Mill Levy Advisory Council Meeting Minutes  
10.17.2019 4:30–6:30PM

Present: Ann Pierce (Co-chairperson)  
J.J. Tomash (Co-chairperson)  
Tim Lomas  
Kendall Rames  
Lauren Weinstock  

Guests: Courtney Kallas, Denver Public Schools  
Rachel Almond, Denver Public Schools  
Michael Kilgore, Financial Health Institute  
Johnathan Sims, Domus Vitae  
Staci Shumate, DHS  

Absent: Jennifer Beck (RMHS delegate)  

Phone: Arnie Swenson, CFPD  

Staff: Crystal Porter  
Amy Packer  

The Council meeting was called to order at 4:35pm by co-chairperson Ann Pierce at the Ford Warren Library, 2825 High Street, Denver, Colorado.

Introductions & Minutes Review
The meeting opened with a brief welcome, followed by introductions from the Council members and Denver Human Services (DHS) staff. The Council reviewed minutes from the previous meeting held on 08-22-2019. Motion to approve the meeting minutes made by Ann Pierce and seconded by J.J. Tomash. Minutes approved 3-0-0. Kendall Rames arrived shortly after this vote.

Information Sharing and DHS Updates
DHS announced that two council members had vacated their seats with the Council: Kate Williams and Betty Lehman resigned their positions. DHS will be appointing new members in their place, and per the bylaws whomever is appointed will finish out the remainder of the term and then can be reappointed for a consecutive term afterwards. An application will be on the DHS website and shared throughout the community via email. Current Council members were asked to spread the word as well, keeping in mind the one requirement is that the person be a Denver resident. DHS planned to deliberately reach out to individuals with I/DD in Denver who may be interested in participating on the Council as a member. Lauren Weinstock arrived during this conversation.

DHS then provided an update on the Inclusive RFP that went out in July:

- DHS received 8 proposals in response to the RFP.
- One (1) was disqualified during the technical review for not submitting all the required documents.
- Another was disqualified due to a conflict of interest.
- Of the six (6) remaining, three (3) were recommended to Executive Director Don Mares for awards and DHS has moved forward with all three.
- Each of the providers were selected in order to offer an array of training opportunities.
- Letters have gone out to all who applied notifying them of decisions. DHS is involved in the contract negotiation process. Once the contracts are completed, DHS will share more information about the awardees. The amount of money these contracts encompass is collectively less than $400,000.00.

DHS reviewed progress on recommendations the Council had previously made to DHS. Council members and DHS engaged in a discussion regarding the recommended independent appeals board:

- Council members can continue to gather information from families who use mill levy services to about the request process and will report back out to DHS as new information comes up.
- As requested previously by the Council, Amy Packer visited the Board of Adjustment for Zoning (BOAZ) and learned about the guidelines they follow to make decisions. DHS would need something similar if there was an appeals board.
- Council members reminded DHS staff there is a lot of fear over complaining and losing partial or full funding at that moment or in the future.
- 3 out of 5 Council members report experiencing issues with accessing mill levy funds themselves.
- Communication could be better during the process, including timely updates and clear explanations on where a funder is in the process of denying or approving. This would go a long way with peace of mind.
- The Council suggested DHS consider adding a link to their website, so families can take an anonymous survey about their experiences. Another idea was to give RMHS case managers self-addressed/stamped envelopes to give to clients for feedback about their experiences.
- DHS working on what wording is best practice for mill levy contracts: appeals, review, complaint process
- Council members will review RMHS guidance list provided back in August and give feedback.
- Criteria for BOAZ to be shared with this board to assist with criteria points for possible review/appeals/complaint process.
- Clarify that Crystal Porter as the DHS Mill Levy Program Manager is a connection for complaints about mill levy service contractors. DHS will work with contractors on their processes and Crystal will reroute families to that contractor’s complaint process if that has not yet been attempted.
- DHS to update FAQs on the website about this process, add Crystal’s contact information.

Additional recommendation updates included:

**Website directory.** DHS has continued to connect with organizations that manage resources directories and has considered the feedback provided by the Council in discussion at the June 18
meeting. DHS asked the Council about a model where information specialists are on loan or embedded with organizations for a period of time to build up information and resources. The Council provided positive feedback and encouraged DHS to move forward with this concept.

**Feedback loop.** No additional information on the feedback loop at this time, other than to emphasize the Council plays a large role in giving feedback to DHS. DHS is looking at what will be needed in the future to gauge progress on needs identified in the community and will revisit again.

**Potential marketing campaign.** This would work to educate the public about the mill levy and drive people to trainings to be offered. There are options that are available on how to do this and DHS will update the Council once new information is available.

**Understanding the mill levy.** DHS is working with communications team to continue to develop information resources for the mill levy program. Mill levy cards were passed out to the Council at this meeting for them to use to educate people about getting involved and giving feedback. Cards have area where information can be written by person getting card, and also had business card slot for Council members to add their own business cards.

**Respite.** Undergoing process of negotiating new exhibit A for 2020 RMHS contract. The 2019 contract was for $14 million and next year the maximum contract amount increases to $15 million. DHS reports a significant portion of this increase will go directly into funding for families. Currently 800 families not being funded for this type of care except through the RMHS mill levy contract.

**Home modifications.** DHS completed a scan of what is currently offered. RMHS does not often fund this type of request due to most modification projects given as estimates by contractors which leaves too many open possibilities in regard to final dollar amounts. DHS plans to consider options for contractors and may need to connect with Public Works a department in City of Denver who handles most contractor work. Currently $10,000.00 is considered the lifetime award for home modifications on certain waivers serving people with I/DD and this is often not enough for a home modification.

**Emergency Response Fund.** There are options at RMHS to expedite requests when they are made. Additional funding may not be needed as there are already resources in place that may be adjusted which would help families not have to reach out to yet another resource for help.

DHS is also still investigating mini grant opportunities.

**Conflicts of Interest Q&A**

Amy Packer advises the Council that with recent resignations and a change to the Council quorum, the Mill Levy Advisory Council cannot continue with subcommittees at this time. With a quorum of 4, a 3-person subcommittee was ok. Now that the Council has open seats, 3 becomes the new quorum.

DHS is also considering tools that might serve as a vehicle for transparent collaboration outside of official meetings, such as a message board, Dropbox, or emails posted on website. Whatever would be
used would be public record. DHS invited the Council members to share ideas they may have. Texts with 3 people is considered a quorum- if it is council business, it should be a public meeting.

Ann Pierce asked about how to share information in the moment, for example after talking to a family about something important to this boards work. Slack is an option; Microsoft teams is another option. This will create more immediacy. DHS will work on investigating options for this technology and will keep the group informed. J.J. Tomash made a motion to allow public comment to happen earlier so more discussion can occur and those speaking can leave on time. All voted in favor of doing this. The Council took a break from discussion for public comments.

DHS provided a packet that includes a conflict of interest guidance one pager. When reviewing items outside of meetings, Council members can gather information and bring it back to public meetings. There is a very clear process to recuse oneself from both topics of discussion and from a vote taking place. It is important to be aware of even the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Amy Packer, Assistant City Attorney, is happy to work with individual members and any questions about this process to help them determine if there is a conflict rather then them trying to guess. Amy Packer and Crystal Porter are also working with DHS contract teams to help with conflict wording and understanding. Going forward there will be inquiries about possible conflicts prior to each topic of discussion.

**Report Outs & Discussion**

Documents are passed around to the group to aid discussion. One of the documents is information compiled by DHS on the State waitlist for the DD waiver, which was one of the top five problems identified in the 2018 needs assessment. DHS has requested a meeting with HCPF representatives as they are over the waitlist. In 2014 HCPF submitted a strategic plan and every year they are required to provide an update on where they are on that plan in getting more families enrolled and eliminating the waitlist. The strategic update for this year is due November 1st. The document includes figures from HCPF’s joint budget proposal, a link to HCPF’s hub for the waitlist, and waiver redesign work.

Lauren Weinstock asked how many people have been approved except for funding and are on the waitlist. DHS reported that CCBs report their own local data up to HCPF for tracking. In April 2019, RMHS reported 269 Denver residents on the wait list, with 12 are not getting any other kind of services. Lauren Weinstock reiterated that she thought families should know what number they are, and how long they have to wait until they can be enrolled onto the DD waiver. DHS will continue to research data related to the waitlist.

**Mental Health.** Lauren Weinstock reported out that their group, in prior conversations, had been impressed with the program START Colorado, the Council members are concerned the DHS mill levy could not fund it entirely. Questions this group is asking: How can we break a piece of the program off that is fundable? Could we then hire a coordinator to pay for training? What are START’s oversight requirements? Not sure what the training is, if there are hidden costs, if there are annual conferences,
who pays for it? DHS reiterated that the Council does not need to have all details figured out before making a recommendation and in fact it’s tied to the conflict of interest because the more you know about the contract the higher probability it becomes for a conflict to occur. Kendall Rames expressed concerns about the University of New Hampshire’s commitment to the fidelity of the model. Another program Lauren Weinstock mentioned is Intercept, a program through Aurora Mental Health that is incredibly complimentary. DHS will investigate this model further.

Lauren Weinstock made a motion for DHS to investigate the efficacy of putting out an RFP to hire a coordinator to get trained in this model and how many strings are attached and how practical it is and report back to the board. J.J. Tomash seconded, and the motion passed 5-0-0.

The Colorado pilot’s budget over 2 years was $2 million for 2 programs serving 28 people. This was reported at an earlier meeting. DHS asked whether the $2 million was part of the startup costs, and the Council members were not sure. DHS then shared a couple of articles on mental health initiatives happening already in Denver. There will be about $45 million in new mill levy funds dedicated to improving mental health services, to be managed by a new foundation Caring For Denver, which is not technically part of the City. Some of the funds will be used for a building an alternative to jail, to increase the co-responders that respond with police officers, and an even more recent article where police are going to be pulled from the mental health responses.

**Housing.** The Housing subcommittee hosted the housing forum on the 24th of September. There were three presentations given: one on accessible housing and healthy design, communal spaces, co-housing, one from Denver Housing Authority on the variety of housing programs they offer in addition to Section 8, and an overview of statistics from a neighboring community as well as potential housing models. Barb Ziegler from Stepping Stones attended from Jefferson County. Potential next steps:

- Institute an RFP for planning grants. Should be used by community members to kick start process to develop housing according to their needs. Maybe $1-200,000.00 dollars per applicant. Grass roots effort working with community. Proposal could then be reviewed.
- LIHTC-Low Income Housing Tax Credit for IDD. This is in Florida. There is nothing like this in Colorado. Meet with Colorado Housing and Finance Authority to see if this can be done.
- Council members may reach out to Department of Housing through Department of Local Affairs which is a State agency.
- Crystal connected with Desiree Kameka Who states that the housing usually works with providers of affordable housing and not directly with families. Part of this is because taking it back to families is so new. There is just no model for doing that right now. She will be sending more information to DHS on this.
- Attention Homes in Boulder just received LIHTC funds. We can explore that.

Families at the forum expressed desire to come up with their own plan. They are willing to do the work but need supports and resources. Potential for some version of the Empowering Communities Initiative completed in Douglas and Arapahoe counties to be reviewed in Denver.
• Educate the neurodiverse communities
• Assess preferences and support needs
• Approach housing industry with consumer data
• Increase stock that meets local needs

Potential recommendation for a housing educator/navigator that would serve the I/DD community. They work within an office already established within the City of Denver; DOLA, or whatever. That way they can integrate what they are doing and then they can share what they are doing.

There is also a need to build provider capacity in out of home placements for children with I/DD and DHS wants to engage their interest in exploring further. Goals are to keep children with their families and not go into congregate care of foster care. Family First model is changing the landscape.

Public Comment

DHS had two community members signed up for public comment: The first was a transition specialist at Denver Public Schools who addressed her work with families and accessing Mill Levy services for transition. She shared that they have a lot of family workshops and a lot of my families have never heard of the mill levy, or they are frustrated with RMHS, or they don’t know if they don’t have a service coordinator that they can even access funds. The handout about the mill levy passed out will be very helpful and she plans to bring the information back to DPS families. With this information we can make this connection happen connecting case manager to families, making teachers understand and since families trust teachers, not all the time but it’s who they’ve worked with, and it will help to have them know about this program too. This will really help so a teacher can help them with a transition especially if it’s for an IEP or interagency linkages so that this is happening before they are 18. She reported that the mill levy is still really confusing for most people and individuals have to have a lot of savvy and time to understand so often she refers people to get an advocate from AdvocacyDenver to help. Informational tools will help the teachers understand the process to get their families connected for services and the availability of gap services in the summer and after school.

The second commenter also works as a transition specialist with Denver Public Schools and is a resident of Denver. She asked whether she could ask a question that the Council would answer. DHS explained that the Council does not respond directly to comments during the meeting, but that she can go ahead and ask and someone with DHS or the Council may follow up with her at a later time. She commented that she is hearing teachers in the 18-21 transition program talk about how RMHS does not provide services for the students in their program because it’s a duplication of services. That seems wrong.

Ann Pierce motioned to adjourn the meeting. J.J. Tomash seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:43pm.

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