

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
October 16th, 2023

Present: Abby Horrell (Chair), Matthew Walsh (Vice-Chair), Allison Greenleaf, Rachel Dienna, Ann O’Hanlon, Samantha Pedrosa, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff), Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff)

Absent: Shawna Gary, Paul Almeida, Stephanie Kanwit

Call to Order/Welcome:

The meeting was called to order by Abby Horrell (Chair) at 7:06 p.m. and SSAB members were welcomed to the October meeting.

Approval of minutes: The minutes from September 18th, 2023, were approved by present SSAB members with corrections.

DCHS updates:

- Virginia will launch its own health insurance marketplace platform on November 1st, 2023.
 - This will create a shift from using the federal website and reduce contracting costs used for Virginians to apply for health insurance.
 - Eligibility determination for Virginia’s Insurance Marketplace include being a Virginia resident, U.S. citizen or lawfully present immigrant, be uninsured and not have an affordable employer-based option.
 - This will provide an additional opportunity for people who have lost Medicaid coverage to find a new insurance plan.
- The emergency shelter has received a proposal for RFP and the new vendor will be Carpenter Shelter.
 - The RFP included use of the kitchen facilities as the previous shelter did not include access.
 - It will be used for community involvement, through Carpenter Shelter’s volunteer-based kitchen program.
- Alexandria Community Shelter will remain as the Winter Shelter.

Holiday Sharing programs and activities:

- The Fund for Alexandria’s Child Holiday Sharing program has started.
 - The program is for Alexandria low-income families, children in foster care, seniors, and residents with disabilities, for receiving gifts in the community.
- There is a family intake process, and that intake determines eligibility.
 - Usually, if the family receives any benefits (SNAP or Medicaid), they are automatically signed up for holiday share.
 - Seven hundred families have signed up thus far.

- The intake is currently scheduled on Saturday mornings and Sunday evenings to make it as convenient as possible for families to attend.
- The Fund for Alexandria's Child is currently asking for volunteers to assist with the intake process.
 - SSAB members are not required to volunteer.
 - There will be other opportunities for SSAB members to sign up to volunteer to pick up and drop off gifts to residents if members desire to participate.
- Last year, Abby Horrell (Chair) purchased gift cards with money donated by SSAB members.
 - If SSAB decides to collect money and purchase gift cards this year, Matthew Walsh (Vice-Chair) will purchase the gift cards.
- Historically, The Fund for Alexandria's Child communicates what gaps exist and SSAB members can volunteer in the identified areas.
 - Christine Levine, Coordinator of Community Resources, will be able to provide more information on the program, an update on how the program is, and where opportunities exist for SSAB members to participate in the program.

Challenge with obtaining information about the program:

- Rachel Dienna will forward an email from received from the Fund for Alexandria's Child listserv so that SSAB members can continue to spread the word to family and friends.
- Lesa Gilbert (DCHS staff) will get more information about intake questions and family wish list process from Christine Levine to disseminate to the rest of SSAB board members.
- The City's website has been difficult to navigate in finding information.
 - SSAB members will identify the challenges of the City's website and share ideas/challenges/needs during the next meeting.

Legislative Proposals: Deadline extended for filing.

- Abby Horrell (Chair) submitted the SSAB legislative proposal.
 - The Google Doc used to collect proposals did not require a detailed submission and after it was submitted, Abby Horrell (Chair) received a PDF of the submission.
 - The proposal included the principals and matched with the City Council's priorities.
 - It highlighted Affordable Housing and City Employee Compensation.
 - It mentioned the City Council members that have participated in previous conversations with SSAB members around these priorities.
 - Lastly, it noted the need for publicly available compensation studies and discussed not being able to reach city staff.
- After continued talks with Sarah Taylor, Office of Communications & Public Information, Abby Horrell (Chair) realized there was still time to submit legislative proposals.

Discussion of addition to legislative package submission

- The Commissioner of State of Virginia's Department of Social Services has requested budget items to develop a new case management system.
 - The current system that childcare, child welfare services, and benefits teams use at times utilizes 45 screens for aspects of case management.
 - SNAP cases are reviewed every three months, and each person has about nine hundred cases.
 - Additionally, new cases equate to about four hundred applications a month.
 - Staff are heavily burdened with the administrative tasks because of the lack of systems that communicate with each other.
 - A new system additionally offers the opportunity to address staff turnover.
- Lesa Gilbert (DCHS) will send information that includes PowerPoint regarding the case management system to add to the legislative package to Samantha Pedrosa.
 - Abby Horrell (Chair) will send the link to update the legislative package to Samantha Pedrosa.
 - Additionally, Samantha Pedrosa will resubmit the legislative proposal to include the support of the specific asks from the other boards.

Advocacy addition:

- Childcare services will be lost due to income requirements changing and there will be advocacy at the state level.
 - SSAB members have the opportunity to advocate against this in the legislation package.
 - Samantha Pedrosa will forward information to SSAB members from the National League of Cities to provide information grants to help with need.

Zoning for Housing/Housing for All Update and Discussion

- No feedback or updates from the commission after multiple requests.
- SSAB will wait to see if there are any updates and assess how to engage if so.

Suggestions:

- SSAB members can sign on to other well-versed committees to show support for Affordable Housing.
 - For example, the Economic Opportunities Commission does an extensive amount of work on Affordable Housing.
- SSAB members will continue to discuss what ideas or areas they are interested in relation to affordable housing.
 - Once areas or ideas have been identified, outreach can be done to the different chairs of the boards to learn more about their efforts, and how SSAB can be of support.

Review of upcoming meeting dates

- Monday, November 27, in person
- Monday, December 18 tentatively planning for Zoom meeting.
- Monday, January 22 as accommodation for Martin Luther King Jr's holiday.
- Monday, February 26 as accommodation for the President's Day holiday.

Meeting adjourned at 7:52 p.m.