

Housing & Human Service Committee Minutes
Thursday, January 7th, 2021

Committee Members Present: Osi Kaminer, Ayisha Oglivie, Edda Santiago, Bruce Robertson, Leo Jimenez, Marielle Ali, and Ariel Miranda

Public Members Present: Marshall Vanderpool

Fellow Board Members Present: N/A

Agenda

1. Call to Order

Ariel: Called the meeting to order, discussed what the agenda entailed, and asked committee members as well as members of the public to introduce themselves.

2. Presentation by Regina Taylor Tuck regarding Community Options, Inc.'s services

Regina: Introduced herself as the Regional Director of the NYC region at Community Options Inc. as well as Kerry Brady, the State Director of Community Options Inc. Stated their organization is a non-profit agency funded by the state responsible for providing services for persons with developmental disabilities. The services range from day services, employment, and residential services. They have two apartments within the district that are located at 167th street which are 24-hour residential programs with staff on duty at all times.

Kerry: Stated that in addition to providing services to adults and children with developmental disabilities they also provide services to individuals with traumatic brain injuries, under what are considered nursing homes transition programs, and individuals in need of home care. They service people across all five boroughs, have locations in upstate New York, and are a part of a national company with locations in 10 other states servicing over 5,000 people so that they can live a quality life, independent, and enjoy time with their families.

Osi: Asked why they only have two apartments and stated she felt the number of apartments might not be enough

Kerry: Stated that their organization typically locates apartments based on where the need arises and so it has more but will really look to find apartments based on where the clients are requesting being able to live.

Ariel: Asked how the organization works alongside NYS government in its relationship to service its clients

Kerry: Stated that when clients undergo assessments by the State, the NYS Department of Health deems eligible individuals based on the diagnosis of a developmental disability. Once this happens, the Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is responsible for connecting the client with a case manager and the case manager will build the support needed based upon what the individual wants. This may typically differ based upon what the client wants. Some however will request residential services, make a life succession plan that occurs through the Dept. of Health, and then the Dept. of Health will choose a provider. From that point on, the State Department of Health oversees the work they do, conducts audits, inspections, checks records, and ensures the right supports are offered

Ayisha: Asked if this is the organization that was brought forward by Janet Wilkoff, what capacity the organization is servicing the community, if there has been any issues in the community, and how long it has been in the community.

Regina: Stated that there are 2 apartments with 3 individuals to each and there is 24 hour staffing that can vary in their capacities.

Kerry: Stated some activities include assisting in learning to prepare their laundry, prepare meals, aiding them in financial responsibilities, and making it to their medical appointments but ultimately, to live their independent lives.

Ayisha: Asked if perhaps the organization also services foster care recipients.

Kerry: Stated everyone they serve must have been diagnosed with a developmental disability.

Marshall: Asked if there is a capacity level to which they cannot serve the client, specifically individuals who are of a certain age.

Kerry: Stated that the range of intellectually disabled individuals can vary much so range from being able to do a great deal of activities and individuals who need further assistance. Irregardless of the two, their organization looks to help everyone in that range and wants to make available the opportunities they do to anyone in need. Then offered to share her contact information as well.

Osi: Noted finding an agenda from October of 2014 where it notes Community Options Inc. had sought to move into the two apartments it currently occupies.

Regina: Confirmed it should have been around that time

Ariel: Asked how Community Options Inc. usually find its applicants for employment to service the clients in the building within the district.

Kerry: Stated they receive applicants for multiple positions, who are asked to meet certain criteria within the field of health and typically will be required to go through what she deems as a "very cumbersome process" to be hired. Under NYS guidelines, their organization requires fingerprinting, background checks, a statewide child abuse check, and other items that falls into a 6-point check. Applicants must have to pass all 6 points before being hired and under the NYS Dept. of Health they are regularly audited to ensure all their employees do.

Ariel: Asked if there is additional training by the State required or even training that goes beyond the state's requirements involved.

Kerry: Stated there is a state required curriculum that all employees must complete within their first week of employment and serves as a week-long orientation with topics ranging from nursing, fire evacuation, and incident reporting while working with developmentally disabled clients that is also then individually then curtailed to the needs of the client they are expected to serve as well.

Ariel: Asked what difficulties exist for Community Options' clients looking for housing.

Kerry: Stated the greatest difficulty is monetary in that their clients rely upon a fixed income given by Social Security Disability, that can make the housing process difficult.

Ariel: Asked if SSD is the sole income or funding available for housing their clients

Kerry: Stated that it is solely based upon the clients' income but the organization does fundraising and grant writing to assist wherever possible.

Ariel: Asked if NYS has any funding for supportive housing that goes before non-profits or perhaps had funding prior made available for this.

Kerry: Yes, previously there had been the ability to apply for HUD mortgages.

Ariel: Asked if the current scatter site model, whereby it uses different buildings across NYC to house its clients, causes difficulties for providing services. In addition, he mentioned having looked over "The Bridge", which is another non-profit organization tasked with providing supportive housing and mental health services, owns multiple buildings, and houses its clients directly within them.

Kerry: Stated that housing people with developmental disabilities in one building sounds like an institution.

Regina: Shared with Kerry that The Bridge is a mental health agency whereby its apartments are meant to service their clients and house them all within a building.

Kerry: Stated she understands and said probably might be run by the DOH's Office of Mental Health and be able to run like a psychiatric center.

Ariel: Asked that if The Bridge might be under the Office of Mental Health how its services might differ from theirs

Kerry: Stated that she wasn't certain given she isn't as familiar with the field of service there.

Ariel: Asked what the relationship looks like between Community Options Inc. and the residents of the building.

Regina: Stated that they normally will connect with the building management and are more often engaging in communication now.

Kerry: Stated that she'd like to be invited and participate in any meetings had.

Ariel: Stated that he'd like to open the conversation up to the community.

Janet Wolkoff: Stated that there often seems to be a deal of foot traffic in the halls and suggested that maybe it might be best to have less people in the building.

Kerry: Stated that due to NYS labor laws they are required to have three shifts being made available for employees and service continuation.

Janet: Asked if home health aides can be hired.

Kerry: Stated that they do not hire aides because they do not meet the same background as would be needed.

Janet: Asked how Community Options Inc. finances its services

Kerry: Stated there is a 300+ page manual created by NYS which explains how these services are covered such as rent, medical coverage and others.

Janet: Asked how since the HUD mortgages aren't available anymore they were able to afford buying the units in her building.

Kerry: Stated she isn't aware since it's been several years from when the units were bought and she did not work there back when the purchase occurred.

Janet: Stated she checked OPWDD's website, saw it was on "Early Alert", and wanted to know why that might be.

Kerry: Stated there is an apartment in Brooklyn without greater accessibility meeting the fire safety requirements and greater need for nurses in their Queens' locations.

Janet: Stated that there's been 2 clients who COI removed due to complaints - both of which for violent behavior caught on video - and asked how they might ensure individuals exhibiting their behavior can not be placed there.

Kerry: Stated she could not speak to what occurred but appears that the very matter should no longer be an ongoing issue.

Ariel: Asked how the community could serve to further support Community Options Inc.

Kerry: Asked that they are treated like anyone else and are given the opportunity to engage with each other as neighbors.

Marshall: Asked if COVID has had any significant impact on their services.

Kerry: Stated that they have had a much greater deal of success in staying healthy due to their current scatter site model but had difficulties trying to ensure their clients are wearing masks.

Ayisha: Asked if there is a solution we might be able to present to Janet's matter.

Ariel: Stated that he spoke with Janet about this, understands the previous concern raised has no longer continued, seems as if the two parties are to be engaging with greater frequency so it seems as if the issue should be being resolved, and asked if anyone had any ideas for other solutions.

Ayisha: Asked if we might have another resolution to present for when Community Options, Inc. might have an issue arise with its building owners as well as if the manual referred to earlier by Kerry could be shared.

Ariel: Stated he would like to address any issues if there ever are any others that arise, refer to the past resolution passed, and provide oversight wherever possible. At the moment, it would appear the prior resolution is still a standing basis for how the non-profit should operate and if other issues should arise he would like to hear.

Linda: Stated that she is thankful to have everyone speaking about the issues at hand in her building and is looking to build upon communication with Community Options Inc. In addition, she is glad to be ensuring the vulnerable are being taken care of, especially at a time in which we are during the pandemic.

Ariel: Thanked Community Options Inc. and then began shifting the conversation to the next section

3. Discussion in regards to DHS' oversight of public space at The Armory

Ariel: Stated that since the committee last met he reviewed the documents shared by Phil Zablocki earlier as well as took the time to draft a resolution using the material before sharing the draft version with the committee on his screen as well as reading aloud many of the items.

Edda: Asked to receive a copy which Ariel then sent

Ayisha: Stated she would like to spend time in further reviewing the resolution as well as having added further information before taking it to a vote; specifically that Columbia University, Vera Wang and others have been allowed to utilize public space in violation of the lease offered by DHS and how GDS has been wronged. In addition, she noted that it's been problematic how fellow board members have been allowed to admonish others for attempting to address oversight matters specific to their committees and that the practice should not be allowed to continue.

-Ayisha appeared to have lost connection-

Ariel: Stated that while Ayisha is reconnecting, he wanted to share an email received from fellow board member Glennis Aquino the night after HHS' last meeting which Ayisha was referring to where she expressed her disappointment in not having been spoken to and personally invited as a member of the community board and the Chief Administrative Officer of The Armory Foundation. In addition, he stated that he responded to Glennis informing her that the email was inappropriate and a clear conflict of interest as well as that on The Armory Foundation's own website she is listed as one of its officers receiving a six figure salary. Lastly, he said the committee should be focused on the community and would be happy to continue showing the draft on the screen collecting further feedback.

Phil Zablocki: Thanked Ariel for pulling together the draft language, confirmed what Ayisha stated prior, and asked what the reference was in the resolves for "Council".

Ariel: Confirmed he is referencing the New York City Council as a whole made up of all 51 city council members and then asked if anyone else has edits.

Gary Altheim: Thanked Ariel for the draft, noted that during the time in which Dr. Sanders - former owner of the Armory - tried to evict GDS he spoke with Maria Luna before then being told he wasn't being evicted by Dr. Sanders, stated that he was interested in spending some time going through the resolution in more depth with several others to get further details in, and expressed concern in having legislators in how the current makeup of a potential board would work given that he feels they haven't been as helpful.

Ariel: Stated that he understood the concerns and wanted to note the reasoning for the proposed makeup was based upon two matters: the first being political science and history of ensuring that appointments to boards should be responsible to the public and second is the desire to ensure that the board is capable of proceeding beyond any one appointment with many others that will follow

thereafter being at least thought to be accountable. However, he noted that he is open to other suggestions.

Ayisha: *came back on* Stated that she would suggest looking to the Law Department who have oversight of contracts and know what the stipulations should be as well as knows there are 2 committees in the city council that are responsible for this oversight too. In addition, she also stated that we have yet to still receive answers to the 27 questions sent a year and a half ago to DHS that would be helpful in better understanding the oversight matters, would like to amend the language in the resolution on screen mentioning that there have been three chairs seeking to actively pursue this matter, and amend language about the 2014 resolution voted on by the Youth & Education Committee.

Ariel: Stated he's updated the language on the 2014 resolution and confirmed the meaning of three chairs being from the HHS Committee to which he then changed it to two.

Michael Hano: Stated that there's currently two lawsuits being faced by the Armory Foundation and expressed he felt the resolution needed further work as well before voting to support a resolution before the entire board.

Ayisha: Stated that she has spoken to the board chair and wanted to be clear about us needing to work with others on the board to get something done.

Zadie Adams: Asked how we can hold others accountable and then mentioned that the last meeting wasn't posted on YouTube.

Ariel: Stated that the unfortunate reality is we cannot always ensure institutions are wholly accountable but that is why boards are often structured in a way that requires elected officials' appointments.

Gary Altheim: Stated he does not trust the current elected officials given the experiences had expecting their assistance and accountability in overseeing the armory.

Ayisha: Stated that she feels there's already been issues with the current contract, it clearly isn't strong enough, and hasn't been reviewed in years. In addition, she doesn't feel its current utilization isn't best serving the community and it's unacceptable mental health services for the youth aren't being prioritized.

Michael Hano: Stated that he'd like to ensure its' noted in the resolution we'd like space to be returned to GDS.

Gary Altheim: Asked if CB12 could ask elected officials about how they can assist with this matter.

Ayisha: Asked aloud why the Community Board is silent on the matter.

Ariel: Stated that he could imagine some are not as familiar with the situation but thinks it would be best to move on getting this resolution moved forward.

Osi: Stated that she would like to ensure in the coming month we should move this forward once everyone can correct whatever might need to be edited before then.

Ayisha: Stated she would like one resolution addressing past oversight issues in addition to putting forward another resolution stating what the community would hope to have that space be used for.

Osi: Stated that she agreed with her thoughts.

Ariel: Stated that he'd like to work on this and hopes everyone keeps their spirits up.

Phil Zablocki: Stated that he's thankful and appreciates the effort.

4. New Business

Ariel: Informed everyone that he's spoken with Ebenezer Smith, been referred to Leilani Irvin who was originally in contact with the board, has sent 3 emails, received no response, and intends to include Matt Borden soon. The emails that have gone out are in reference to both the matter of the shelter coming to Inwood as well as the Fort Washington Avenue Armory. In addition, he'd just received an email from Miguel Guadalupe of the Bowery Residents Committee just before the meeting and previously sent over multiple questions given that it has been clearly been in the works for some time.

Osi: Stated she felt there should be a public hearing about the shelter and asked if they have gone before the land use committee.

Ariel: Stated Ebenezer originally found out given a quick note mentioned during one of the meetings but not given any other information.

Osi: Asked if he was told anything by the developer.

Ariel: Stated that he had not been told anything and that the matter had been brought up at a cabinet meeting.

Osi: Asked if Wayne has invited them.

Ariel: Stated he does not know if they have but is asking to learn more.

Osi: Stated that she wants this to be a topic that goes before the public.

Ariel: Stated he's shared at the general meeting prior he intends to have it be and spoken with Eleazar about having a town hall on the matter as well as reaching out to elected officials about this. In addition, he mentioned that he's spoken to Marielle about the matter and they've indicated they aren't as familiar with what is happening either.

Osi: Stated she wants the matter to be placed on the agenda and doesn't want it to fall by the wayside.

Zadie: Asked where the meeting recording is being kept online.

Shinelle: Stated that the meeting for December and January would be placed on the YouTube Channel.

Ariel: Stated another update is that Martin Collins has reached out and asked if we could discuss with the owner of the property by the 1 train station that burned down about a year back about potentially having affordable housing be built there and so he is going to be reaching out regarding this.

Marshall: Asked for the property's exact address.

Ariel: Stated it's 148-154 Nagle Avenue.

5. Old Business

There was no old business updates

Ariel motioned to adjourn the meeting and ended it.