

West Des Moines Human Services Advisory Board

139 6th Street, West Des Moines, IA 50266

February 20, 2024, Minutes

Members Present: Karen Cortez, Bill Crane, Dan Crew, Becky Cunningham, Clarissa D’Souza (via Zoom), Victor Dutchuk, Mike Frandsen, Betsy Happe, DeAnn Howard, Taylor McDonald, Greg Nichols (via Zoom), Eric Tabor, and Council Member Doug Loots.

Members Absent: Will de Blois, Sheila Nelson and Bill Solawetz.

West Des Moines Human Services (WDMHS) Staff Present: Althea Holcomb, Director.

Other West Des Moines City Staff Present: Audrey Kennis, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director.

Citizen Participation: MJ Hoag, citizen of West Des Moines.

Call to Order: Victor Dutchuk, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

Citizen Participation: Mr. Hoag suggested that WDMHS work with the WDM Public Arts Advisory Commission to create a mural on the “imposing wall” on the north side of the WDMHS building. He said sections could be auctioned off to make a “community quilt.” Victor commented that this was a good idea and something similar is done at the Des Moines Arts Festival. Althea said she would look into this suggestion.

Approval of Minutes: Dan moved to approve the January minutes. Seconded by Becky. Approved by the Board.

Director’s Report: Althea presented the Director’s report. She distributed the “Human Services – Program Services Stats” document for calendar year 2023. (It is attached to these minutes.) She noted the following:

- WDMHS served 738 new clients – a 54% increase over CY2022.
- 25% of clients served had a nation of origin outside of the United States.
- 8% of the population in WDM is living at or below the poverty level – a jump from 6% in 2021. Council Member Loots asked how this compares to national figures. Bill C. took to his phone and “Googled” for the answer – 11% nationally. Becky commented that it is “alarming” that the WDM poverty rate was approaching the national rate.
- WDMHS had 15,547 unique client visits – a 26% increase over CY2022.
- Food Pantry client numbers continue to rise.

Althea discussed a study on food insecurity funded by the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines and United Way of Central Iowa and conducted by consultants Scott Raecker and Jordan Vernoy. Althea commented that she does not believe it will move the needle quickly on food insecurity.

Althea updated the Board on the possibility of DMACC offering workforce development training at WDMHS. Early indications from DMACC President Rob Denson about housing the training at WDMHS has dwindled into WDMHS promoting DMACC's training programs. She said these certifications are for jobs paying \$14-\$15/hour (\$31,000/year gross) – “not a whole lot to live on.”

Althea reported on a meeting with WDM city officials concerning the Community Development Block (CDBG) Program. The dollars available this year are uncertain, but historically WDMHS receives \$20,000 for Emergency Financial Assistance and 100 bus passes for income eligible people.

Audrey discussed an arrangement with an ISU Masters Statistics class to study the city's inclusionary practices. The class would quantify and make recommendation to fine tune and improve practices across city departments. Althea requested, if possible, that the class develop a ROI (Return on Investment) for the services provided by WDMHS. Council Member Loots asked to see a draft of the report and the numbers prepared by the students so it could be fine tuned, marketed, and properly positioned with the public. Becky said it was great to use the expertise of ISU to get a baseline.

Althea distributed a document entitled “West Des Moines Human Services Communications Update.” (It is attached to these minutes.). It highlights the good work Kati Ross, Communication Coordinator, has been doing to enhance outreach efforts by WDMHS. Althea said a Board member would be featured in each monthly Donor Update Newsletter. Bill C. was the first to be featured and he joked the piece was “compelling.” Council Member Loots suggested that YouTube videos of volunteer activities be posted - giving a subjective, personal take on services of WDMHS. Althea noted that a video had been posted showing gifts being delivered at the “Adopt a Family” holiday event.

Althea announced that Sheila (who could not be at the meeting) was chairing the annual DMARC auction which has a goal of \$175,000. Sheila asked Board members to contribute to and promote the event. Althea said DMARC provides food to WDMHS and pays Food Bank fees (through the Friends Foundation).

Council Member Loots asked whether WDMHS was “whole” after the fight with the Food Bank of Iowa. Althea responded “yes, mainly.” She clarified that WDMHS buys its milk, as it is not provided consistently by the Food Bank or DMARC. She said WDMHS was “not at odds with the Food Bank.” Eric noted the inefficiency of the Food Rescue route used by WDMHS. He said there needs to be a better coordination by the Food Bank to assign rescue locations closer to food pantries. Althea said 51 tons of food was rescued in CY2023. Council Member Loots commented that the refrigerators were not empty as they had been during the Food Bank controversy. Althea agreed.

Althea said an “unbelievable number of people” are coming to Anytime Food. Council Member Loots asked the cause. Althea said economics and inflation were the main causes. Becky asked whether the decision of Governor Reynolds to reject Summer EBT (federal dollars for summer food assistance for children in low-income families) would increase numbers at Anytime Food. Althea said “probably” and said she was disappointed in the Governor's decision.

Department Redevelopment Committee (“Committee”) Update: Dan provided an update on the Committee’s tour of the Urbandale Food Pantry (“Urbandale”).

- Urbandale serves 2000 households/month in a small space.
- Urbandale’s version of Anytime Food is held inside.
- The relationships it has with stores for food rescue are strong.
- It has set-up strong, enduring relationships with churches for fundraising and other donations.
- It receives large donations from businesses.
- It is asking for \$1 million from the City of Urbandale for a new facility.
- Victor asked if only Urbandale residents could utilize the food pantry. Dan said “no.” Council Member Loots commented that this could change if the city donated the \$1 million.
- It has hours that are different from WDMHS. It has 1 full-time employee and 4 part-time employees. It focuses on food only – no clothing.

DeAnn remarked that DMARC actively approaches churches for money and this affects the ability of WDMHS to raise funds from them. Althea replied that churches do contribute to WDMHS, but at lesser amounts.

Council Member Loots encouraged the Board to look at new ways to conduct business. He said a “critical mass” might be obtained with coalitions with Polk County and Urbandale. This could include the sharing of resources, such as sharing food rescue crews. He said we could have more power with these coalitions and said a model is the 28E agreement between WDM and DSM waterworks. Karen said we would need buy-in from the Food Bank for these types of arrangements.

Council Member Loots asked whether a deadline had been set for recommendations from the Committee. Althea replied “no.” Audrey said the Committee was “testing hypotheses” and taking “small steps.”

WDMHS Friends Foundation Liaison Update. Bill C., the Board’s liaison to the Foundation Board, provided the update:

- The Foundation Board is considering moving the Sunday Supper from Fleming’s Restaurant to another location due to the increased costs at Fleming’s. It is exploring other ways to raise money.
- The Foundation Board is going to reach out to businesses for not only money, but passes, etc. Dan asked whether the Foundation Board has been fostering relationships with corporations and queried about what else should be done in this regard. Bill replied more needs to be done.
- The Foundation Board is reviewing the process it utilizes to decide what to fund. Historically, it has funded unforeseen needs. The Foundation Board doesn’t think it should fund WDMHS employees.
- The Foundation Board is meeting monthly.
- Victor suggested that Bill take Mr. Hoag’s idea of a mural to the Foundation Board. Bill said he would do so.

FY25 Budget Discussion. Althea led off the discussion with these points:

- Althea is presenting the WDHS FY25 budget to the Mayor and City Council on Saturday, February 24. Board members were invited to attend, but could not speak.
- WDMHS is only 1.23% of the city's general fund budget.
- After taking account of Althea's accrued vacation and sick leave payout, the WDMHS budget is down \$50,000. One FTE (Shawna's position) is removed.
- Althea has no control over staff or building costs. She does have control of discretionary spending from the Human Services Trust Fund, which comes from private donations, not tax dollars.

Council Member Loots added these points:

- The budget outlook is better than the "draconian" budget picture painted by the City Manager's office to the Board last fall. A major factor is the construction of new data centers by Microsoft in WDM. The question is how to spend this new revenue. Victor asked for clarification about the money from Microsoft. Council Member Loots replied it was commercial property tax revenue and that Microsoft had not asked for tax abatement.
- He said the impact of the Legislature's potential legislation on the city's budget is being monitored.
- He mentioned several actions being considered to save money: (1) cutting middle managers and increasing the span of control; (2) looking at all retirements and whether positions need to be filled; (3) charging outside groups for the use of city training facilities; (4) running business better in all departments; and (5) revitalizing areas like Valley West Mall instead of costly expansion of the city.

Comments for the Good of the Order. Karen said she had met with Katherine Harrington, President and CEO of the WDM Chamber of Commerce. Karen said WDMHS should share information and leverage a relationship with the Chamber. Althea noted that the Chamber was doing a Sock Drive for WDMHS on February 23.

Council Member Loots said WDM businesses are asking him to help find employees. He asked how WDMHS might play a role. Althea responded that businesses often don't articulate their needs clearly and a process was needed to connect prospective employees to jobs. Karen noted that other organizations hold job fairs and this was something for WDMHS to consider. Victor suggested a job board at WDMHS. DeeAnn said a staff person would need to do these types of activities. Council Member Loots raised the issue of immigration status of potential employees and the need for an attorney with immigration law experience. Taylor noted that the Iowa State Bar Association has immigration resources that might be accessed.

Adjourn. Motion to adjourn made by DeAnn. Seconded by Mike. Meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Eric Tabor



HUMAN SERVICES

PROGRAMS & SERVICES STATS

West Des Moines Human Services has been assisting low-income, older seniors and disabled residents since 1979. We currently provide assistance to more than 1,900 households in West Des Moines and surrounding western suburbs.

In CY 2023 We Served...



1,959
Households

29% increase over CY 2022



738
New Clients

54% increase over CY 2022



15,547
Unique Visits

26% increase over CY 2022

Nation of origin outside
of the United States

25%
of Clients

Population in West Des Moines living
at or below the poverty level

8%
of Population

Food Pantry



1,927
Households

44% increase over CY 2022

Emergency Financial Assistance



334
Households

48% increase over CY 2022

Clothing Closet



616
Households

23% increase over CY 2022

Food Rescue



51

Tons of Food

Energy Assistance



325

Households

ELL Classes



On Average

50

Students

(Speaking 15 Languages)

Holiday Assistance



533

Households

Personal Care Pantry



713

Households

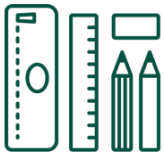
Coat Distribution



501

Individuals

School Supply Distribution



420

Students

Pool Passes



548

Individuals

Birthday Heroes

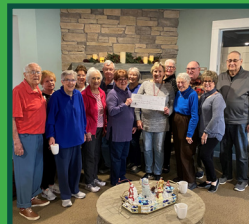


101

Children

11,239
Volunteer Hours

The equivalent of more than 5 full time employees



WEST DES MOINES HUMAN SERVICES

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE



NEWSLETTERS

- Monthly client update
- Monthly donor update
- Need of the Month Reminder
- Subscribe on our website



TEXT NOTIFICATIONS

- Currently 93 clients registered
- Phase II to collect more numbers via web form will begin this Spring.
- New List Created for ELL Students



VIDEO

- Food Rescue Video (collecting footage)
- Client Testimonials for larger HS campaign (currently planning)



VOLUNTEER TRAINING

- Step-by-step Food Pantry training videos
- Providing volunteers with all necessary info to assist as much as possible
- Will help with on-boarding process for new volunteers in the Food Pantry.



FEATURED BOARD MEMBER

- Featured Board Member in each monthly Donor Update Newsletter in 2024/25
- Kati will reach out to ask you to answer a small list of questions
- Let Kati know if you are NOT interested



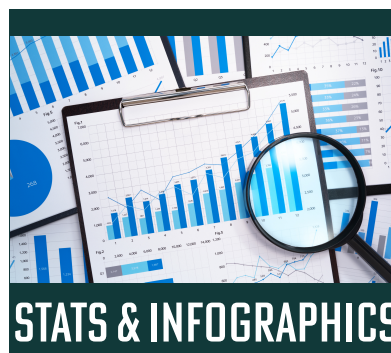
GOOGLE LISTINGS

- Two HS Google Listings may be merged into one listing
- Working with Amplimark to review this process and to review our listings to make sure people can find our listings and services



WEBSITE UPDATES

- Recent updates to home page and Programs & Services page.
- Next Up: Updates to Food Pantry page to provide a more visual format



STATS & INFOGRAPHICS

- New CY 2023 infographic is now on the Programs & Services page.
- In the future other stats and metrics related information can live here.



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