

Housing & Human Services Master Plan Advisory Committee

April 12, 2005

Meeting Summary

The sixth quarterly meeting of the Housing and Human Services Master Plan Advisory Committee was held April 12, 2005 from 4:00 to 6:30 pm at the West Boulder Senior Center.

Participants: Jacob Blass, Helen Dorsey Corbett, Nino Gallo, Jerry Lee, Jane Nelson, Susan Moore, Clara Perez-Mendez, Barbara Pingrey, Ardie Schulster, Chuck Stout, Barbara Ryan

Staff: John Pollak, Karen Rahn, John Riggle, Richard Johnson, Linda Hill-Blakley

Materials were distributed both in advance of and at the meeting, including:

- Revised Recommendation Section of the Draft Housing and Human Services Master Plan
- Summary of Comments from the Public
- Written comments from Ardie Schulster, Advisory Committee member
- Draft Housing, Social Equity and Diversity Policy Items for the April 26 joint City Council Planning Board Meeting on the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Update

The meeting agenda included:

- Overview of Timeline
- Review and Discussion of Public Process Comments and Suggestions
- Review and Discussion of Revisions to the Recommendations Section of the HHS Master Plan
- Update on Proposed Housing, Social Equity and Diversity Policies for the Boulder Valley Comprehensive
- Next Steps: Public Presentations Remaining, Revisions to Draft Plan, Planning Board and Council Meetings, Next Advisory Committee Meeting

Overview of Timeline

The timeline was reviewed to provide an overview of where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going.

Phase One: The first phase of the project, the “Data Portfolio” phase, is essentially complete. This included research and discussion related to current services, demographic highlights, with input from the Advisory Committee’s study groups that concentrated on each of the four HHS divisions, as well an input from the HHS staff.

Phase Two: The second phase of the project, “Analysis and Strategies,” identified key trends, gaps and issues, mission, principles, policies and roles that guide the work of the Department.

Phase Three: Currently, we are in the third phase of the project, focused on “Recommendations” that address policies and investment scenarios. As a part of this phase, staff is conducting a comprehensive public process on the work of the master plan to date. Following discussion at the April 12 Advisory Committee meeting and consideration of input from the public process, revisions will be made to the draft plan. A Study Session is scheduled with City Council on August 9, to be followed by Planning Board review in late August or early September, with ultimate presentation of the plan to Council anticipated for late September or October. One more meeting is anticipated for the Advisory Committee, likely to be in early to mid-September

Public Process

In the months of January, February and March 2005, staff provided copies to interested organizations and individuals of the Draft Housing and Human Services Master Plan and made presentations to the following groups: the Boulder Human Services Alliance, the Boulder Human Relations Commission, the Boulder Youth Opportunities Advisory Board, City of Boulder Department Directors, Housing and Human Services general staff, and Housing and Human Services management staff.

An Open House and Public Forum was held for the general public on March 30. Electronic copies of the Master Plan were sent to approximately 300 organizations and individuals in the Boulder community, requesting comment and input. Future input forums are planned with City staff, selected City of Boulder Department Directors, the Commissioners for Boulder Housing Partners and a focus group with Latino immigrants.

A raw notes summary of the comments received in forums held to date was provided, organized by comments related to the HHS Department and broader community, then for each of the four divisions of the Department. A number of the comments reinforced issues identified in the draft master plan, with other comments suggesting other areas for consideration. Highlights of the public comments are summarized below.

Overview of Public Comment

Department and Community-Wide

- Community awareness: Frequently reoccurring comments stressed the importance of educating the broader community that Boulder does have a substantial low income population and others at-risk, and the important role housing and human services plays in providing basic safety net services and contributing to the economy. An intentional and well-orchestrated public relations effort could assist in cultivating this sense of community awareness.

- Collaboration: The noteworthy extent of successful community collaborations in human services provided in the community was stressed, as was the role HHS plays in building the capacity of the community system of services.
- Social Engineering: The concept of social engineering was raised: What do we want our community to look and be like? What policies and programs can help support that?
- Social Filters: The concept of instituting a social filter on items going before Council was viewed as important. As policies, programs and development occurs, it is important to make those decisions in the context of impacts on the social fabric of the community.
- Revenues: There is a critical underlying assumption that to sustain existing programs and services of the department, revenues must keep up with increased costs, including the continuation of the .15% sales tax that contributes about \$1 million annually for contracts for community agencies.
- National Policies: The impact of changing national policies needs to be emphasized more in the plan. Specifically, the master plan should be adjusted to reflect the substantial reduction in the Community Development Block Grant program, which will impact Boulder significantly.
- Cultural Sensitivity: With the growth of the Latino population, the need to engage that population in the community, to provide services in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner, and for more Spanish speaking staff at agencies was emphasized.

Children, Youth and Families

- Child Care: There was strong agreement that child care is a major area of need—the capacity of the infant and toddler care system, more scholarships for a wider range of families, and sick child care options were specifically stressed.
- Youth: Boulder is rich in many outdoor activities, restaurants and higher end shopping. Often lacking are more “regular” and affordable things for youth to do: bowling alleys, inexpensive movies, places to “hang.” Youth feel at a disadvantage and in competition with college students for jobs, with suggestions for more partnerships with businesses and internships with the City as possibilities.
- Transportation: Transportation was stressed as a problem for many of HHS clients, especially middle school youth, but also seniors, with the possibility of a van pool raised.

Community Services

- Health Care: The crisis of the escalating national health care situation was a common comment, resulting in people having to spend a greater portion of their incomes on health care, thereby reducing the amount people have available for housing, food, child care and other essential needs.
- Food: There is not enough mention in the draft plan of food as a basic safety net need, and that this is clearly a major issue for many people in the community, including a large number of children and families, in the community.

Housing

- Homeowner Associations: Development trends in the community are producing denser housing, typically involving homeowner associations. This emerging trend points to the need for more assistance in how neighbors relate with one another.
- Housing for Families: The affordable housing program and the 10% affordable housing goal were viewed as appropriate for the community. However, development trends are not always producing housing that is appealing to all families, leading families to seek housing outside of Boulder.
- Inexpensive Housing: The need for inexpensive housing for people with marginal incomes was raised on a number of occasions, with the challenges of this recognized given the current housing market and cost of land.

Senior Services

- Intergenerational Programming: Efforts to expand such opportunities were suggested, emphasizing involving seniors more as a resource in the community; they possess many skills that could be of great community benefit.
- Future Planning: The need for future planning for the upcoming projected surge in the senior population was reaffirmed, recognizing that many, but not all, may be able to pay for increased services.
- Recuperating from Cuts: It was noted that senior services has been cut by 3 staff positions over recent years, and that the proposed increase in Investment Scenario Two would bring HHS back to where it was previously.

Master Plan Document

- Non-City Sources of Revenues: It was suggested that the plan needs to be more explicit that a substantial amount of funding for HHS is from outside sources, and that the future of those funds may not be certain. In particular, it was suggested that the plan be more explicit about the major reduction to the Community Development Block Grant.
- Stabilizing the Tax Base: With all scenarios, it was noted that what is essential is maintaining and increasing a stable tax base for the City in order to be able to continue to provide existing services. The connection with economic vitality efforts is therefore very important.
- Priority Goals: It was noted that the HHS Department works in two priority goals of Council, housing and community sustainability. At the same time, the general fund contributes a relatively limited portion of the HHS budget (about 25%).

Discussion of Public Comment

The members of the Advisory Committee discussed the public comment. Highlights from that discussion are offered below.

- **Outreach to the Business Community:** More outreach to the business community, such as the Chamber and realtors is needed. We need to make a clear statement that these services are important to businesses in the community. Particularly with health care, company policies can exacerbate problems when employees do not get health insurance or a living wage.
- **Undocumented Workers:** We also need to engage the business community in the undocumented worker issues. There are instances of employers cheating workers on paychecks, with those workers feeling that because of their undocumented status they may have little recourse. It was noted that the Office of Human Rights in HHS has seen an increase in such cases and has been successful in assisting workers get remedy to such situations.
- **Leveraging of Funds:** HHS is very successful at getting outside sources of funds as a match for City funds. This leveraging should continue, but City general funds are needed as a strong base of City commitment. Outside sources of funds vary in their stability and predictability which can impact services.
- **Information and Marketing of Affordable Housing and other Services:** Have we adequately addressed how people get into affordable housing and should there be additional marketing efforts? Current City housing programs target those making up to 80% of the area median income; there is a shared equity program, as well as first home downpayment assistance. The County offers a homeownership training program, both in English and Spanish. More outreach to employers, such as the school district, would be helpful. Information on all services, including housing, is now available through the United Way 2-1-1 phone line.
- **Continued Work with the University.** University students clearly put a strain on the housing market. The University recently produced an additional several hundred beds near Williams Village, and currently is not pursuing any expansion in enrollment. Work needs to continue with the University in addressing student housing needs.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

There are two main components of the Recommendations. First are the policy recommendations, which include policies for the HHS Department and Community-Wide issues, as well as policies related to the work of the four divisions of the HHS Department (Children, Youth and Families; Community Services; Housing; and Senior Services). These policy recommendations are proposed regardless of which investment scenario is pursued. Second, all City master plans are required to propose recommendations related to three levels of “investment” scenarios.

- **Fiscally constrained scenario,** which is essentially a flat level of funding, assuming current levels of funding. It is important to note that this assumes outside sources of funds will be maintained, including the continuation of the .15% sales tax, which will expire during the planning period.

- Action scenario, which addresses funding needed to meet goals established by Council. This includes the 10% affordable housing goal as well as new goals being developed by the Community Sustainability Goal Committee of Council.
- Vision scenario: In the ideal world, what should a higher level of funding address? What are the broadest goals to which housing and human services should aspire?

Discussion of Recommendations

The Advisory Committee members discussed the proposed scenarios, focusing primarily on the vision scenario; highlights of their comments are offered below.

- **Maintaining Existing Funding:** Maintenance of the existing level of funding will require substantial effort, both in terms of continuing to pursue and acquire grants and program fees, as well as the continuation of the .15% sales tax.
- **Building on Ability to Pay:** We need to acknowledge and build upon services that people are willing and able to pay for, such as parenting education. Payments made by those who can afford it can help subsidize services for those who cannot afford to pay. Sliding fee scales can assist in cost recovery. An example is the parenting education offered by the Health Department for alcohol abuse; parents acquire skills for working with their kids on alcohol issues.
- **Community Engagement:** More efforts are needed to build a sense of community. Are there sufficient opportunities for people to be engaged and come together with each other in our community? Money is not always the issue, although organization of such efforts does require some investment. Examples of simple ways to encourage interaction are such things as babysitting coops, garden tool sharing, use of senior volunteers. Longmont is in the process of a major community visioning effort that may be a model to further investigate.
- **Complementary Currency:** Complementary currency, a form of a bartering system, is a concept being promoted by a local economist, Bernard Lightner at Naropa. People who lack money can contribute time. For example, in exchange for two hours of services for the elderly, you get the equivalent of two hours of health care services. An added benefit could be promoting more intergenerational efforts. Jacob indicated an interest in scheduling an exploratory meeting with the local economist; other interested Advisory Committee members will be invited to join. Staff will assist Jacob with meeting arrangements and distributing a meeting notice.
- **Community Diversity:** The diversity of our community is already limited and at risk for deteriorating further. We need to be serious in our efforts to preserve and promote diversity in our community.
- **New Funding Sources, Engaging the Private Sector, and Community Awareness:** We need to understand that there are limits to new sources of funds. New taxes should be considered, but pursued very cautiously. Again, engaging the private sector and business community is important. At the same time, building human services in the community helps build and frame the future nature and composition of the community. More community awareness would assist.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** In the process of educating the community, agencies need to be encouraged to address cultural issues appropriately. More information needs to be

available, and through a variety of forms. Web-based information is good, but not available for everyone; outreach is essential.

- Social Capital: People in our community represent an important resource, and the importance of investing in the human element of our community must be stressed.

Revisions to the Draft Master Plan

Revisions will be made to the draft HHS Master Plan based on public comment and discussion from the Advisory Committee members (including written comments provided by Advisory Committee member Ardie Schulster.) Comments will be organized as follows:

1. Items to be included or enhanced in the plan,
2. Items that are already included,
3. Items that are not recommended for inclusion, and
4. Items that need discussion to determine if they should be included.

Following this organization and consideration of comments, revisions will be made to the draft plan and revised drafts distributed to Advisory Committee members prior to the August 9 study session with Council.

Additionally, work will be done to reduce the length of the document and make it more readable. The plan will be divided into two parts, the main body of the document and the appendices will be separated. Possibly, the tables listing funding recipients for the last ten years will constitute a third part. This should enhance the readability of the document. In this way the main body of the plan will be much shorter, and the recommendations section will be at the end of the document and thus much easier to access. The draft plan will also be edited for areas of duplication.

Update on the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Policies

On April 26, Planning Board and City Council will be having a joint meeting on the major update in progress on the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan. A draft of items related to housing and human services was distributed. A portion of the joint meeting will involve discussion of areas for policy revisions and changes. In terms of general policies, it is proposed that there be principles that articulate the concept of “core community values.” This would consist of the four “E’s:” environmental sustainability, economic vitality, equity, and engagement.

In terms of policies, two issues that have emerged from the HHS Master Plan process related to housing that are being put forth for discussion: increasing opportunities for housing options for families and exploring options for very inexpensive housing for people with marginal incomes. Additionally, a number of items related to social equity and diversity are being proposed that address diversity, community engagement, and responding to changing needs and demographics.

Next Steps

Next steps include the following:

- **Culmination of the public process:** Staff will be completing several scheduled presentations and conducting a Latino focus group.
- **Revisions to the draft plan:** As previously described, comments will be evaluated, and the draft master plan will be revised accordingly.
- **Council and Planning Board:** A study session with City Council is scheduled for August 9, to be followed by Planning Board review of the draft plan. A final plan is expected to be presented to Council at the end of September or early October.
- **Next Advisory Committee Meeting:** A final Advisory Committee meeting is expected in early- to mid-September, after the study session with Council and the meeting with the Planning Board. Staff will be requesting meeting date availability from the Advisory Committee members prior to scheduling that September meeting.