Mill Levy Advisory Council Meeting Minutes  
5.14.2020 5-6:45PM

Present:  
J.J. Tomash (Co-chairperson)  
Melissa Emery (RMHS delegate)  
Courtney Foss  
Tim Lomas  
Kendall Rames  
King Viteron  
Lauren Weinstock

Guests:  
Jay Morein, DHS  
Jules Crawford, DHS  
Justin Sykes, DHS  
Tami Tapia, DHS  
Stacy Portillo, DHS  
Staci Shumate, DHS  
Jordan Humphreys, DHS  
Michael Kilgore, Financial Health Institute  
Rafael Hoffman, Laradon  
Laura Tateyama, DHS

Absent:  
Brittany Murdock  
Linda Brooks (Council advocate)

Staff:  
Crystal Porter  
Amy Packer  
Ginger Vigil

The Council meeting was called to order at 5:00pm by Co-chairperson J.J. Tomash via Microsoft Teams, a virtual online meetings platform.

Introductions & Minutes Review

Council members and Denver Human Services (DHS) employees staffing the meeting briefly introduced themselves. Crystal Porter announced other guests in attendance by reviewing participants logged into the meeting and called for anyone else to introduce themselves. No other introductions were made.

J.J. Tomash reviewed ground rules for new virtual meeting functions, including:

- Council members should keep their video on;
- Council members should announce themselves prior to speaking and keep their audio on mute unless speaking;
- Chairs will try to acknowledge Council members to speak, especially where there is overlap;
- Suggested all Council members review the summary for Roberts Rules of Order.

The Council reviewed minutes from the previous meeting held on 11-14-2019. No changes were suggested. J.J. Tomash initiated a vote to approve the November meeting minutes and the vote passed 5-0-1.
Proposed Bylaws Updates

J.J. Tomash asked if there were questions regarding proposed changes to the bylaws. Lauren Weinstock expressed concern over discontinuation of subcommittees. DHS explained that in the past year subcommittees had been used for deeper dives into high priority needs topics. Due to potential resignations of Council members there was no ability to continue those while following open meetings requirements and honoring the transparency of work done by the Council. DHS intends to work with the Council on other meeting options that support open meetings requirements and Council work.

With no other questions voiced, the Council adopted the proposed bylaws updates with a passing vote of 5-1-0.

Co-Chairs and CAC Member vote

J.J. Tomash asked for candidates interested in serving as co-chairpersons for the Advisory Council in 2020. After no initial candidates emerged, J.J. Tomash volunteered to serve in 2020 and called for a second candidate. Courtney Foss volunteered to serve as a co-chairperson in 2020. With only two candidates, the blind vote used for officers was deemed unnecessary. J.J. Tomash initiated a vote to confirm J.J. Tomash and Courtney Foss as Council co-chairs in 2020. This motion was seconded by Tim Lomas and the vote passed 6-0-0.

Tim Lomas served as the CAC Member in 2019 and explained the role to the Council. J.J. Tomash asked whether there were any volunteers for the 2020 CAC Member role. Lauren Weinstock volunteered, and no other Council members expressed interest in serving, meaning no blind vote was needed. J.J. Tomash initiated a vote to confirm Lauren Weinstock as the CAC Member. Tim Lomas seconded. The vote passed 6-0-0.

Information Sharing & DHS Updates

Crystal Porter provided a brief overview of 2019 Mill Levy Program activities, including meetings held, number of guests in attendance, and new contracts negotiated in 2019.

Following this overview of 2019 activities, DHS presented on a model to guide services to be developed and contracted with DHS uncommitted funds. The model establishes five (5) program pillars to serve as guiding categories of needs/services as the program develops. Pillars include: Gaps in essential services, Housing, Inclusion, Mental Health, and Technology. DHS explained the pillars were largely identified through what had been learned over the past couple of years through various types of engagement with stakeholders, including the 2018 Needs Assessment, Council feedback and recommendations, public comments, as well as other stakeholder conversations and environmental needs. DHS provided transitions as an example of an important need or service area focus which the Council prioritized in 2019 that does not get officially captured in the program pillars. DHS explained that work related to Transitions might happen within the boundaries of one of the five pillars, particularly Gaps, and did not require its own representation to be incorporated into the DHS Mill Levy Program. The arrows across that run across the bottom of all five program pillars identify other needs...
resulting from the 2018 Needs Assessment and 2019 Council recommendations, which would thread throughout the program and each service area. At the foundation of the model is the end goal, which would be access to services and community life. Crystal Porter expressed excitement about this approach and the model’s ability to help the Council and DHS create a flexible network of support and services for individuals with I/DD and their families.

Lauren Weinstock provided feedback specifically about transitions, enquiring whether a position paper with an overall philosophy including suggestions and examples of children transitioning into adult services without the emotional or social skills needed for success could be created. She also liked the idea of a speaker’s bureau to speak on topics in different arenas and making it apart of or in promotion of a transitions position paper. DHS suggested revisiting the concept further in future, so the Council can get a better idea of what the position paper might do, who would be responsible for creating it, and the outcome of it’s creation. Lauren Weinstock elaborated that she doesn’t know whether something like the concept of transitions can be solved by throwing money at it and any work done will likely require building awareness.

Courtney Foss remarked on how helpful the 2018 Needs Assessment seemed to be to the Council and DHS, and asked how often needs would be reassessed. DHS explained future reassessments are on the table and that DHS wants to allow enough time to pass to find issues or successes with current programs and see how needs may shift over time.

King Viteron asked whether transportation was mentioned in the needs assessment and, if it was, where it ranked. DHS said that transportation had been captured in the needs assessment, and that it is a service that can be foundational and impact access to other services. After the meeting, DHS will send relevant points from the published report to Council members for review.

DHS gave updates for ongoing contracts resulting from recommendations and work in 2019:

- CTAT, LLC, Easterseals Colorado, and Autism Community Store contracts were announced on the DHS Website. DHS provided a preview into services that happened early in 2020.
- In person activities on hold since March, phase 2 will be to adjust to meet COVID-19 changes.
- DHS currently estimates $15.3M in unspent funds from prior years.

Due to time constraints, DHS gave a very brief introduction to 2020 priorities and suggested the Council consider what they want to prioritize. DHS currently has several priorities underway, including:

- Housing stabilization assistance due to the economic crisis resulting from COVID-19
- A recent Request for Applications (RFA) for creative mini projects to adapt services and meet needs due to COVID-19. The projects still have an inclusion focus. DHS informed the Council that applications for the current RFA had been received and the selection process was ongoing.
- Beginning the bidding process to find a community partner to become START certified.

Lauren Weinstock asked whether the $6M budget estimated for the Center for START Services project has already been deducted from the $15M unspent funds projection. DHS clarified that the unspent
funds projection does not include the work estimated for the START model yet, and that even though DHS would be aware of the overall commitment of the funds, the amount would be recorded year-to-year, meaning DHS would commit $2M per year over 3 years.

DHS also noted that RMHS had completed their 2019 annual written report related to mill levy projects and services under contract. The annual report presentation given to City Council’s Safety, Housing, Education, & Homelessness Committee was postponed from 4/22/2020 to an indefinite date. The written report is available online for those who want to review it.

Discussion

J.J. Tomash opened the floor for discussion. Lauren Weinstock proposed an idea in response to COVID-19 stay/safer at home orders. She observed her son had begun participating in Zoom meet ups and other remote activities, but that some people could not participate fully because they did not have the technology needed. She asked whether there could be some sort of tablet distribution and instruction on how to use it. DHS mentioned RMHS currently fills some needs or requests for devices through the mill levy’s Client Assistance program, which is based on individualized requests.

Tim Lomas acknowledged technology needs is a great question and if RHMS can provide that is great. One of the things he said he’s been concerned about is what happens when RMHS does not have enough funding to meet the needs, related to the independent appeals process. Concern if they have a legitimate need and the funds are not available and the item is needed, what process could review the issue and decide they should be eligible for funding and can fund independent of the contractor. His question was whether Crystal Porter is the person to contact when all methods of trying to get a resolution have failed, whether she could act on their behalf, and whether this information is available on the RMHS website.

DHS clarified that Crystal Porter as the DHS Program Manager is the person that would be the DHS point of contact for any of the mill levy programs if someone ultimately was not getting what they needed. This presumes that they’ve completed the contractor’s grievance process, which is required by the mill levy program for all of the current contractors. DHS explained most grievance processes have at least one, if not several, steps to elevate a grievance or complaint within an organization, independent of the person who may have made the initial decision related to the grievance. DHS serves on the other side of the process, where if they’ve gone through the contractor grievance process and their needs are not being met or are not being heard, Crystal Porter could be contacted. Her course of action would be to go back to the contractor to address the issue raised through the terms and authority DHS has defined in the agreement. DHS reiterated the goal is always to get people what they need and appreciated the point Tim Lomas raised about what happens when the scope of the agreement cannot meet all the needs of individuals in the community. DHS suggested part of the work the Council does to help DHS evaluate needs is to determine where needs may be so great that DHS should investigate addressing the need on a larger scale than simply through an individualized request process. To use Lauren Weinstock’s idea about meeting technology needs, whether DHS might
implement a larger program— for example, the brief discussion of SmartHome technology at the last Council meeting and the areas where individuals may need support, from acquiring devices to installing them, maintaining them, troubleshooting issues that arise, and learning how to use them in their daily lives. Would it be a good use of mill levy funds to tackle technology in this larger, more systematic way with DHS uncommitted funds?

Tim Lomas reiterated that he recommends the information on when and why to contact Crystal Porter should be put on contractor websites so all who visit know what they can do when they feel they haven’t been treated in an equitable way after completing the grievance process. He believes it should be clear to individuals that there is an ultimate authority they can appeal to when they cannot receive what they need with the agency they originally requested support from. He asked DHS to work with contractors to make this information available publicly. DHS agreed to investigate and see what options could work. Amy Packer further clarified that the DHS Program Manager does not have access to the funds separately per the permitted uses detailed in the ordinance which governs the I/DD mill levy funds. She reiterated the Program Manager role was to return to the contractor and hold them to the terms set in the contract. DHS does not directly expend funds due to the ordinance. Tim Lomas requested further discussion happen in future.

Lauren Weinstock asked whether Denver residents receiving services from other Community Centered Boards (CCBs) have access to mill levy funds, and whether those case managers are familiar with mill levy funds and offer use of them. DHS shared that there are a smaller number of people in Denver served by other CCBs in the Denver Metro area, and that they can apply for and access mill levy funds with RMHS and other partners. Melissa Emery added that mill levy funding is something the metro area CCBs are well versed in and that each CCB has different ways of managing the funds. She reported RMHS has one case manager dedicated to connecting those outside of RMHS to mill levy funds. CCBs know they can send requests on behalf of their clients to that person and RMHS would commence typical review processes and get the item or service requested back out to that person through her.

Conversation circled back to the potential to distribute tablets for Denver residents with I/DD. Crystal Porter proposed taking time for Council members to reflect on the need and for DHS to determine what data could be gathered, and the topic could be revisited on a future call or regular meeting agenda. Kendall Rames expressed support for this approach. She shared her belief that it was a great idea and that it was crucial to provide access, but that numbers might be helpful in framing the need better to make an informed decision. DHS proposed digging in on what data RMHS might have available through Client Assistance. DHS asked the Council to consider whether the need is there and whether there is an approach that might work to address the need, and that DHS would be responsible for validating the logistics of executing a project and what the budget might be to meet the needs of people in the immediate environment. DHS also asked the Council to consider what evaluation criteria there might be, and whether DHS should consider income limits or other thresholds to prioritize needs. Courtney Foss added that it would be helpful to understand better the types of tech support which might be needed in addition to the devices. Amy Packer mentioned the concept of a ‘Geek Squad’
introduced by DHS last year as a way to support Denver residents with I/DD on their access and learning of technology, and whether that approach could apply here.

Lauren Weinstock brought up struggles with Stay at Home and Safer at Home orders, such as the difficulty for caregivers and individuals who are used to outside interactions and are now having little to none. The strain is high for both caregivers and those they care for. Crystal Porter shared the concerns expressed by Lauren and added that there is a lot of discussion going on about this issue for the broader community and mentioned the extra challenges families in the I/DD community may face. DHS believed projects that will become active under the new mini projects RFA could be a step in addressing new needs. This is a high priority. DHS reminded the Council that RMHS is using funds under the current agreement to send out Boredom Buster kits to families to provide relief and stimulation that may otherwise be missing. DHS continues to follow updates provided by the Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF) to determine where the mill levy could fill in gaps or meet needs. This includes following the evolution of respite and any HCPF guidance to provide the service safely in the new public health environment. Lauren Weinstock emphasized the additional strain to mental health for all involved, and the need to provide support for caregivers over time. Lauren Weinstock and DHS acknowledged the pandemic and its impacts are likely to be seen and felt long term, and how critical mental health support is to continuing health and safety.

Amy Packer asked about access to online resources and stated that it would be a good idea to get the word out for those items. DHS committed to investigating support options for parents and caregivers, and asked Council members to send any programs or services they were aware of to DHS, so they can be compiled and pushed back out to the community. J.J. Tomash added that one of the fun things about being on the DHS Advisory Council is that Council members can have ideas that become projects in Denver and encouraged members to bring any additional ideas forward for discussion.

Kendall Rames said she agreed with Lauren Weinstock’s assertion that the pandemic is not even close to done and the quicker the new START model project is up and running, the better. As a service provider, she shared the difficulty of telehealth services for persons on the Autism spectrum and stated whatever can be done to pursue mental health supports and services quickly is a good idea.

**RMHS Community Advisory Council (CAC) updates & Council member announcements**

Tim Lomas provided updates from the RMHS CAC to close out his participation as the 2019 CAC member. He shared that RMHS will become the single-entry point (SEP) for 5 counties starting July 1, 2020 (Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, Douglas and Elbert). This is a $13 million annual contract with the State of Colorado and duties include but are not limited to screenings, assessments, and referrals for customers from those counties. RMHS is in the process of hiring about 180 additional people to do this work, many from the existing Denver Metro SEP (Colorado Access). Melissa Emery added that the primary responsibility of the SEP is to provide case management for the other waivers in Colorado not specific to people with I/DD- this includes two (2) waivers serving children and four (4) waivers serving adults.
Additional updates from Tim Lomas as the CAC member included information RMHS provided regarding the delivery of their services in recent months in reaction to COVID-19, including:

- Significant increase in requests received for emergency housing support, with people losing income or otherwise effected.
- RMHS shifted most if not all services to online support across various services including intake. They continue to monitor how this impacts clients and how they can maintain access to essential services provided by their team.
- External providers have also shifted their practices. An example of this is a community partner providing cooking instruction has moved services online.

After Tim’s CAC Member update, Lauren Weinstock reminded the Council of Desiree Kamika’s work evaluating housing needs for Douglas and Arapahoe counties under contract with Developmental Pathways (CCB). The report detailing and analyzing the findings on housing needs in these counties has been approved and will be available for public consumption soon. Lauren states that in the report, Kamika advised housing survey and analysis for every county as the needs of each community may be very different, and that the data can be given to developers in the community to drive larger scale changes to housing that include people with I/DD. Lauren Weinstock also gave an update on her volunteer work with PUSH, a parent organized group for housing opportunities. Lauren mentioned she and another parent volunteer would be on a panel of four (4) for the Housing Colorado summit in October. They hope to identify an adult with I/DD that wishes to participate on the panel with them.

**Public Comment**

No one signed up and no guests opted to provide public comment at this meeting. Council discussion continued through the end of the meeting (see CAC Member updates and Council member announcements).

JJ Tomash motioned for meeting to end at 6:47pm. King Viteron seconded. Vote passes to end meeting 6-0-0. Meeting adjourned at 6:49pm.

*Mill Levy Advisory Council sessions are recorded; recordings are available upon request.*