City of Alexandria Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) Meeting Minutes
May 17, 2023, 7:00 PM ET

Attendees:

1. Aminata Ly
2. Jennifer Ayers
3. Tim Laderach
4. Meronne Teklu, Chair
5. Kameron Gonzalez
6. Conrad Sylvanus
7. Charles Brown
8. L'Allegro Smith
9. Mesha Hall (speaker)
10. Lesa Gilbert, Staff

Absences:

1. Berole Bekele
2. Barbara LaToison
3. Janeka Cogdell
4. Karishma Merchant

Meronne Teklu, EOC Chair, commenced the meeting at 7:10 PM ET.

Chair's Opening Remarks

- Adopt agenda (aminata, Jenn)
- Last meeting minutes (Charles, Kameron)
- Welcome, new school superintendent installed, Brown v. Board of Ed. anniversary, described Mark Center ribbon cutting
- Quarterly boards/commissions chairs meeting last week; follow on to Southern Towers conversation; commission for women proposal to collaborate with EOC.
- Mentioned two category I vacancies on EOC, search ongoing by elected officials.
- David Parker approved for Category II

Mesha Hall, OCS

- **CSBG - Community Services Block Grant**
    - EOC serves as the "tripartite board" in order for OCS to receive these funds
    - CSBG funds usually last 11-12 months; this year lasted ~4 months due to increased need from COVID-19 pandemic
    - Discussed overview of how money is used
        - Largest tranche of money is for senior rent relief - usually the largest
            - Same recipients (set number) recertified year after year
        - Second largest is emergency shelter funds
    - Community Services Team uses both CSBG and local funds
        - CSBG: rental & utility assistance

        - Local funds: everything else
        - CSBG is about $370,000 of the total $1.9Million Community Services Funding for FY23
            - This includes a $60,000 supplemental tranche for CSBG TANF
    - Discussed demographics of population served
        - 361 Households served so far in FY23, 887 individuals
    - Described additional details of Senior Rent Relief program
        - Average rent to income is 107% before program enrollment
        - Drops to 70% after enrollment
    - Emergency Shelter funds
        - Pays for utilities, rental assistance, burials, prescriptions
        - Most flexible pot of money
    - Moving forward
        - Approved for additional funding for rental relief from CC for next FY
        - Expressed hope that total rent arrears will not be as great next FY & no abrupt shortage in RRP funding
    - Potential advocacy points
        - Income limit per household
        - Amount per household
            - Council's approval for increased funding in FY24 on assumption of $5000/household need
            - Average rent relief per household currently ~$2300
    - Described how OCS works with other agencies/departments/community partners to provide a holistic response to client needs

City Updates

- **OCS updates/DCHS updates**
    - Lesa shared an overview of budget approval and highlights pertaining to EOC
        - Additional rent assistance
        - New positions approved
            - Immigrant services coordinator: not yet sure where this position will be located within the city structure
            - Described the importance of this role in Alexandria, particularly with the city having the highest resettlement numbers for Afghan refugees
    - Youth internship program from June to August for local employers; 14-18+ y/o
        - 170 slots, 570 applicants (Conducted additional outreach this year)
        - Received funds to increase slots for next year
        - DCHS places interns with local employers
    - Youth ambassadors program
        - Strategic placement of youth with policy makers and decision makers to ensure youth voice is heard in all places
        - In process of hiring currently

- ACT for Alexandria Youth Council is having report out this weekend, Sunday @ ALX Community Waterfront location

Old Business

- **Needs Assessment**: Meronne stated that the document is still in progress. The document refers to multiple information dashboards and the focus of the employment section will be shifted to reflect the theme of "economic mobility". The goal is to have the document ready for adoption at the June EOC meeting.
- **Special Events:** Special events committee consisting of Kameron, Conrad, Jenn and Alison met; Alison provided the exec board with initial thoughts and ideas. Kameron presented four focus areas.
  - Discussion of "know your rights" events; compare challenges of prior Office of Housing events and attendance; potentially repositioning the program or phrasing of the program, making the event multipurpose.
  - State of the Community; EOC serving as MC for coordinated event
    - Importance of having personal stories as part of the event; SMEs in areas of needs assessment categories; new building provides opportunity
  - Final two areas regarding EOC members specifically: onboarding packet, survey
    - Historically had onboarding packet; collective desire to bring this back
    - Tapping in to board member interests to drive board engagement and effectiveness
  - *Prioritize State of Community as event (Kameron, Conrad, Jenn, L'Allegro, Meronne); goal of Fall event; to coordinate meeting to discuss further details
  - *Prioritize EOC member survey (Conrad to spearhead this, Meronne to assist)
  - "Know your rights" could occur in summer; lighter lift by using external SME, coordinating presence at food hub or other location
    - Meronne to ask POCs at LSNV/LAJC
- **Alexandria Fund for Human Svcs:**
  - Charles provided an update on the state of the fund: currently reviewing applications.
- **Alexandria Human Rights Commission Update:**
  - Conrad to provide an update via email following the meeting.
  - Southern Towers issues, proposed letter to Sheriff's office among other entities.

New Business

- **Alexandria CHIP Progress Report:**
  - CHIP = Community Health Improvement Plan
  - Progress report released; EOC highlighted specifically throughout document
    - Advocate for $15 minimum wage in Virginia
    - Create/promote new initiative
    - Identify sources of financial support for workforce development programs
    - Theme: Hiring/pay equity
  - Potentially partner with ACE (Alexandria Commission on Employment)

Announcements

- Act for Alexandria this Sunday May 21
- Next Community Meeting for Zoning for Housing Monday May 22 @ 6PM

Closing: L'Allegro moved to adjourn the meeting, Charles seconded. The meeting adjourned at 8:48 PM ET**.**