. Some people have medical bills and are close to the edge. Most people have been dealing with financial stress for a long time and are paying more than 50% of their income in rent, and the recession has pushed them over the edge. MSC staff have been trained on the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and their data quality keeps improving. The City hired a part time HMIS coordinator to train staff at agencies that serve the homeless population and to compile reports and data required by HUD.

Meeting was adjourned.