



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

APPROVED
Meeting Minutes
City of Fort Lauderdale
Community Services Board
City Commission Chambers, City Hall
April 11, 2022 – 4:00 P.M.

MEMBERS		PRESENT	ABSENT
Marisol Simon, Chair	P	8	1
Christina Disbrow, Vice Chair	P	5	1
Pamela Aiken	P	2	0
Wismy Cius	P	1	0
Elizabeth Cupido	P	4	2
Gary Hensley	P	1	0
Christi Rice	P	4	1
Dana Somerstein	P	1	0

Staff Present

Rachel Williams, Housing and Community Development Manager
Avis Wilkinson, Assistant Housing and Community Development Manager
Eveline Dsouza, Administrative Supervisor, Housing and Community Development
Carla Blair, Recording Secretary, Prototype, Inc.

Communication to the City Commission

None.

I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

- **Quorum Requirement – As of April 1, 2022, there are 8 appointed members to the Board, which means 5 constitutes a quorum**

Chair Simon called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. It was noted a quorum was present at the meeting.

II. WELCOME / BOARD AND STAFF INTRODUCTIONS

New Board members Wismy Cius and Gary Hensley introduced themselves at this time.

Ms. Williams emphasized that the funding recommendations the Board will make today will be recommendations only, as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has not yet provided the City with the amount of its official award. HUD has also added a new requirement: the City may not submit a projected Annual Action Plan, but must submit a complete document reflecting the amount of its allocation.

Ms. Williams explained that this means the City's allocation may have increased or decreased; however, until they have received official word of their allocation, a final decision cannot be made.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MARCH 14, 2022

Motion made by Ms. Cupido, seconded by Mr. Hensley, to accept the minutes from last month. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

IV. CDBG FY 22-23 GRANT APPLICATION PRESENTATION

Ms. Dsouza stated that the presenters from each organization will have three minutes to present their request. The Board will then have seven minutes to question the Applicants. Once the presentations have concluded, the Board will determine the agencies' funding allocations.

1. Covenant House Florida

Betsy Syrien, representing Covenant House Florida, explained that this agency is a youth crisis shelter serving young people under the age of 21. They provide residential services to individuals experiencing some form of homelessness. Clients receive shelter, food, and clothing, followed by an assessment to determine what can be done to help them either reunite with family members or transition to independence.

Clients may receive physical assessments, parenting education and support, on-site education, group counseling, and workforce readiness training. The average length of stay is 30 days.

Covenant House Florida is requesting \$25,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, which will directly support the needs of their clients in the form of supplies, food, hygiene, and bedding. It will also support a portion of the salary of the agency's independent living coordinator.

Ms. Syrien estimated that 40% of young clients return to the facility after leaving the program. Some of the organization's programs require six-month follow-up to determine if the client has maintained education, work, or other goals.

Chair Simon requested additional clarification of how Covenant House Florida works, including its relation to the Orlando branch of the agency. Ms. Syrien explained that Covenant House Florida began in Fort Lauderdale 36 years ago; ten years after it began, the Orlando branch opened to serve young mothers and children under the age of 21. The two entities function together despite being located in different cities. Much of the Fort Lauderdale chapter's leadership has been with the organization between five and 21 years.

Ms. Aiken requested information on how the program fared during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Syprien replied that at the beginning of the pandemic, there was a significant increase in needs for different services. They are still experiencing a great need due to current housing costs, as many clients cannot afford market rates.

2. Delta Education and Life Development Foundation

Chair Simon noted that this agency has withdrawn its application.

3. Jack & Jill Children's Center

Lauren Bernstein, representing Jack and Jill Children's Center, advised that this organization's mission is to strengthen children and families through education, supportive programming, and community engagement.

Jack and Jill focuses on both children and families in a two-generation model, offering family strengthening programs so both children and parents have tools for success. This program provides services such as case management, emergency funding, a food and clothing pantry, and adult education through their own teachers as well as through community partners. Families in the program are required to be employed or in school. Tuition is based on income.

Jack and Jill Children's Center is requesting funding for its Promising Futures Empowerment Scholarships, which serve children in its early education program. This program provides early childhood education, enabling children to grow emotionally and physically in a safe and nurturing environment. Children are provided with two hot meals and one snack each day, as well as preventative health care and screenings. The agency also provides therapy for children with counseling services from community partners. Most families served by this program live or work in Fort Lauderdale.

Ms. Rice requested clarification of whether the 12 to 20 clients to be served would be individuals or households. Ms. Bernstein replied that these are individuals, pointing out that a parent may have more than one child in a program, each of whom would be required to pay some tuition in addition to their scholarship.

Mr. Hensley requested additional information on the sliding scale used to determine tuition. Ms. Bernstein stated that this is based on salary and family size, with priority given to students who demonstrate the highest need.

4. Oasis of Hope Community Development Corporation

Jacqueline Reed-Stills and Martha Toomer, representing Oasis of Hope Community Development Corporation, stated that this organization serves the Fort Lauderdale community as a HUD-approved counseling agency. They provide affordable and safe homes for families with low to moderate incomes. The programs for which they are

seeking funding would assist first-time home buyers, help prevent foreclosure, and offer financial literacy for young people. Most of the individuals who participate in Oasis of Hope's program are facing challenges that hinder them in becoming first-time home buyers, or difficulties making financial choices between paying mortgage or rent and other bills.

Ms. Toomer explained that the program uses a workshop model. Many families may face difficulties as homeowners due to a lack of budgeting or guidance in making better financial decisions. She also noted that rent increases are forcing families to consider relocation. The agency reaches out to families with low to moderate incomes to provide them with resources, such as assistance with down payment or closing costs, one-on-one financial counseling, and resources for families facing eviction.

Ms. Rice noted that Oasis of Hope's application had a number of issues, including missing performance indicators and recent financial information. Ms. Reed-Stills advised that the agency undergoes an audit every three years, which is the reason the most recent audit was from 2019.

Chair Simon suggested that the agency's representatives could provide additional information on their proposed performance indicators. Ms. Taylor replied that their goal is to reach 400 additional individuals or couples within the community. These clients provide information during the intake and counseling procedures as well as during 30-, 60-, and 90-day follow-up periods. The organization hopes to assist 90% of the 400 clients.

Clients attend monthly workshops and sign up for one-on-one counseling appointments, after which Oasis of Hope schedules ongoing follow-up contacts with them. Goals are set for clients during the initial workshop. It may take 12 months to five years for clients to meet these goals. If credit, for example, is a barrier to home ownership, Oasis of Hope works with that client to improve their credit issues.

Clarification was requested of what would be considered a success for the 400 clients the agency hopes to reach. Ms. Reed-Stills stated that the program reaches out to clients who have attended the first workshop but have not scheduled one-on-one counseling.

Ms. Cupido asked how Oasis of Hope makes its services known to the community. Ms. Taylor replied that in addition to their role as a nonprofit agency, Oasis of Hope is also a developer with the mission of building affordable homes. They advertise through social media, banking partners, schools and churches, and other community organizations, as well as word-of-mouth, to communicate that there are options for prospective homeowners.

5. South Florida Institute on Aging (SOFIA)

Victoria Ruiz, representing the South Florida Institute on Aging (SOFIA), recalled that the agency's Senior Companion Program has received CDBG funding in the past. This program serves residents with low to moderate incomes and isolated older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers. They take a holistic approach to improving economic stability, social insights, and community services that empower residents to continue to thrive as they age.

The Senior Companion Program's federal funding requires a 10% local match. It creates volunteer opportunities for adults 55 years of age or older to provide individualized companionship and services to clients and their caregivers. These services reduce social isolation, improve mental health and quality of life, and enable both volunteers and clients to live independently for as long as possible.

In 2021, the program supported 93 senior companion volunteers, 36 of whom were Fort Lauderdale residents. It also served 179 clients, 26 of whom were Fort Lauderdale residents. The agency has a current client waiting list of 86 individuals. The requested funding would allow SOFIA to expedite services for Fort Lauderdale clients and recruit more volunteers. Clients reported an overall improvement in their lives as well as feelings of well-being. Caregivers reported that they were able to have short-term relief, and senior companion volunteers reported being more active and that the program had a positive impact on their ability to continue living independently.

While the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily forced SOFIA to remove its volunteers from in-person service, they developed alternative ways to maintain engagement through technology. This has since been incorporated as a permanent part of the service model.

Ms. Somerstein asked if the \$50,000 requested by SOFIA represents the 10% match or is above the 10% threshold. Ms. Ruiz replied that this amount is slightly above 10%. She added that the organization serves more clients who reside in Fort Lauderdale but whose addresses may be outside the millage area, or who may not wish to provide additional information to show that they are residents of the City.

6. Broward Partnership for the Homeless

Ryon Coote, representing Broward Partnership for the Homeless, advised that this organization is the largest comprehensive provider of services to the homeless in the County. Their services include stabilization, housing, and food, and their goal is to reduce homelessness by promoting independence, advocacy, housing, and comprehensive services.

The Partnership requests funding to support its emergency shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness in Broward County, with priority placement given to residents of Fort Lauderdale. This funding will assist with the costs of essential services, including basic facility supplies, meal provisions, transportation services, personal hygiene supplies, and other supplies needed to help the target population. Individuals

and families reside in the Central Homeless Assistance Center, which is a 57,000 sq. ft. facility on 2.7 acres. Funding would go toward services provided at this center, which is a 230-bed facility.

Ms. Aiken asked if new construction is being added to the Central Homeless Assistance Center. Mr. Coote replied that this construction is for a new development that will be located on the former parking lot of this facility. The new development will be a 72-unit affordable housing project, of which 36 units will go to individuals who formerly experienced homelessness.

Mr. Coote recalled that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Center was forced to reduce its capacity and change its model of care, as social distancing can be difficult in its environment. This created a delay in spending the CDBG funds provided to them in an earlier cycle. He thanked the City for allowing them to retain this funding and move it forward, as costs of food and services have increased since the pandemic.

7. Habitat for Humanity of Broward

Casey Huber, representing Habitat for Humanity of Broward, stated that this organization's mission is to bring people together to build homes and communities. They assist clients with low to moderate incomes by helping them into housing and home ownership. Habitat for Humanity has been a part of the Broward community since 1983, and all the funds it generates remain in Broward County.

The agency is seeking funding for improvements to its ReStore, which is approximately 2600 sq. ft. in size and generates \$1 million in funding for the organization. This translates to five to seven homes per year. They are requesting \$48,000, which would repair the ReStore's roof.

It was noted that the roof repair may not be eligible for CDBG funds, as it is considered construction. There were also no leveraged funds cited in the application. Mr. Huber explained that the intent of the request was to avoid diverting funds from the agency's other affordable housing programs.

Ms. Williams clarified that construction requests are ineligible for Public Services CDBG dollars, which are the Community Services Board's purview. An application for capital improvements would have to come through a different forum.

8. Women in Distress of Broward County

Susan Evans and Jeffrey Metcalf, representing Women in Distress of Broward County, advised that this organization is the only nationally accredited state-certified domestic violence center in Broward County. They are the largest domestic violence shelter in Florida, with 132 beds in their emergency facility. They serve over 3000 survivors each year.

While there are no income requirements for clients to qualify for services, approximately 90% of clients have low to moderate incomes. The largest percentage of domestic violence survivors in the facility are residents of Fort Lauderdale. In 2021, Women in Distress provided over \$1.1 million in services to Fort Lauderdale residents, including nearly 7000 nights of emergency shelter; over 4600 hours of advocacy, counseling, and therapy; over 2000 crisis hotline calls; and education and prevention services.

Women in Distress is requesting \$50,000 to supplement the costs of providing emergency shelter and supportive services to a minimum of 50 Fort Lauderdale residents over the coming year. In addition to shelter, they will provide advocacy, safety planning, food, clothing, therapy, financial literacy classes, housing assistance, and other resources needed to empower adults and children to heal from domestic violence abuse and build financial self-sufficiency.

The demand for domestic violence services is rising due to pandemic-related stressors. This underscores the need for the services provided by Women in Distress, as many clients would be homeless without their shelter services. They have a long history of leveraging public and private funding and meeting or exceeding their deliverables. The requested CDBG funds represent 3% of the agency's proposed budget.

Chair Simon noted that the remaining two agencies would fall under the Community Based Development Organizations (CBDO) category.

9. Prevention Central / Mount Bethel

Tierra Smith, representing Prevention Central, explained that this agency was founded in 1993 due to the overrepresentation of minorities in the juvenile justice system. They are requesting \$120,000 to provide daily and weekly assistance to 80 families. Their services include operation of a weekly food pantry, which offers both drive-through and indoor food assistance. Clients are provided with a questionnaire which helps the organization determine the barriers in place that have led them to seek assistance. The agency hopes to establish case management for these families and provide them with the education and resources they need.

Over the last year, the need for food pantry services has increased significantly. Prevention Central also receives calls from the Fort Lauderdale Police Department requesting that they assist families who experience emergencies, such as house fires or youth homicides. Their Family Resource Center also serves infants, children, and families in need of services. These clients are also given a needs assessment to determine and address the reason for children's behavioral issues.

Ms. Smith noted that the 33311 ZIP code, in which Prevention Central's offices are located, includes the largest area of referrals for juveniles and at-risk families.

Vice Chair Disbrow asked if the program addresses job creation or placement. Ms. Smith stated that job creation and career-building are offered as part of the program. Within the last year, Prevention Central has assisted roughly 21 individuals with job placement. They foresee that this number will increase as their programs expand.

Ms. Williams clarified that the nature of the activities described in the application would meet the criteria for Public Service CDBG funding, as the application itself does not reflect an emphasis on creating jobs.

Vice Chair Disbrow asked Ms. Smith if she would be amenable to changing the category for Prevention Central's application from CBDO to Public Service. Ms. Smith asked if this would limit the amount of funding that is available to serve the community. Ms. Smith replied that she would be willing to make this change for the application in order to continue to serve the organization's clients.

Ms. Williams briefly explained that CBDOs are organizations whose physical address is within a neighborhood revitalization strategy area. CBDOs must also focus on economic development through the creation of full-time or long-standing part-time jobs or internships that lead to full-time jobs.

10. HOMES, Inc.

RaShani Boynton, representing HOMES, Inc., stated that the grant funding sought by the organization directly affects its young tenants. They are provided with food, toiletries, bedding, bus passes, and other necessities. The internship program works with community partners, many of whom have hired youth who are still employed by those programs.

Mr. Hensley requested clarification of the number of young people who would be assisted by the grant. Ms. Boynton explained that the program consistently serves youth aged 18 to 24, while the internship program serves 16- to 22-year-olds. They do not place a cap on this number. The organization also has the capacity to house 21 youth in its facilities, who may stay there for varying amounts of time. She concluded that the agency has exceeded its capacity.

Ms. Rice noted that HOMES, Inc. has recently merged with another organization. Ms. Boynton emphasized that the two organizations are stronger together, as their missions align and complement one another; however, they remain two separate entities.

Ms. Aiken asked if 24 years is the cutoff age for services. Ms. Boynton replied that when a client is 23, the agency addresses their monetary situation, including whether or not they will be able to sustain housing on their own. By age 24 and nine months, the client has developed a plan and works with life coaches and agency support to determine what their future will look like before they transition from the program to sustainable housing.

V. BOARD REVIEW FINAL SCORES AND RECOMMEND ALLOCATION

1. CDBG FY 22-23 Grant Application City Staff to assist the Board with:

- **Budget & Expenditure of prior year**
- **FY 22-23 Applicants' Final Score**

Ms. Dsouza showed a visual of the members' scores for each entity prior to the presentations. She advised that scores can be changed on the Board members' individual scoring sheets and then changed on the screen as well so the combined scores can be tabulated. The Board members provided Staff with any scores that needed to be changed.

It was noted that the adjusted scores did not change the overall ranking of the Applicants, which was as follows:

- Covenant House of Florida
- Broward Partnership for the Homeless
- Women in Distress of Broward County
- Jack and Jill Children's Center
- SOFIA
- Oasis of Hope

Delta Education and Life Development Foundation and Habitat for Humanity of Broward were not included in the final ranking.

- **Requested funds by each applicant**

The Board reviewed the amounts provided to Applicants in the FY 2021-2022 funding cycle, noting that when these amounts were combined, it would exceed the estimated available funding.

It was noted that Prevention Central's funding request could come from Public Services rather than CBDO funds, as the organization's representative had agreed to this change. Ms. Cupido pointed out, however, that if the organization meets the qualifications for CBDO funding, there would be no benefit to changing them to the Public Services category.

Ms. Williams advised that the Board may make the decision to move Prevention Central to Public Services rather than CBDO funding; however, she pointed out that the grant agreements for these two categories are very different, as the CBDO grant agreement requires significantly more documentation for the economic development component.

She also noted that Prevention Central's budget leans heavily on its supportive services component rather than on economic development.

The Board members requested input from Prevention Central's representative on this change. Ms. Smith stated that the agency would be willing to move to the Public Services category, although she emphasized that they were willing to provide the additional documentation required for the CBDO category, as they provide economic development services as well.

Ms. Somerstein noted that Prevention Central is currently funded under the CBDO category and is aware of the requirements of that program. She added that moving the organization to the Public Services category would significantly affect the amount of funding they could be provided. It was determined that Prevention Central would remain in the CBDO category.

▪ **Total available funds for allocation**

Chair Simon explained that the Board would lessen the funding amounts to the agencies whose applications were less strong. The Board members agreed by consensus with this recommendation.

Mr. Hensley suggested that the top three scoring agencies be awarded their full funding requests, which were as follows:

- Covenant House of Florida: \$25,000
- Broward Partnership for the Homeless: \$50,000
- Women in Distress of Broward County: \$50,000

Ms. Cupido recommended funding Jack and Jill Children's Center at the same amount as in the previous year, which was \$45,000.

Ms. Somerstein cautioned that awarding the top three scoring agencies with their full requests could mean the Board is giving more to these organizations because they requested it rather than in alignment with the number of individuals they plan to serve with the grant funds. She spoke in favor of reviewing the requests before these numbers are finalized so they are aware of how the organizations will serve the public with these funds.

Ms. Rice observed that if the Board uses the City Commission's 2022 priorities as a reference, not all organizations are closely aligned with these priorities. Vice Chair Disbrow agreed, stating that she had taken this into consideration when determining her scores.

The Board members discussed options for funding SOFIA and Oasis of Hope, which were the two agencies whose priorities were less closely aligned with the City Commission's priorities. As Oasis of Hope had requested \$25,000 and SOFIA \$50,000,

they proposed reducing these amounts to \$12,500 and \$25,000 respectively. It was noted that both of these agencies had requested local matching funds.

Ms. Reed-Stills, representing Oasis of Hope, stated that any amount the agency received would serve to enhance their programming. Ms. Ruiz, representing SOFIA, advised that a 10% match would total \$38,175. The federal AmeriCorps Seniors program provides them with sufficient funding for stipends for a specific number of volunteers, and the requested funds from the City would be used in the event that more funds are needed for stipends. They would be able to continue the program, but the reduction would mean their focus may be on other cities. Both representatives emphasized that the organizations would be grateful for any assistance.

The Board members next addressed CBDO funding, with Ms. Cupido noting that the City Commission's priorities focus on homelessness and housing opportunities. She pointed out that HOMES, Inc. specifically addresses these needs, and recommended providing this agency with the majority of available CBDO funds. Mr. Hensley agreed with this suggestion.

Ms. Cupido proposed funding HOMES, Inc. at \$90,000, with the remainder going to Prevention Central. Vice Chair Disbrow pointed out that the City Commission's priorities do not address many of the issues facing Fort Lauderdale residents. She emphasized that the services provided by Prevention Central enable City residents to be able to pay their rent and assist needy families in other ways as well.

Chair Simon commented that both the CBDO applications were very strong and were highly rated by the Board members. Because the requested funding amounts are significantly higher than the estimated available funds, she suggested funding both agencies at 50% of their requests, which would mean Prevention Central would receive \$60,000 and HOMES, Inc. would receive \$62,500.

Ms. Rice observed that there was a significant disparity in the scoring and ranking of the two agencies, with HOMES, Inc. receiving the higher ranking. She did not agree with funding the two agencies at the same levels for this reason. Ms. Somerstein proposed a 70/30 split in funding, which would allocate \$86,221.42 for HOMES, Inc. and \$36,952.04 for Prevention Central. There was consensus among the members in favor of this 70/30 division of funds.

Chair Simon reminded all present that these figures would need to be revisited when the City receives its funding allocations from HUD. There was consensus from the Board to direct Staff to make any changes consistent with the 70/30 split of funds.

Mr. Cius asked if the 70/30 split of funding was due to the two organizations' scopes of services. Chair Simon replied that there seemed to be consensus that the services provided by HOMES, Inc. were more consistent with the goals of the City Commission. The 70/30 division was also consistent with the relative ratings of the two applications.

Chair Simon requested a motion to finalize the above funding recommendations, with the provision that Staff modify the recommended amounts based on the final allocations from HUD. Ms. Cupido proposed that the Board may wish to revisit these recommendations if the final allocations are significantly different from the estimate. Ms. Williams agreed that the Board would need to weigh in on any changes if the allocation represents a substantial reduction; if the reduction is from 5% to 10%, however, she felt Staff could adjust the amounts accordingly.

Motion made by Vice Chair Disbrow, seconded by Mr. Hensley, to finalize these funding recommendations with the provision that Staff should modify these recommendations based on the final allocation from HUD; and that we would like the Staff to modify the recommendations if the final allocation is within 10% of what we thought it might be. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

VI. ELECTION OF NEW CHAIR & VICE CHAIR

Motion made by Ms. Disbrow, seconded by Ms. Cupido, to nominate Christi Rice for Vice Chair. In a voice vote, Ms. Rice was unanimously elected Vice Chair.

Motion made by Ms. Disbrow, seconded by Mr. Hensley, to nominate herself for Chair.

Motion made by Ms. Aiken to nominate Dana [Sommerstein] for Chair. Ms. Sommerstein declined to accept the nomination.

In a voice vote, Ms. Disbrow was unanimously elected Chair.

VII. GOOD OF THE ORDER

The Board and Staff members thanked outgoing Chair Simon for her service to the Board and to the community.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Linda Taylor, CEO of HOMES, Inc., Ms. Smith of Prevention Central, and Ms. Reed-Stills of Oasis of Hope thanked the Board for their consideration and funding of the City's nonprofit entities.

IX. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA

Ms. Williams stated that it was unlikely the Board would receive the HUD allocations in time for discussion at the next meeting, as HUD had indicated the earliest date for these figures would be May 13, 2022. Ms. Dsouza added that the Housing Opportunities for Persons with HIV/AIDS (HOPWA) would be present at the next meeting to provide performance reports.

X. COMMUNICATIONS TO CITY COMMISSION

None.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Any written public comments made 48 hours prior to the meeting regarding items discussed during the proceedings have been attached hereto.

[Minutes prepared by K. McGuire, Prototype, Inc.]