



WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

May 17, 2023

WORKING SESSION

I. ROLL CALL

A session of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners Working Session was held at the Administration Building, in the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan, on May 17, 2023.

The meeting was called to order at 03:01 PM by Comm. Somerville, Chair of the Working Session.

Members Present: Comms. Shannon Beeman, Justin Hodge, Andy LaBarre, Crystal Lyte, Jason Maciejewski, Yousef Rabhi, Caroline Sanders, Katie Scott, Annie Somerville

Members Absent: None.

Others Present Greg Dill, County Administrator; Andrew DeLeeuw, Interim Deputy County Administrator; Michelle Billard, Corporation Counsel; Catherine McClary, County Treasurer; Lawrence Kestenbaum, County Clerk; Tina Gavalier & Catherine Jones-Alther, Finance; Brady Peck, Director of Operations; Alize Asberry Payne & Terrence Williams, Equity Office; Jason Fee, Facilities Management; Ashley Hall, BOC Communications and Operations Manager; Bryce Allmacher, Clerk's Office; Eli Savit, Washtenaw County Prosecutor; and members of the public.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A. None.

III. REPORT FROM THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

None.

IV. REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS LIAISON

None.

V. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. The session was organized according to the following topics, which were identified as strategic priorities for the Board of Commissioners during an April Meeting:

1. Promote and improve human services delivery
2. Provide good government
3. Affordable and available housing
4. East Side Community and Recreation

Promote and Improve Human Services Delivery

Comm. Hodge noted the challenges of discussing human services delivery given the County's role as not only a service provider, but also as a source of funding for different organizations throughout the community with their own sets of priorities and challenges.

Comm. Hodge noted that many community organizations rely on multiple funding sources outside of the County, making the task of effectively allocating resources more difficult.

Comm. Somerville said that a more coordinated approach to human services funding is needed.

Comm. LaBarre said that it is realistic to convene key funders and service providers from throughout the County and determine whether the various organizations are aligned in their goals and expectations. Comm. LaBarre envisions a third-party funding structure somewhat similar to the community's old coordinated funding system (CoFu).

Comm. Scott noted that Board members have participated in similar bodies in the past; believes that some form of coordination is possible by the end of the current Board term.

Comm. Maciejewski agreed with Comm. Scott and noted that the discussion should focus on the Board's ability to foster transformational improvements for community members in the long-term.

Comm. Hodge said that the goal should not be to mimic the previous coordinated funding system.

Comm. Somerville noted that the County needs more partners and more funding to achieve the Board's goals surrounding human services; emphasized housing and youth services specifically.

Comm. LaBarre noted that replicating CoFu is perhaps impossible; any new funding structure should be equipped to address people's needs immediately and effectively.

Comm. Sanders said that she would like to see a more consistent use of the services and resources that are already available to the County; said that the Racial Equity Office should be included in more projects in a more meaningful way. Comm. Sanders shared that she hopes the Board can walk away from the retreat with actionable steps to improve human services delivery.

Comm. Rahbi stated that he believes that CoFu was reasonably effective; he believes that the coordinated funding system left out smaller nonprofits which lacked the capacity to complete the application process.

Equity Officer Alize Asberry Payne was asked to speak about the New Human Services Partnership's evaluation team; she stated that the County has contracted with outside organizations to complete comprehensive evaluations of ARPA investments.

Comm. Scott clarified that she views the failures of CoFu as being a result of some

participating organizations withdrawing from the partnership.

Administrator Dill stated that the County's ability to align the missions of different organizations was seriously challenged by the previous coordinated funding system; reiterated several Commissioners' thoughts regarding bringing in more partners to fund community organizations.

Comm. Sanders stated that CoFu was too exclusionary, even with regard to the communities which participating organizations purported to serve.

Comm. Rahbi asked about the New Human Services Partnership.

Comm. Hodge said that the New Human Services Partnership consists of the Urban County, the City of Ann Arbor, and Washtenaw County. The Office of Community and Economic Development oversees a committee of community volunteers who review grant applications to the partnership. The New Human Services Partnership funds high-impact grants, mini-grants, and safety net grants.

Comm. Rahbi said that the New Human Services Partnership should seek to be more transparent in its operations.

Provide Good Government

Comm. Scott said that good government is all about transparency in budgeting; noted that it is important for the Board to understand where money is and is not being used.

Comm. Somerville said that the County website is difficult to navigate; suggested making basic budgetary information available on the website.

Administrator Dill agreed with Comm. Somerville's point regarding transparency with County financials.

Comm. Macijewski said that documents that are presented to the Board should be more comprehensive and beneficial to the Board's deliberations at public meetings.

Comm. Somerville suggested that the Working Session be used to host critical conversations relating to the Board's upcoming agenda.

Comm. Beeman said that the Board should have conversations that include information on both funding and relevant outcomes.

Comm. Lyte said that the Commissioners will have to commit to reading information that is provided to them before meetings so as to better facilitate their conversations.

Comm. Rahbi noted that deliberating during public meetings is highly important; spoke to the importance of creating a space safe for disagreement.

Comm. Somerville called a recess at 5:06pm.

Comm. Somerville reconvened the meeting at 5:38pm

Affordable and Available Housing

Comm. Somerville said that she prefers permanent supportive housing because it wraps social services together with affordable housing.

Comm. Beeman noted that there are leaders in municipalities who are passionate about affordable housing but don't know where to start; suggested bringing more voices to the table.

Comm. Somerville said that the County can help play a role in finding and purchasing land for affordable housing developments.

Comm. Rahbi said that building designated affordable housing is the only way to increase the stock of affordable housing; said that building different types of housing will not lead to an increased supply of affordable housing. Comm. Rahbi spoke in support of cooperative housing developments.

Comm. Somerville spoke about the Dorsey Estates development in Ypsilanti

Comm. Hodge noted the County's efforts to increase pathways to homeownership; shared the Commission on Aging's comments regarding housing issues in the County.

Comm. Maciejewski shared about the County Treasurer's efforts to help people experiencing financial challenges remain in their homes.

Comm. Beeman said that County Townships are eligible for similar streams of funding as the larger jurisdictions.

Comm. Hodge said that partnership between jurisdictions throughout the County is paramount to the development of affordable housing.

Comm. Scott said the County should consider the environmental aspects of all housing projects it funds.

Comm. Rahbi spoke in support of a County housing commission and foreclosure prevention programs.

East Side Community and Recreation

Comm. Hodge said that he hopes the community and recreation center breaks ground before the end of the year.

Comm. Rahbi shared his concerns regarding equity between the west and east sides of the County; said that the various partnerships involved with the East Side Community and Recreation Center invite private interests in what should be a public facility.

Comm. Somerville said that she hopes the community and recreation center is accessible to those that need it most.

Administrator Dill said that Administration has had conversations regarding ownership of the site and building; noted that County ownership of the parcel would help facilitate a

project that more closely aligns with the Board's goals. Administrator Dill Spoke about the importance of the County supporting the project's operations, not just its construction.

Comm. Sanders said that the Board had previously agreed to refer to the project as the "East Side Community and Recreation Center" rather than the "East Side Rec Center." Noted that residents immediately proximate to the site should benefit from its construction.

Comm. Beeman spoke about pulling in different community partners.

VI. ITEMS FOR CURRENT/FUTURE DISCUSSION

VII. ADJOURN TO NEXT SESSION

Comm. Justin Hodge, seconded by Comm. Shannon Beeman, moved to adjourn. Voice vote - motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 06:46 PM.

Annie Somerville,
Chair

Lawrence
Kestenbaum,
Clerk/Register
By: Bryce Allmacher, Deputy Clerk

Board Approved: June 7, 2023