

TUMWATER BUDGET & FINANCE COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING
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CONVENE: 11:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Pete Kmet and Councilmembers Leatta Dahlhoff, Debbie Sullivan, and Eileen Swarthout.

Staff: City Administrator John Doan and Executive Assistant/Deputy City Clerk Hanna Miles.

**2022 COMMUNITY
HUMAN SERVICES
PROGRAM
FUNDING:**

Mayor Kmet welcomed applicants and outlined the presentation format.

Executive Assistant Miles reported the Community Human Services Program 2022 budget is \$15,000. The City received funding applications from four applicants totaling \$17,000. The applicants will present their funding requests to the committee.

Mayor Kmet invited applicants to present their respective proposal.

**DISPUTE
RESOLUTION
CENTER OF
THURSTON
COUNTY:**

Jody Suhrbier, Executive Director, reported the Dispute Resolution Center (DRC) of Thurston County serves Thurston County and south Mason County. As a part of the community over the last 30 years, DRC anchors its services in its organizational values which inform all services offered by DRC of Personal Empowerment, Integrity, Respect, Collaboration, Civility, and Trust. DRC offers services in conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and youth services. All service provisions have been adapted for offering through an online format.

Ms. Suhrbier reviewed services provided under the three areas. A resource line is available for conflict resolution offering coaching, referrals, sources of information and resources, and conciliation services (phone-based negotiation). Coaching and conciliation are free services. If the issue is not resolved through coaching or conciliation services, mediation is the next step. That formalized process is a conversation with trained certified facilitators to arrive at a resolution for all parties.

Conflict prevention involves efforts to prevent conflicts such as group facilitation, training in communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and de-escalation to help prevent future conflict. Youth services include both prevention and resolution. DRC averages 1,500 cases each year and trains approximately 1,000 individuals annually. Most of the agency's 140 volunteers are either certified junior apprentice mediators or they are just beginning training.

Assessing support is through the DRC resource line to discuss the issue and obtain information on next steps and resources. Many individuals contact DRC for other services, such as facilitation and training. Phone consultations are at no charge. Phone-based negotiated issues can include

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small claim cases or housing issues as examples. Individuals, organizations, businesses, and governmental agencies are able to access DRC services.

During the last two years of the pandemic, conflict has often increased. Several new areas of focus include the Restorative Justice Facilitated Dialogue Program, a restorative program for healing harm as part of a participant's prior drug use or alcohol abuse. The second program is the Housing Stability Program, an addiction resolution program focused on eviction prevention and ensuring dollars flow to landlords. The program has been successful because it is part of a three pillar foundation of support of early resolution, access to legal resources, and access to rental assistance.

Mayor Kmet expressed appreciation for the work by DRC in support of the community. He thanked Ms. Suhrbier for the presentation.

**FAMILY SUPPORT
CENTER OF SOUTH
SOUND:**

Maija Glasier-Lawson, Development Director, shared information on the Family Resource Services Program. Many families are experiencing difficulties both before and during the pandemic with increasing housing prices, increases in the cost of food and basic supplies, and a substantial cost in baby diapers averaging between 14% and 20%. Based on a preliminary report for the 2021 Thurston County homeless count, 33 of the individuals were in the Tumwater area. Last year, only nine individuals were from the Tumwater area. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction counts homeless youth differently by including any family that may be doubling with another household, couch surfing, or living in a hotel/motel. The report in 2020 reflected 250 students in the Tumwater School District are experiencing homelessness. Twenty-eight of those students were unsheltered and the remaining lived in the other homeless situations where parents were staying at hotels or motels, or were staying with friends. The organization's Family Resource Services Program (FRSP) assists those families and students in need. Many of the youths served are moving from friend to friend and do not have a permanent shelter. There is no income requirement to access the Family Resource Services Program other than the family must be experiencing a crisis, such as receiving an eviction notice, loss of electricity or gas, or other situations. The FRSP program is rooted in trauma and informed care and uses a strength-based model. The FRSP navigator works with families to identify their current situation and the resources they may be able to access on their own to resolve the crisis. Many times, families accessing the FRSP are employed or have benefits but income or benefits are insufficient to overcome an emergency or meet the increasing costs of supplies or rent. The need for the FRSP has continued to increase through COVID, with the program receiving 15 to 20 calls each day through the dedicated hotline not including Facebook

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messages or inquiries from the website. Not only are more families contacting the agency for assistance, the level of issues have become more complex. The program works closely with other agency programs to streamline resources. This year, the request is funding support to offset some of the cost of the FRSP navigator.

Mayor Kmet asked about the biggest challenge for the agency. Ms. Glasier-Lawson replied that affordable housing is the biggest challenge. Many families doubled up with other families want their own home but the lack of affordable housing prevents them from moving. Many families with vouchers have to wait for months to find a home. Additionally, anyone with credit problems or prior evictions experience more difficulty in finding a home.

Mayor Kmet said he understands the agency serves as the primary navigator for individuals entering the system. Ms. Glasier-Lawson affirmed that the agency serves as the Coordinated Entry point for families only.

Mayor Kmet conveyed appreciation for the agency's efforts despite limited resources.

**GARDEN RAISED
BOUNTY – GRUB:**

Jennah Kemp, Lead Garden Builder, GRuB, reported the community organization grows healthy food, people, and the community. GRuB creates opportunities for people to learn, lead, and thrive through many programs connecting people to each other, the land, and food. The organization envisions an equitable world where everyone is nourished by healthy relationships, resilient community, and good food. The GRuB garden project begins each spring with staff, youth, volunteers, and other community members building free backyard gardens within the community. The program sponsors approximately 50 gardens each year for families with no to low-income in Thurston County and surrounding counties. Over 3,200 gardens have been constructed to date throughout the South Sound area. The program fosters community connection, increases food security, and grows a number of food producers in the community. Last year, with increased food, job, and housing insecurities caused by COVID-19, GRuB increased the garden projects and constructed 96 gardens. The garden beds are capable of providing over 500 pounds in fresh produce for a family. With additional support, an additional five gardens will be built in Tumwater next year to provide resources to the gardeners through free gardening workshops, seeds, one-on-one mentorship, and organic vegetable starts.

Ms. Kemp shared several photographs of successful gardens created in 2020. GRuB benefits the community by providing access to fresh food, enhanced food security, the garden helps to supplement income, and

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gardening provides education and skills. GRuB supports equity within the gardening project by collaborating with SNAP-Ed to form three advisory groups of BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and GRuB alumni to steer and enhance the accessibility, relevance, and sustainability of the program. She thanked the Council for its ongoing support of the garden project.

Mayor Kmet asked about the durability of the gardens and whether GRuB rebuilds gardens in disrepair or no longer viable. Ms. Kemp advised that each year, applications are submitted from previous gardeners who need a new garden or need repair of existing garden beds.

SAFEPLACE:

Esmeralda Triplett, Domestic Violence Program Director, reported SafePlace recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. SafePlace is the main agency in Thurston County providing services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. The agency hosts a 24-hour hotline. The agency averages 300 calls each month through the hotline. The hotline is supported by both volunteers and trained advocates. SafePlace offers a housing program. Currently, 25 households are receiving services. Four households are located in Tumwater. SafePlace offers a legal program consisting of assisting survivors with obtaining protection orders or securing security measures for new housing. A new position has been added focusing on workforce employment. The position will work closely with shelters and housing survivors to help them obtain employment through preparation of resumes, application for employment, and assisting them to obtain housing. The agency also offers car repair services to ensure survivors have transportation for work. In addition to the hotline, SafePlace receives 70 walk-ins each month from Monday through Thursday. The agency is adding a caseworker to assist in providing services and has collaborated with a hotel in Tumwater to assist survivors who need temporary housing as they work through the system.

Councilmember Dahlhoff asked about the status of filling the vacant Board of Director's President position. Ms. Triplett responded that a Board meeting is scheduled in the next day and an announcement of the person to serve as the Board President would likely be announced.

Mayor Kmet asked whether SafePlace rents facilities in the City to house survivors. Ms. Triplett said SafePlace assists survivors with securing housing by providing support for an apartment or a single-family home.

Mayor Kmet asked about the status of turnover of staff at the agency. Ms. Triplett advised that the Executive Director has been with the agency for approximately one month and she has served in her position since April 2021. She has worked at SafePlace for over four years beginning as a legal advocate and then serving different roles within the organization.

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Although, the agency has experienced some turnover in personnel, it is important to recognize that working closely with survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault can be very traumatic as many staff members experience second-hand trauma through the constant exposure of survivor stories, as well as many staff members are survivors of domestic violence. It requires fortitude for an individual to remain in the field to assist survivors. Much of the turnover can be attributed to the specific field of work and self-care practices by staff when not working.

Mayor Kmet expressed appreciation for the work performed by staff.

Councilmember Sullivan asked whether domestic violence has increased during the pandemic. She asked whether SafePlace has experienced an increase in the number of cases. Ms. Triplett said when COVID-19 first started, the number of calls to the hotline decreased. The decrease was attributed to victims unable to access a phone because their abuser was home rather than working because of the pandemic. Over the course of the pandemic, calls have increased, as well as the level of crisis, which is significantly higher than prior to the pandemic. SafePlace has encountered many instances of dual abuse with both partners attempting to access SafePlace services requiring caseworkers to contact the coalition to determine how to navigate those situations.

Mayor Kmet thanked Ms. Triplett for her presentation.

**COMMITTEE
DISCUSSION:**

Mayor Kmet asked about the status of Tumwater Education Foundation because the organization did not apply for funding. Councilmember Swarthout replied that the organization is in the process of reestablishing the Board of Directors. The organization has sufficient funding to support its program at this time.

Mayor Kmet asked staff why Big Brothers, Big Sisters did not apply for funding support as the organization has applied for funding for many years. Executive Assistant Miles said she received a response to the initial email advising her that the organization was looking forward to submitting an application. However, the City never received an application from the organization. Councilmember Swarthout added that Tumwater HOPES has been working with the organization, which has experienced some transitions in its leadership and is likely the reason the organization did not apply.

Committee members shared their respective recommendations for the allocation of funds.

The committee agreed to forward the following funding recommendation to the City Council:

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- Dispute Resolution Center of Thurston County - \$4,000
- Family Support Center of South Sound - \$4,000
- Garden Raised Bounty – GRuB - \$3,000
- SafePlace - \$4,000

Councilmember Dahlhoff abstained from providing a recommendation on the funding award for the Family Support Center of South Sound because she is a member of the Board of Directors.

ADJOURNMENT: **With there being no further business, Mayor Kmet adjourned the meeting at 11:51 a.m.**

Prepared by Puget Sound Meeting Services, psmsoly@earthlink.net