



City of Richmond

900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
www.richmondgov.com/cityclerk

Minutes

Education and Human Services Standing Committee

Thursday, September 3, 2020

2:00 PM

Council Chamber, 2nd Floor – Virtual Meeting

Committee Members and Staff in Attendance

The Honorable Kristen Larson – Chair
The Honorable Stephanie Lynch – Member
The Honorable Kim Gray – Council Member (*early departure*)
The Honorable Ellen Robertson – Council Member
Lawrence Anderson, Council Chief of Staff
Samson Anderson, Council Budget Analyst
Joyce Davis, Council Policy Analyst
Jamie Isley, Assistant City Clerk
M. Janet Palmer, Deputy City Attorney
Candice Reid, City Clerk
RJ Warren, Deputy City Clerk

Absent

The Honorable Chris Hilbert – Vice Chair

Call to Order

Chair Kristen Larson called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m., and presided.

Electronic Meeting Announcement

Assistant City Clerk Jamie Isley, in accordance with Ordinance No. 2020-093, adopted April 9, 2020, as amended by Ordinance No. 2020-183, adopted August 20, 2020, announced the meeting would be held through electronic communication means. Assistant City Clerk Isley stated notice of the meeting was provided to the public through a public information advisory issued on August 27, 2020, and through Legistar on the city website in accordance with usual practice. She also stated members of the public were encouraged to provide comments in writing prior to the meeting and all comments received prior to 10:00 a.m., on Thursday, September 3, 2020, were provided to committee members. Ms. Isley indicated that members of the public who signed up to speak and provide comment would be called to speak at the appropriate time.

Citizen Speaker Guidelines

Upon the Chair's request, Assistant City Clerk Jamie Isley, provided information on the citizen speaker guidelines.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

There were no amendments or corrections to the meeting minutes of Thursday, August 6, 2020, and the committee approved the minutes as presented.

Board Vacancies

There were no board vacancies.

Presentation(s)

There were no presentations.

Paper for Consideration

The following ordinance was considered:

ORD. 2020-170

To change the use of the City-owned real estate known as the Annie Giles Community Resource Center and located at 1400 Oliver Hill Way so that such City-owned real estate will be used as an inclement weather shelter for homeless persons in the city of Richmond when the outdoor or wind chill temperature falls to 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below and when the outdoor temperature rises to 92 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, when there is a forecast of accumulation of one inch or more of rain, snow, sleet or other precipitation within a 24-hour period, or when there is a forecast that includes a warning for a hurricane, tornado or high winds.

Patron: Ms. Gray

Citizens were provided an opportunity to offer comments in writing regarding ORD. 2020-170 prior to the Education and Human Services Standing Committee meeting. All written comments received by the Office of the City Clerk were provided to members of the Council prior to the meeting and are included as an appendix to the September 3, 2020, Education and Human Services Standing Committee meeting minutes.

Councilor Kim Gray introduced ORD. 2020-170, and stated that there is an October 15, 2020, obligation to designate a location for unsheltered populations to seek shelter.

Public Hearing

Support

Bridgette Whitaker Williams, Blessing Warriors RVA, Inc. consultant, spoke in support of ORD. 2020-170, and referenced information from the Office of Emergency Services website regarding emergency shelters. Ms. Williams stated that it is a matter of life or death for a shelter location to be designated as soon as possible.

A copy of the material provided has been filed.

Councilor Kim Gray clarified that the date by which the city must designate a location for unsheltered populations is October 1, 2020. She also expressed concern regarding the fiscal implications of housing unsheltered individuals in hotels.

Rhonda Sneed, Blessings Warriors RVA, Inc. founder, spoke in support of ORD. 2020-170, and expressed frustration at the current hours of operation for the crisis hotline and shelter locations. She further stated that communications with unsheltered persons is lacking, and stressed the importance of designating a shelter location.

Opposition

Lawrence Williams, Eastview Civic League president, spoke in opposition of ORD. 2020-170, and stated that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hotels should be utilized to house individuals. He further stated that the Annie Giles Community Resource Center (AGCRC) should be utilized for the intended purpose of serving the Eastview community.

Chair Kristen Larson stated that a shelter location must be designated by October 1, 2020, and that it is incumbent upon the city to designate a location to house unsheltered individuals in the interim.

Member Stephanie Lynch expressed support for the non-congregate model of housing unsheltered individuals, to include wraparound and case management services. She further stated that the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care is working to improve the intake system and accommodate unsheltered individuals after hours. Member Lynch noted that ORD. 2020-170, would not be implementable due to the expiration date on the use of the AGCRC for homelessness services outlined in ORD. 2019-245. She requested city administration create a short and long term plan and report back to the Council within the next two weeks.

Councilor Ellen Robertson requested a member of city administration to inform the committee on current plans regarding homelessness services and the city's response plan regarding emergency shelters.

Chair Larson requested city administration differentiate between homeless shelters and emergency shelters.

Sharon Ebert, deputy chief administrative officer for Economic Development, informed the committee that there are designated locations within the emergency management plan for the evacuation of individuals if the city were in a state of emergency due to inclement weather. She further explained that emergency shelters differ from homeless shelters, and that the Homelessness Strategic Plan 2020-2030 does not support the non-congregate cold weather overflow shelter model as it is not in line with best practice. She stated that city administration is working to update zoning legislation to allow for flexibility in sheltering individuals and supporting group home locations within the city. Ms. Ebert informed the committee that city administration does not recommend the congregate cold weather overflow shelter model due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. She explained that the city is utilizing funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Community Development Block Grant program and the Emergency Solutions Grants program to house unsheltered individuals in hotels, with the goal of potentially purchasing a hotel for long-term use.

Councilor Kim Gray inquired about where unsheltered persons may receive housing in the interim and during the winter.

Ms. Ebert stated that due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the safest method of housing individuals is within hotels and providing wraparound services to individuals.

Reginald Gordon, deputy chief administrative officer for Human Services, explained the success of the non-congregate model within the city, and stated that persons seeking shelter in the winter will be housed within hotels. Mr. Gordon clarified that emergency shelters are distinct from homelessness services.

Councilor Ellen Robertson discussed the importance of a living wage to housing security and highlighted the various interconnecting systems with issues that may be rectified by the continuum of care. She also stated that homelessness services are needed within all nine Council districts and voiced support for the Homelessness Strategic Plan 2020-2030 and the upcoming housing plan.

Member Lynch requested the city website be updated with the crisis central intake hotline number, information regarding the service providers that are operating city shelters and the city housing plan once complete.

Chair Larson requested clear communication be provided to unsheltered individuals regarding the status of the cold weather overflow shelter and that it be shared prior to October 1, 2020. She also recommended that the city determine the best course of action to ensure concrete shelter plans for the winter months, before the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding is depleted.

Councilor Kim Gray asked about the city's plans to sustain the non-congregate hotel model, and provide transportation to the shelter locations once the CARES Act funding is depleted. She inquired about methods to ensure that unsheltered individuals with no access to cell-phones or internet are adequately informed about shelter updates.

Chair Larson requested city administration attend the Council Informal meeting to be held on September 14, 2020, to provide an update regarding shelter plans to include plan structure, cost estimates, transportation, and strategies to provide information to unsheltered individuals. She also expressed the importance of addressing the immediate shelter issue and recommended returning to the year round shelter issue subsequently.

Member Stephanie Lynch agreed with continuing ORD. 2020-170, pending additional information from city administration regarding shelter plans.

There were no further comments or discussions and **Member Stephanie Lynch moved to continue ORD. 2020-170 to the October 1, 2020, Education and Human Services Standing Committee meeting, which was seconded and unanimously approved.**

Discussion Items

Richmond Public Schools (RPS) Update

RPS Superintendent Jason Kamras provided updated information to the committee regarding RPS reopening plans for the 2020-2021 school year.

Chair Kristen Larson inquired about RPS technology for the upcoming school year.

Superintendent Kamras informed the committee that RPS is awaiting 10,000 Chromebook laptops which were ordered in June but were delayed due to ongoing trade issues between the United States and China. Superintendent Kamras stated that the Chromebook laptops are expected to arrive in September 2020, and in the interim, several thousand android tablets have been purchased to allow students to participate in classes.

Member Stephanie Lynch inquired about high-risk students and plans for ensuring their success in virtual schooling.

Superintendent Kamras informed the committee that students who have not responded to communication are placed on a list for follow up by phone. He further stated that if a student cannot be reached with follow up communications, a family liaison will visit student residences to connect students and families to needed resources. Superintendent Kamras explained that during the initial weeks of school, teachers will focus on building relationships with students and that grades, assignments, tests, and teacher evaluations will follow the initial rapport building period. Superintendent Kamras advised the committee to connect parents with their children's school or with him directly so that the information may be forwarded to the correct source.

Councilor Kim Gray inquired about attempts to obtain gently used refurbished computers or computer donations from the business community in the interim. She also inquired about educational programs that are operated using a cloud system, and asked for information regarding plans for students with no access to technology.

Superintendent Kamras stated that the student computers require very particular specifications to be ready for use and that preparing the devices takes a considerable amount of time. Superintendent Kamras

informed the committee that less than five percent of students do not have a device, and that by the upcoming Tuesday, the percentage will be close to zero.

Councilor Ellen Robertson requested Superintendent Kamras, the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) and members of the Council to meet virtually to develop resources to ensure access to the internet and to address school participation from students who reside within the public housing community and other neighborhoods within the city.

Superintendent Kamras informed the committee of several issues regarding internet availability within public housing communities and other neighborhoods throughout the city. He also suggested Comcast and Verizon Wireless representatives attend the proposed meeting to assist in ensuring internet accessibility to communities in need.

Chair Larson requested city administration representatives be present at the proposed virtual meeting.

Member Stephanie Lynch expressed concern for communities in the 5th District which have experienced connectivity issues, and stated that there have been communications between RRHA and Verizon Wireless regarding internet connectivity in the city.

Superintendent Kamras expressed hope for additional federal funding, and stated that a group of superintendents are currently advocating for additional federal allocations.

Chair Larson requested RPS provide a legislative update during the October 1, 2020, Education and Human Services Standing Committee meeting.

Councilor Kim Gray left the meeting 3:30 p.m.

Richmond Public Schools (RPS) Child Care/Day Care Initiative

Eva Colen, Office of the Mayor senior policy analyst, provided an overview of plans for the RPS child care and day care initiative. She informed the committee that on August 31, 2020, five RPS facilities were approved by the Richmond School Board for emergency childcare use. Ms. Colen also stated that the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA), as a confirmed partner, will be providing child care services to children with special needs in addition to clinical services that have been regularly provided to students in past years.

Chair Kristen Larson inquired about transportation to the RBHA location. She also asked whether the RBHA service would be educational or considered an out of school time service.

Ms. Colen stated that six vans will be acquired to transport RPS student's city wide, and that physical distancing guidelines will be observed when transporting students. Ms. Colen explained that the RBHA service is considered clinical, and that hours will be extended from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on school days.

Member Stephanie Lynch cautioned that RBHA will need to ensure approval for extended clinical hours and encouraged city administration to expand outside of RBHA for day care and child care services.

Ms. Colen informed the committee that although there have been hindrances to confirming other providers, city administration is communicating with the YMCA regarding the student success centers, and past after school programming providers to finalize plans with partners and the Office of the City Attorney. She also stated that city administration is waiting for confirmation from RPS regarding facility readiness, and that the goal for the start of child care services is September 14, 2020.

Member Lynch expressed concern that three million dollars in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding would not ensure enough subsidies to provide zero dollar services for the majority of families. Member Lynch asked if the child care services are available to all families.

Ms. Colen stated that two-thirds of the population of 500 students per acquired school will attend at no cost, and that the remaining student openings will pay a rate of less than fifty dollars per week. She also stated that the second semester of school could cause a gap in funding if CARES Act funding is not readily available. Ms. Colen informed the committee that initially, essential personnel were provided child care services, and that for the upcoming school year, child care services will be provided to all families. She stated city administration hopes to begin registrations by the end of the day and that families will receive services starting the second week of school.

Member Lynch expressed concern that the five RPS facilities will not be sufficient to serve the population of families who will utilize city child care services. She also inquired about the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities' pop up camps.

Ms. Colen informed the committee that the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities, informed city administration that a third-party partner is necessary to adequately staff the pop-up camps and that she would follow up regarding the status of the camps.

Chair Larson inquired about how the payment will be handled regarding the RBHA services. She also stated that schools should facilitate and manage services typically received at school.

Ms. Colen informed the committee that she would follow up regarding the payment process for RBHA services. Ms. Colen also stated that RBHA is providing services to students whom are already receiving services from RBHA. She further stated that RBHA is working on routes to screen students as the COVID-19 pandemic does not allow for screening to occur as it has in the past.

Staff Report

Joyce Davis, Council policy analyst, provided the committee with the September staff report.

A copy of the report has been filed.

Member Stephanie Lynch expressed concern and requested additional information regarding reports of a COVID-19 outbreak within the Richmond City Justice Center and a recent incident at a protest outside of the Richmond City Justice Center building.

Chair Kristen Larson stated that she would contact President Cynthia Newbille to receive additional information regarding reports of COVID-19 infections and the recent protest incident that occurred at the Richmond City Justice Center, at a future meeting of the Council prior to the next committee meeting.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:59 p.m.

From: [Karen O'Brien](#)
To: [City Clerk's Office](#)
Subject: Ordinance 2020-170
Date: Thursday, September 3, 2020 8:24:31 AM

CAUTION: This message is from an external sender - Do not open attachments or click links unless you recognize the sender's address and know the content is safe.

Karen O'Brien
CARITAS

As one of the original and longest-running emergency shelter providers in Richmond, we have learned through experience, mistakes, and trial and error that collaborative work serves our clients best. The Greater Richmond Continuum of Care (GRCoC) has worked diligently to create a coordinated system that prioritizes the most vulnerable and maximizes the use of our limited resources. We know that the housing first approach is a path to lasting success, a solution rather than a temporary bandaid.

It is imperative that shelter services offered in our region be coordinated and collaborative. Without this overarching priority, we risk squandering resources and undermining the successes that the GRCoC partners have made in reducing homelessness.

I respectfully ask you to align this inclement weather shelter with the activities of our coordinated entry system to include the other shelters, outreach, rapid rehousing, etc. We have established proven methods of working together, most recently tested by our response to the COVID pandemic, and these strategies can inform and benefit the initiatives put forth in the city. All partners in this Continuum work commit via an MOU stating their awareness of our Coordinated Entry policies and procedures and the housing first mindset we have adopted.

Aligning and collaborating serve our community best. Don't let his ordinance create a stand-alone entity that is structurally and contractually siloed.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen O'Brien

Stay safe. Be well. Practice Kindness.

Karen O'Brien
Chief Operating Officer

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[d] [REDACTED]
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United by our compassion, we help our most vulnerable neighbors break the cycles of homelessness and addiction to reclaim their dignity.

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From: [Kelly King Horne](#)
To: [City Clerk's Office](#)
Subject: Ordinance 2020-170 comments
Date: Thursday, September 3, 2020 9:49:56 AM

CAUTION: This message is from an external sender - Do not open attachments or click links unless you recognize the sender's address and know the content is safe.

Dear Ms. Reid,

As the designated Collaborative Applicant*, Homeward has been supportive of the City of Richmond's strategic planning efforts to address homelessness and affordable housing. Emergency shelter is a key component of our community response to the crisis of homelessness. Emergency Shelter is defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 24 C.F.R. § 576.2 (2012) as any facility, the primary purpose of which is to provide a temporary shelter people experiencing homelessness in general or for specific populations of the homeless, and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements. Emergency Shelters provide emergency housing to address an individual's or family's immediate housing crisis. Assistance is offered without preconditions (such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety) and with few to no barriers. The resources and services provided are typically tailored to the unique needs of the individual or family.

Here is a listing of current homeless services and resources:

<http://www.homewardva.org/about/homeward/systems-coordination>.

Thank you,
Kelly King Horne
Homeward

*= Defined here:

http://endhomelessnessrva.org/images/MemberResources/CoCStructure/Collaborative_Applicant.pdf

Kelly King Horne
Executive Director
Homeward