

Economic Opportunities Commission Meeting
Wednesday February 21, 2018
2525 Mount Vernon Ave
Alexandria VA 22301

In Attendance

Canek Aguirre
Gila Harris
June Shih
Kelly Stone
LaDonna Sanders
LaVon Curtis
Maani Stewart
Geoff Caldwell
Salina Green
Greg Parks
Sal Biberaj
Thomas Gibson
Hope Nelson
Racquel Williams-Jones
Jessica Lurz
Lesa Gilbert

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:15pm.

Minutes

Raquel motioned to approve the January minutes. Ladonna seconded. The minutes were approved on a unanimous voice vote.

Membership

Jessica provided an update on membership. We have four open positions, two of which are nominees from political officials (Mayor Silberberg and State Senator Adam Ebbin). The other two are for category II, representing low-income individuals. Jessica reached out to Community Lodgings and Canek has reached out to the ARHA community resident board.

By Laws

Last month the EOC voted to draft proposed changes to the by-laws, in article V, paragraph 3 for consideration this month. This is to clarify that a process selection for category II board members, who represent low-income individuals.

Salina motioned to approve all proposed amendments. Sal seconded. With 11 members present, passed on a unanimous voice vote.

Second Quarter CSBG Report

CSBG spending is about on track, with 55% spent against the budget at the end of quarter two. The demographic information this quarter was surprisingly similar to last quarter.

Some big news is that an employment navigator was hired full time with the city. This was a need we had identified.

Jessica added the Department been collecting data on zip codes on where clients are living to see if we can target our services more out in the community. They used that to create a heat map and overlaid it with a map showing apartment complexes to see if there was a natural place to move services to serve more of the communities. The hope is that making it easier to access services means that clients will come to the city sooner and before they are too far behind on payments.

Raquel pointed out that with job training, the City needs to be making sure that the support provided will lead to a reasonable career pathway that can result in a decent livelihood.

Going forward, data reflecting changes from quarter to quarter on the number of people served was requested. Duplication is hard to separate out, but Jessica can get us a number there as well.

EOC members asked a question about the budget line for dues and fees. That is the Department's membership in VCAP. Staff feels this is a good value.

TANF revenue formulas are being reviewed at the State level and we have an opportunity to advocate for additional money. This will be discussed more when we discuss the census later in the agenda.

There was a short discussion of the high number of black or African American and high number of single individuals.

Also, one of the City's caseworkers just retired after 37 years of service. The EOC expressed appreciation for their many years of service.

Sal motioned the EOC accept the 2nd quarter CSBG report. Hope seconded. The motion carried on a unanimous voice vote.

Resolution 830/Route 1 Charrette update

Salina provided an update on the two most recent Resolution 830 meetings (meetings two and three in the process). The second meeting focused on finance. It was an incredible amount of material, and since the material was not provided ahead of time, it was difficult to absorb the material and provide comments at the meeting.

The most recent meeting focused on what "substantially equivalent" means in this context. Discussions were held in small groups about this group. Salina's group discussed amenities, square footage, accommodating all community members, and a discussion of quality of life. Right now the period of affordability is 20 years, and discussion on if this should change.

The next meeting (March 14, 6:30 pm) is supposed to focus on recommendations, but Salina expressed concern about how much information was presented in each meeting, not having enough time to absorb it and that the timing that they were pushing though. This concern was echoed by others in the EOC who have participated in parts the process.

Salina and June will draft a letter to the Council expressing these concerns which we will consider at the March meeting. Proposing some alternatives might be helpful.

On Route 1 Charrette, we have seen the community meeting and the pop-ups getting some interest. The biggest concern from residents is that they do not want to be displaced. The City is trying to get ahead of this issue, but residents are still very concerned. The affordability of many of these units expires in 2019. Residents like this housing because they are often townhome styled which blends in with the rest of the community. There are three landlords, two private organizations who own apartments and the Church, who are important in this conversation.

Meal Tax Increase

Please see the handouts, including the “Housing Affordability – A Community Call to Action” and the budget memo.

This would be an increase of 1% tax on meals that would go to a dedicated affordable housing fund. This is particularly important for developing affordable housing for community members who need housing at the 40%-30% or lower. There is interest in this from developers, who need to prove they can make the projects financing work, when seeking other funding.

There has been some pushback, including from restaurant owners and community members who are concerned about the impact on restaurants. The EOC discussed however that restaurant employees stand to benefit, as they frankly cannot afford to live here now on their salaries. Additionally, members did not think that such a small increase in tax – which most people don’t even pay attention to on the bill – would change the behavior patterns for eating out. This also captures tax revenue from those who work or vacation in Alexandria, using services, but don’t live here.

The EOC considered possible actions to support the proposal, including sending a letter in support of the tax. There was a question about timing and when would be a good time to send a letter. Michelle Krockner, who has spoken to this group before, is running the advocacy on this. We will seek her guidance on timing. Kelly will draft a letter before the March meeting to be prepared for the best time to weigh in.

Budget

The City Manager presented the budget last night to the City Council. There are also a public sessions, one of which is scheduled for tomorrow.

DCHS, under the “Healthy and Thriving” section, received a 0.6% reduction, which is a much lower reduction than initially feared. The various commission chairs are meeting next week and might be coordinating a letter to the City Council. Please review the budget when you have an opportunity.

Census Meeting

After the last meeting, the Mayor’s office asked an EOC member to attend a meeting on the census. Fortunately, Geoff was able to represent us. Several organizations, the mayor and other city officials attended. The goal of this effort was to develop a process support a fair and equal count from the census. In addition to determining representation in the House and informing district lines, the census dictates the availability or amount of different grants for the city. It is in the City’s interest to ensure

everyone is counted. There are concerns that the budget for the census will be low, they won't have enough staff (significantly less staff will be assigned to our area than last time), but we need to make sure that we get a good the count for the census. The Director of Planning and Zoning with the City is setting up a committee to try to make sure the city gets the needed responses. The EOC may be asked to help.

Community Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment is ready to go and Jessica has printed copies for everyone. The hope is that we start handing out this month. We are looking to set up different sites where we go and have surveys to hand out.

Some of the venues:

- Community Lodgings
- ALIVE February 24th and March 31st
- Brent Place
- Compania registration
- Church of the Resurrection and Cora Kelly food distribution around 9am.

A sign-up sheet is being passed around, please sign up to different time slots and add any ideas that you have. We're also looking to push it out to different listserves. The links to the different surveys are also on the website. .

Please make sure that the complete surveys are returned to Jessica. Online responses are easier for us to use if its possible. The flyer will be edited to allow for easier access to the survey the flyer is distributed as a hard copy.

Announcements

The Women's Commission holding a Patsy Ticer Tribute this year. The proceeds will go to causes she cared about. A flyer is being circulated with the details.

February 28th, there will be a conference on Opioid Treatment which will feature Dr. Haering, our guest speaker next month.

Tuesday March 6th at 7pm there is a housing issue group that will be meeting at the Baptist Church. Jessica will circulate a flyer.

Adjournment

Raquel moved the meeting be adjourned. Geoff seconded. The Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:55pm.