

**West Des Moines Human Services Advisory Board Meeting
July 16, 2024**

Members Present: Karen Cortez, Dan Crew, Greg Nichols, Becky Cunningham, Will deBlois, Clarissa D'Souza, Victor Dutchuk, Jr., Betsy Happe, DeAnn Howard (virtual via computer), Taylor McDonald, Sheila Nelson.

Members Absent: Bill Crane, Eric Tabor.

City Staff present: Director Audrey Kennis.

Citizens Present: MJ Hoag.

The meeting was convened at 5:32 PM by Chairperson Karen Cortez.

Citizen Comments: Mr. Hoag presented thoughts on how WDMHS might utilize available funds/endowments to more fully address needs of citizens with limited resources, including housing, medical, child care, and other issues.

Director Kennis responded by acknowledging the various community citizens' needs which will be a part of a planning process to be conducted in the coming months, however, she noted that these will need to be balanced with increasing demand for existing services and restrictions on use for many of the endowment funds currently available. The Director added that one current way to address some of the needs mentioned was through our emergency assistance funds, which are also seeing increasing demand. She thanked Mr. Hoag for his continued interest, advocacy, and suggestions.

Approval of Minutes from June 2024: Victor moved to approve the minutes, with Clarissa seconding, and the motion was approved on a voice vote.

Directors Report: Director Kennis first referred to her written report contained in the board packet by stating that the financials appeared ok through June, though the client demand figures continual increases are concerning in terms of sustainability of services. She noted that while final figures are still being completed, it appears food and clothing again saw increased demands year over year of 20%+, and emergency assistance an increase more in the range of 60%.

The Director then gave an overview of recent staff planning activities including a June all staff retreat, and recent staff meetings. The former

included discussion of the departmental vision and strategic goals, as well as presentations from city staff from the managers' office. One specific immediate outcome was a decision, based on data, to discontinue the Saturday extended service hours, but retain the Tuesday evening hours. The latter included discussions with Matt Unger the director of DMARC, who indicated they are over \$1M in the red, and the deficit is growing due to increased demands from all their network sites. WDMHS staff is participating in conversations with other network providers about how to help address the fiscal challenges through increased coordination and cooperation, any identified consensus efficiencies, and potentially by more direct engagement in outreach and advocacy work with elected officials.

In response to questions from board members about client data information and use of such data to better understand needs and opportunities to improve services and ensure DEI is embedded in our work, a discussion ensued on the upcoming software changes which were noted in the written report to create long term savings. Director Kennis added that the new salesforce-derived software has the capacity to provide more complete and useful client information, and will be run in parallel with existing systems for a time this summer/fall in transition. Board members cautioned that salesforce systems can be complex and that in-house point person(s) will need to be identified to be leads on making the system work.

The Director then noted that a Prairie Meadows grant of \$20K was approved, that Polk County, and Women in Business grants will also be sought—and that she was the writer of grant applications most recently for the department. Board members commented that could possibly be a function to ask for qualified volunteers to help take up to allow staff to focus on other tasks, and that qualified volunteers might also be able to seek out additional opportunities.

Director Kennis addressed three key departmental priorities to focus on in the coming months. The first was OPERATIONS, which includes reimagining how best to provide services utilizing all our resources in the most effective ways, including considerations of space utilization and ergonomics. The second is PROGRAMMING, consideration of what programs and services going forward are most important, whether ongoing or new areas such as expanded employment assistance. The third is COMMUNICATIONS, which includes community outreach, education, and fund development. Increasing community exposure through “road shows,” and a “community cares campaign” beginning this fall to raise financial resources were cited as efforts in this area.

Board member questions included asking if these priorities will encompass volunteer orientation, training, and recruitment, as well as increasing empowerment of volunteers where possible, and whether communications

outreach efforts will include expectations of board members. The answer to the questions was yes. The Director further stated that empowering “lead volunteers” on certain functions is under consideration, and that it is her hope the board in September will begin a process to be more explicit about expectations of board members, which would include communications outreach functions. An additional question was asked regarding the goal for the community cares campaign, to which the response was \$1M.

Chairs Report: Karen reported that she felt it would be very timely for the board to reimagine their role(s) and operations as discussions move forward on how to be most effective and efficient in our programming and operations in all other areas of the work of the department, staff, and volunteers. In light of the multiple board work of the new Director working with our board, the Friends group, and the Human Rights Commission, for example, she recommended moving to having six board meetings per year rather than the 10 currently scheduled, while still receiving a written directors report each month of the year, as an example. She also stated she thought questions of board expectations, officer tenure, operating committees were worthy of consideration, recommending creating a committee to bring forth suggestions to the board for review.

Victor moved, and Betsy seconded a motion to create a governance subcommittee to consider changes to bylaws and other board operational matters, with an initial report of proposed changes to the Board at their next scheduled meeting in September. Discussion included a consensus among those present that a meeting schedule going forward that would include January, March, May, July, September, November would be appropriate. The point was also raised by Board members that significant changes in bylaws or other operating procedures would probably need City Council ratification, so looping in Councilman Loots, the Mayor, and the City Manager along the way would be appropriate. The motion to create the subcommittee was approved on a voice vote, and Victor, Betsy, and Greg volunteered to be the initial members of the group.

Comments for the Good of the Order: Director Kennis indicated that the September Sunday supper event is undersubscribed on sponsorships, and asked board members to review and sign up on a sheet she circulated to make more calls to community members and organizations to seek sponsors. In response to a Board member question, she agreed to re-send to Board members the sponsorship packet materials.

MJ Hoag inquired about “public posting” of board agendas, materials, and specifically the Directors monthly report, and the Director stated she would review those processes.

Karen reported on a conversation at Althea's retirement event about an outreach activity WDMHS used to do, which was to have a visible presence at the annual city Independence Day parade. The individual who raised the issue said it was fun and also useful, and wondered if it might be reinstated in the future.

Adjournment: With no further business, and without objection, Karen adjourned the meeting at 6:43 PM.

–Submitted by Greg Nichols, Board Secretary