

City of Alexandria Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) Meeting Minutes
April 19, 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. Karishma Merchant
10. Alison Coleman, Staff
11. Matt Fitzgerald (Guest Speaker)

Absences:

1. Berole Bekele (excused)
2. Barbara LaToison (excused)
3. Janeka Cogdell

Meronne Teklu, EOC Chair, commenced the meeting at 7:08 PM ET.

Chair's Opening Remarks

- Welcome, described quorum requirements, new building, lack of AV until fall, etc.
- Congrats to ALIVE! for opening the DelRay food hub (2nd location)
- ACT for Alexandria, Spring 2 Action kicked off early giving
- Introduced guest speaker, Matt Fitzgerald, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Matt Fitzgerald, Director, Virginia Office of Economic Opportunity

- Members of the EOC presented short introductions of themselves for Mr. Fitzgerald.
- Mr. Fitzgerald spoke about several matters related to his position with the state. He acknowledged general difficulties experienced by boards like EOC across the state, namely vacancies and strain on personnel (contributing to attrition). Mr. Fitzgerald described his vision of the role of a board like EOC: community action, and advocacy for actual clients receiving services.
- Mr. Fitzgerald recommended that EOC members access the training management system called ROMA (results oriented management and accountability), which has various trainings on matters under EOC's purview (E.g. Community needs assessment).
- The training management system also contains "peer groups," with distribution lists, opportunities to ask questions of other boards across the state, as well as listings of group trainings. EOC members were encouraged to sign up to receive the Office's newsletter.

- Mr. Fitzgerald outlined a general path forward for his Office as well as how that path applies for localities. Highlights were as follows:
 - Transition to self-sufficiency work (moving families out of poverty)
 - “Whole Family” model
 - Described pilot project, multiple agencies working in concert to assist families
 - Year 4 of 5
 - Learning communities
 - Goal to get concerted action by all 31 agencies
 - Consider ways we can implement this in our communities
 - Broadband
 - Broadband planning project built around digital equity
 - Alison & Meronne discussed Ting and City’s rollout
 - EOC consideration - look into broadband equity efforts
 - Community Action Program
 - Mr. Fitzgerald described the Americore Vistas projects at the Office level, along with how the Office collects data regarding racial equity to determine impact and opportunities. He also discussed financial empowerment and how the Office uses surveys and agency interviews to determine current capacities and needs.
 - Meronne mentioned a tool used by developers to help tenants build credit with rental payments and receive access to loans.
- Charge to EOC:
 - Access and utilize ROMA training system.
 - Subscribe to Office newsletter.
 - Consider ways to implement “Whole Family” model locally.
 - Look further into broadband equity efforts.
- Q&A
 - Conrad: In what ways is the Office putting out information?
 - Not so much on social media, could consider utilizing; newsletter (mentioned above)
 - Conrad: Does the Office have local community leaders?
 - Do have local DSS in each community, not all strong
 - Jenn: as doing needs assessments, what is the office seeing as the overarching trends on issues across the state? How do we think about a new baseline for needs/compare to other localities?
 - Mental Health_largest need, lacking in funding
 - Trauma in general
 - A lot of temporary funding now running out
 - “Benefits cliff”, always an issue in the background
 - Homelessness
 - Will send additional info on trends as needs assessments come in
 - Meronne:

- “Unite Us” platform, connecting healthcare patients with safety net services in each jurisdiction; is the Office involved in that effort?
 - Initially funded by state, now receiving “help” by state
 - Built off giving referrals to agencies that can get tracked
 - Privacy issues inherent in handing off clients between providers
 - **Rollout has been slow likely because of privacy issues and having mechanisms in place
 - Jenn: ALIVE! has received referrals that they can’t help, concept is great but kinks that need to be worked out
 - Kameron:
 - Whole Family model, interested in hearing more about this, along with timeline and if it is being implemented yet

Chair’s Opening Remarks Continued

- Reviewed agenda with an amendment to add guest speaker Matt Fitzgerald, L’Allegro moved to approve the agenda, Kameron seconded.
- March minutes approved, L’Allegro moved to approve the minutes, Aminata seconded.

City Updates

- **OCS updates/DCHS updates**
 - Allison gave a report that the agencies are now in the new city building, though it was not yet fully open to the public as of the April EOC meeting. The city had begun to offer emergency services (including eviction services, utility cut offs, benefits, tax prep program) at that time. She also mentioned that emergency SNAP ends in April, Medicaid unwinding happening in May, and she anticipates a large gap between needs and available resources.
 - Regarding the City budget process, Alison noted the \$250,000 budget item for rental assistance which EOC discovered in March. The Eviction Prevention Taskforce discussion with elected officials went well.
 - For homeless services, a RFP is set to be issued by the departments; both Alexandria community shelters were at 100% capacity as of the EOC meeting. Special attention will be made to bringing in youth voices (e.g. sessions with 8th graders). Further discussion was had about the partnership to prevent homelessness and getting updated data on point in time counts.

Old Business

- **FY24 Budget:** Meronne mentioned EOC consensus at March meeting on conveying positive sentiments on inclusions via letter. Meronne also mentioned her discussion with Councilman Chapman regarding ARPA funds ending. The Councilman recommended EOC add language encouraging council and staff to research this. The draft letter was reviewed and approved unanimously. L’Allegro moved to approve the letter, Karishma seconded.
- **Bylaws Update:** Meronne presented proposed bylaws update to amend Articles 5.1 (reducing EOC positions from 18 to 15, reducing each category by 1) and 5.5 (clarifying that unapproved absence count for removal purposes runs the calendar year). L’Allegro

moved to adopt, Jenn seconded. The amendments were unanimously adopted. Amendments next to be sent to City Clerk for any further required steps.

- **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 May EOC meeting.
- **Special Events:** Special events committee consisting of Kameron, Conrad, Jenn and Alison plan to meet, discuss, and return to EOC with recommendations.
- **Alexandria Fund for Human Svcs:** Alison mentioned that the grant committee has now been established. Charles is an EOC representative acting as panelist for the fund.

New Business

- **Executive Committee Nominations:** Meronne discussed EOC applications:
 - Category 2: resident at Carpenter’s Shelter
 - David Parker, Kameron Moved to approve, seconded by L’Allegro, unanimously voted to move forward.
 - Category 1: elected official representative
 - Meronne spoke with Councilman Aguirre and Senator Ebbin about appointment representatives.
- **Human Rights Commission Report & Southern Towers:**
 - Conrad led a discussion about Southern Towers. He was invited by the Chair of the Human Rights Commission to attend a tour of the facilities. Conrad stated that new buildings at the complex will have new amenities; the group noted some discrepancies with rent and utilities at the older buildings.
 - Utilities are through Southern Towers. A recent rent increase occurred where some tenants were able to negotiate rent; however, utilities are only available through Southern Towers management, and there was a reported issue with one resident having a \$500 water bill.
 - Conrad mentioned that the Human Rights Commission is considering if there are human rights issues. Regarding public spaces, the new buildings will have no-charge use of new common areas whereas the old buildings require a charge for the spaces. Regarding broadband access, there were attempts to have a specific broadband provider written into contracts, limiting choice for residents. Finally, with advertisements of the new buildings, there is a potential issue with the content of those advertisements catering to a specific demographic. Cameron reported that these were noted by a group of members of various commissions on a recent visit to Southern Towers.
 - Meronne mentioned that the Southern Towers United group was formed because residents did not feel other entities in the city were adequately advocating for resident needs. She also acknowledged reports about lack of upkeep of units for those who are behind on rent.
 - Alison highlighted a possible opportunity for EOC for a special event on the topic of how to organize, and Meronne pointed out that LAJC expressed willingness to participate in such an event.

Additional announcements

- Zoning for Housing meetings, staff is conducting community outreach.
- Community Cookouts, great way to connect with people in the community.
- Office of Housing meeting at Southern Towers for all city residents.
- Duke Street in Motion, public comments received through April 30th, open house April 20 at Bishop Ireton High School from 5-8:30PM, staff will be available for questions.

Closing: L'Allegro moved to adjourn the meeting, Conrad seconded. The meeting adjourned at 9:01 PM ET.