HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
Meeting September 16, 2009 5:30 - 7:30

Commissioners Present: Ayse Atasoylu, Marian Darlington-Hope
Staff Present: Ellen Semonoff, Stephanie Ackert, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder)
Presenter: Susan Pacheco, Director of Client Services at the Council On Aging (COA)

Presentations:
Susan Pacheco talked about the contract with HouseWorks and the heavy chores services required to keep seniors in their homes. She introduced the concept of compulsive hoarding, defined by academics as a mental health illness, currently under study at Boston University with a grant from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Compulsive hoarding is manifested by collecting and saving from trash, and clutter. It often affects the mental and physical health and the safety of neighbors; it is a fire hazard and can be an obstacle to emergency responders entering a living space. Hoarding generally starts in childhood by middle school age and does not discriminate by age, gender, race, class, or education. Perhaps three to five percent of the US population are compulsive hoarders. Most tend to live alone and are isolated.

The Cambridge Council On Aging (COA) has a great relationship with the City's Inspectional Services Department (ISD) and the emergency responders. Generally, first responders and ISD refer hoarding situations to COA rather than write a citation. Most of the referrals are from public or subsidized housing, rarely from private homes. Cases are discovered at the time of the annual inspection or recertification for Section 8, or by other agencies that provide services (CASCAP, Visiting Nurse). When these situations become public, first responders, ISD, and the COA are called in. Most clients are not receptive to services and have to be persuaded under the threat of citation and eviction. Susan passed around pictures of clutter and hoarding in a client's apartment. If more money were to become available, there is a need for maintenance and continuous service. HouseWorks would provide the ongoing maintenance. Though the COA usually serves hoarders only once, last week, COA got a referral for a client who was served three years ago.

Jolyon Cowan presented on the HUD designated Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy areas (NRS), Community Based Development Organizations (CBDO) (Please see attached handouts: a map of Cambridge with the location of public housing within the NRS areas, and a map with the location of CDBG funded agencies in relation to the NRS areas, and FY 09 CBDO reports of clients residing in NRS areas).

HUD defines NRS areas, as primarily residential, where 55% of low and low-moderate income households reside. This is identified by the census track information. Most of Area IV, parts of East Cambridge and Cambridgeport were designated NRS areas in 2005. North Cambridge, by Jefferson Park and Rindge Towers, was designated in 2006. HUD's determination of a CBDO is based on the agency's

mission of economic empowerment and locally based organizations with at least 51% community residents on their boards. In FY09, CBDOs reported that 66% of their clients resided in NRS areas.

Ayse asked how best to promote collaboration between agencies given that some are closely located to each other.

Ellen mentioned that the Guidance Center will merge with Riverside Community Care (a regional agency).

Stephanie presented on the CDBG Community Agency Funding History (please see attached two handouts: history and graph of funding).

Cambridge Housing Authority's Tenant Services, Caspar 's Emergency shelter, and Food For Free have been the longest continuously funded agencies. Early on, there was a focus on linguistic services: Concilio, COPA (predecessor to MAPS), and CHAMA (Haitian services) 1991-1995. In 1995, the community agency CHAMA folded. The City subsequently hired one person at the Multi-Service Center for Haitian Services. Ethiopian Services started receiving funding in 1998.

For a while, CDBG funded a supervised teen living apartment on the third floor of 3 Bigelow Street. By its nature it served only few people and it was hard to find the right Resident Assistant compatible with the girls. The YWCA took over the 3rd floor and moved in homeless families through a Department of Transitional Assistance family shelter grant.

Transition House and The Women's Education Center had problems with reporting. This was also the case when we briefly funded Emerge.

For a while, CDBG funded CASPAR alcohol education program for kids operated hand in glove with youth centers. As time went on there were program changes that seemed to make the service unsatisfactory and incompatible for operating within our youth centers.

CDBG funded the Teen Clinic at the high school from 1987-1999. As CDBG funding dwindled and the clinic seemed to have a fair amount of resources, we discontinued contracting with them.

CASCAP was the only agency that asked for seed money for one year and never came back.

Ayse liked the idea of seed money for one year to allow for creativity and imagination of new programs. Stephanie mentioned that at one time for a brief period the City had a community trust fund that would attract grass roots organizations.

Ellen said that having funded programs for many years, there has been a process of weeding out non-performers and current programs provide valuable services and have done well.

Ayse mentioned the need for technical training to agencies in how to measure outcomes. We could also fund some agencies more and some less based on outcomes and appropriate measures.

Ellen mentioned that the Cambridge Community Foundation (CCF) is interested in overlaps of programs. CCF might be interested in working with us or other partners to provide technical assistance to agencies.

Marian suggested that Bob Hurlbut from the CCF be invited to come to a Human Services Commission meeting.

Future conversations:
Marian would like to hear from people involved with middle school education: Khari Milner, Susan Richards, and Adam Corbeil, our Middle School Afterschool Program Coordinator. How is changing the k-8 model progressing? She is also interested in a discussion concerning issues of race and class, access to and utilization of after school programs, and the achievement gap. She noted that a high percentage of children classified as having special needs in the Cambridge Public Schools are African-American. The larger numbers of children in special needs programs are in middle and high school. Many families whose children begin their education in the Cambridge Public Schools have relocated to housing or other opportunities by the time the children have reached middle school age. This is partly reflected in the lower proportion of white students in the upper grades.

Ellen suggested that Dr. Aida Ramos of the School Department's Office of Special Needs, DHSP Inclusion Specialist, Nicole Horton, and Jackie Neal come talk about what they are seeing in the schools.

There was some discussion of keeping an ear to the ground on emerging community issues through various means including newspapers and blogs.

It was noted that Paulina Mauras has mentioned the young adult population (age 24-30) as feeling disconnected from the community and services.

Ellen remarked that the City and DHSP tend to be heavily focused on families while we in fact have fewer family households than many other communities. We do provide services to seniors and to other adults seeking basic education and employment.

Khari Milner cannot attend meetings on Wednesday nights. Chris Hall resigned due to schedule conflict on Wednesdays. There was a decision to poll Commission members about whether to change the meeting to another night, possibly Thursday.