

West Des Moines Human Services Advisory Board

139 6th Street, West Des Moines, IA 50266

February 16, 2021 Minutes

(Virtual Meeting via Zoom)

Members Present: Rick Riley, Bill Solawetz, Sue Wright, Kasey Tickel, Jo Helling, Janet Clarey-Jones, Tami Swenson, Dan Werner, Mary Bernabe, Doug Loots, Matt McNeece, Joe Happe, Mari Bunney

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Althea Holcomb

Citizen Participation: None

Call to Order: Meeting started at approx. 5:30 by Rick Riley

Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the Jan. meeting were approved by Joe Happe, seconded by Matt McNeece.

Director's Report:

\$121,000 spent in January for rent assistance. The second round of the CDBG funds were used, and had to use just under \$50,000 from the discretionary account to cover. January was so fast and furious that fund requests didn't get put into the spreadsheet on a timely basis so the CDBG money plus more was spent - the homeless prevention fund was used to cover the extra cost.

CDBG meeting tomorrow with budget and finance to ask for approximately \$335,000 to use for rent assistance. Bill Solawetz asked what happens to those funds if not all used. They would determine if the city could use the funds elsewhere. This money would not be available until after March 1st. Letters were sent to landlords and clients to ask them to please hold on as money will become available. When funds are short, is this an opportunity for a fundraising special appeal? Idea proposed by Joe Happe to possibly write a letter of appeal.

Through December federal stimulus package, aid is coming to Iowa to help with rent assistance that is available for a 12-month window of help. The funds will be coming to Polk County and clients will be encouraged to access those funds through Polk County. \$210 million total is coming to Iowa with \$14 million to split between Polk County and Des Moines. Energy assistance is down from last year. The reason for this is we used to take any/every LiHeap application, but because of the huge number of rent assistance applications, anyone not a WDM resident was referred to Impact for help.

Althea thanked everyone for the morale boosters being sent to the WDMHS staff on a weekly basis. A staff member said that she had never worked in a place where she has felt so appreciated for the work that she has done. The entire staff has greatly appreciated everything. A big thanks to Mary Bernabe for organizing all these weekly treats.

For the holidays, donations of money and gift cards to WDMHS was doubled. Community members were very generous and very much wanted to help monetarily if they could.

Thanks to Sue Wright for going to the budget meeting this past Saturday - it went well. The only remarkable thing is that the budget went down because of the ending of the transportation program. Althea took some time to talk to the council about the affordable housing program. People got tax credits to build units and then could rent them to people that were 80% AMI (\$49,000) and below. Landlords rent to people making the higher end of the AMI and so it doesn't help people at the lower end of the AMI. Sue said Althea did a wonderful job of educating the council about this. Rick thanks Sue for going in his place and to both of them for presenting to the council. Affordable housing is a tough issue - it is a true balancing act. Discussion continued of what the state legislature is currently working on regarding affordable housing.

Janet had a question about the goals listed on the 2nd page of the Director's Report and how we as a board can support these. These goals are regarding diversity equity inclusion and what action steps will be taken to further develop diversity on our board, and how to make everything even more accessible. For the marketing program, what are the specific, data-driven goals? Overarching goals are to increase awareness and to increase fundraising.

Dan had a question about the donated winter coats. Westridge Elementary has taken WDMHS up on the offer to take some of the coats. WDMHS is taking some coats to CISS (Central Iowa Shelter and Services) and then the rest will be stored and offered to people in the fall or winter as soon as doors are open again.

Board Discussion time:

How have all of the items for morale boost of staff been received? What items to go going forward and how often? After our last board meeting Althea decided to do weekly 1-1 meetings with each staff member to see how they are doing. Althea has been asking the staff on a scale of 1-10 how they are doing. Everyone responded 8. The staff appreciation boosts came at the right time to really help improve staff morale. Mary proposed to continue through April because at that time maybe weather and Covid numbers would be done. Some thought maybe take a little break and save some for a later time. Keep checking in with Althea where the staff is at and then bring back when needed. First two weeks of March will be the chair massages. Then in early April do something that relates to flowers and gardening. Then once a month or as needed to boost morale. A big thanks to Mary for organizing ALL of this. Sue moves that we do a gardening basket (up to \$20 per staff member) for first two weeks of April. Joe Happe seconded. Motion passes.

There are openings on the WDMHS board. Sean Fredregill resigned on Feb. 15th for personal reasons and Matt McNeece will end after 6 years. Sue will be moving to Des Moines this summer and will no longer be eligible to be on the board. Should we have a nominating committee that could help with the vetting process? Dan proposed that we look into this and will follow up. Board members should be actively recruiting or looking for possible nominations. Board makeup by by-laws has to be 8 men/7 women or 8 women/7 men of the 15-person board. Do we need to fill Sean's spot before July 1st? No - it then becomes harder to track start and end dates. We will fill by July 1st. We will have 3 total positions to fill by July 1st.

Althea thanked Tami for setting in motion how we are looking to fill the board positions and being more diverse. Tami has also shared ideas/ways to offer more senior services. The idea has also been proposed to have a survey group, or to get more feedback from the people being served on a regular basis.

Joe motioned to adjourn, and Matt and Mary seconded.

6:40 - meeting adjourned

Respectfully submitted,

Kasey Tickel