



CAN Board of Directors Meeting

2/11/22 Minutes

Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting

Present: **Tamara Atkinson**, Capital Area Workforce Solutions; **Devon Darden**, Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; **David Evans**, Integral Care; **Sherri Fleming**, (for Travis County Judge Andy Brown); **Simone Talma Flowers**, Interfaith Action of Central Texas; **Vanessa Fuentes**, Council Member, City of Austin; **Juan Garza**, (for Mike Geeslin, Central Health); **Suchitra Gururaj**, UT Austin; **Rachel Hampton**, CAN Community Council; **Denise Hernandez**; Travis County Attorney's Office; UT Austin; **Liz Johnson**, St. Edward's University; **Rudy Metayer**, Pflugerville City Council Member; **Jo Anne Ortiz**, Capital Metro; **Ingrid Taylor**, Ascension Seton; **Jeffrey Travillion**, Precinct 1 Commissioner, Travis County; **Ofelia Zapata**, Austin ISD Trustee.

Other guests: Cupid Alexander, City of Austin; Sundal Ali, AISD; Sara Barge, City of Austin District 2; Jacqueline Capistrán, Meals on Wheels Central Texas; Nora Comstock, CAN Community Council; Donovan DePriest, CAN Community Council; Hal Katz, Integral Care; Lawrence Lyman, Travis County; Ara Merjanian; Naomi Peschke, Meals on Wheels Central Texas; Jennifer Tucker, Goodwill Central Texas.

CAN staff in attendance: Raul Alvarez, Carlos A Soto, Jelina Tunstill

Call to order and Introduction: Board Chair Suchitra Gururaj called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm and introduced the meeting.

Minutes: The 1/14/2022 CAN Board minutes and notes were approved, after a motion submitted by Hal Katz which was seconded by Nora Comstock. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Community Council Update: Rachel Hampton announced the Community Council has elected Donovan DePriest as the new Vice-Chair. The Council's plan this year is to focus on mental health. The next meeting will include a deep dive into the recommendations from the mental health workgroup report. Like this year, we will focus on refining the recommendations to the top 5 that the council feels most passionately about and divide into 3 workgroups to work on them. In about a week Rachel and Tamara will meet to discuss alignment.

CAN Executive Director's Report: Raul Alvarez mentioned that CAN has been busy working on the Expanding Opportunity Forums as follow-up to the Regional Summit. Two have already taken place and a third is scheduled for later in the month. CAN also adopted and implemented a set of administrative procedures for use of video conferencing. CAN is also working to establish an Expanding Opportunity Action Team and a Mental Health Work Group. There is a survey available for CAN member organizations to let us know if you or a member of your agency would like to participate. The 2022 CAN Work Plan can be summarized in 4 parts: ensuring an equitable economic recovery, addressing community mental health & wellness, improving language access and resources, and effectively incorporating equity in the pandemic response (and emergency response generally). For people interested in participating in the mental health workgroup, part of the goal is to find the sweet spot for CAN within the broad scope of this work. Juan Garza mentioned that CAN should work with units of local government who are serious about doing something meaningful with respect to diversity and equity issues on this issue so that CAN's work will be aligned and more impactful.

Food Insecurity Report & Recommendations: Raul introduced the report, beginning with a brief background on the series of reports this one is part of. Next, Alvarez discussed what food insecurity means and its short-term and long-term effects on children and adults. In 2019, approximately 13% of Travis County residents faced food insecurity. For 2020 and 2021, since Feeding America data is unavailable, we looked at calls to 2-1-1 for food assistance to gauge level of need with regard to food security. This data shows a spike in the number of calls requesting food assistance towards the beginning of the pandemic and in the first few months of 2021. The data

seem to have stabilized at near pre-pandemic levels by October 2021. Food insecurity is primarily the result of economic inequities. In the absence of an immediate prospect of deep economic reform, government/charity approaches remain important. Our discussions helped identify sustainable local farming and gardening as having potential to enable improvements in people's access to good food.

Rachel Hampton continued with a discussion of the recommendations from the report. These include: calling on CAN partners to review their real estate holdings for unused, undeveloped plots of land of at least ¼ acre to be made available for community farming; that the Office of Sustainability coordinate with other departments to push for full development of the land already reserved for community gardens, including in some innovative formats; job fairs connecting prospective laborers with farmers; paid agricultural internships for students; sponsoring minority farmer education; loans and grants to farmers; supports for home and community gardeners and organizations; coordinating volunteer opportunities for CAN Partner employees to provide labor assistance to community farms; coordinating with homeless liaison staff to identify opportunities to allocate living space in exchange for labor at on-site community gardens; that CAN school district, community college, and university partners offer classes and training in agriculture; that school district incorporate food distribution into parent and community events; and information sharing by school district partners and Capital Metro about available resources and events.

Donovan DePriest, CAN Community Council Vice Chair and Director of Food Sourcing at the Central Texas Food Bank, provided an overview of the benefits of urban farming for low-income residents and people living in food deserts. Ofelia Zapata, AISD Trustee, mentioned that increasing access to farmers markets is a great idea, but we also need to ensure that farmers markets that have already been established continue to serve communities, such as the one at Mendez Middle School. She also mentioned several other programs that were very popular but are not available anymore due to circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Donovan added that one thing the group realized throughout the process of preparing and writing the report is that continued access is especially important. There are plenty of available plots to plant community gardens, but many of the folks interested are not able to get through the red tape barring their access. Councilmember Fuentes mentioned that another important component of community gardens is some way to promote continuity once a garden is established. Sometimes gardens get established and see years of success, while others fizzle out. Creating that community leadership that keeps the momentum going should also be an area of focus.

2022 CAN Priority Issues - Conversation on Mental Health: Raul Alvarez provided a brief introduction to the topic explaining how it was already an issue before it became exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. He introduced two guest speakers from Meals on Wheels and Goodwill Central Texas that have address mental health and wellness as part of their service delivery. Jacqueline Capistrán and Naomi Peschke introduced themselves for Meals on Wheels Central Texas. Jacqueline continued with an overview of the work Meals on Wheels does, which goes much farther than home delivery of meals. Meals on Wheels, in addition to assessing participants for their home delivery service, also asks a series of questions related to mental health. Part of the goal of their work is to break down the stigma associated with mental health and raise awareness about issues related to mental health. Clients can also be connected to mental health services for which they may qualify or find useful to address their situation. The rapport that Meals on Wheels team members develop with clients is also conducive to the client's openness to talk about mental health issues they may be experiencing. Naomi Peshke discussed the Care Services Team, which engages in intensive case management on cases that require a higher level of resources than the average case. She mentioned a program that connects clients to telehealth services, operated in partnership with Dr. Namkee G. Choi of the Steve Hicks School of Social Work at the University of Texas. These services are limited to clients 50 or above with mild to moderate symptoms. More severe cases are referred outside of the agency.

Jennifer Tucker, Chief Mission Officer for Goodwill Central Texas, briefly mentioned Goodwill's mission. She continued with an overview of the work they do in the arena of mental health. Goodwill provides free mental health services to all their team members free of charge. They also have a team of navigators and coaches that helps to connect people to basic needs. Goodwill has been working at the intersection of mental health and basic needs to ensure their workforce is supported. Jennifer mentioned how these needs have changed throughout the past two and a half years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently the needs greatly outweigh what they can provide. To help mitigate that, they brought in a 3rd party Employee Assistance Program to help with virtual services as well. However, they found that folks would rather wait to talk to somebody that they've previously met or met through an introduction or mutual acquaintance instead of cold calling a number. Goodwill also found it has helped with employee engagement and job satisfaction.

Tamara Atkinson added that while carry-out the item in the workplan about expanding equitable economic recovery and talk more about workplace environment, the issue of mental health will continue to be an important theme. We need to make sure that we weave together the priorities of CAN into these topical areas so that they are seen as the complex, interconnected, intertwined topics that they are.

Update on Measures to Mitigate Evictions: Lawrence Lyman, Travis County Health & Human Services Research & Planning Division Director mentioned that the Commissioner's Court has been highly focused on this issue throughout the pandemic with initiatives such as rental assistance. In looking at the 5 recommendations, the County has provided emergency rental assistance for a long time now. Some sources of funds that were essential throughout the pandemic have since become exhausted. Their current focus is to restart their County funded rental assistance program in an expanded capacity. Because the work they do as an agency is limited by state-level legislation, funding this and other initiatives like it will be a challenge. The County has also been involved in several initiatives related to eviction prevention. From the beginning of the pandemic, the Justice of the Peace court partnered with volunteer legal services in a pilot project to bring pro-bono attorneys into the eviction process to represent tenants who are facing eviction. There are ongoing conversations and monitoring to determine if these services can be expanded. In the meantime, the court has approved investments to expand services through Austin Tenants Council and Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid. The next two recommendations (right to council and eviction shield) are less clear in how the County may support them, in part due to potential legal restrictions.

Sherri Fleming added that another part of the conversation about what the County can and cannot do has to do with relationships. We know that the relationship between the tenant and the landlord is an important factor weighing on the outcome of whether a person ends up being evicted or not. In talking with landlords throughout the pandemic, much of their frustration is related to tenants that may not respond to them or sign up for assistance after being notified of available programs/resources. Better landlord-tenant relationships help better connect households with better resources, whether it's assistance when families are struggling or mediation (informal and formal). It can also help develop a better understanding of the rights of the landlord as it relates to their property, as well as the role of landlords in understanding some of the challenges that families face and how to work together better to help individuals maintain their housing. Commissioner Travillion added that HHS and the team introduced "navigators," individuals that meet people, who may not have the time or capacity to navigate the system on their own, to mediate and advocate for them and help shift the balance in their favor. These tie into the 5th recommendation, the one-stop-shop idea, which alludes to the interconnectedness of the recommendations. The County has several initiatives to coordinate and co-locate services across systems, but there is still much work to be done and many constraints as to how it may be carried out.

Cupid Alexander, Assistant Director of the City of Austin Housing and Planning Department, began by revisiting some of the details of the eviction process to make sure we have a common understanding and vocabulary to better understand and work on the issue. Alexander mentioned the different kinds of notices (24-hr, 72-hr, and no cause), Forced Entry Detainers, market pressures (including the impact of affordability & subsidization on vulnerable

families), the upcoming expiration of local moratoriums, and the evolution of the eviction process and its proxies (such as constructive evictions & stipulated agreements). Next, Alexander discussed some of the data provided by the 'Eviction Dashboard': of the 5,709 evictions filed since the start of 2020, nearly 55% were filed after the shutdown beginning March 15, 2020; 40% have had judgements issued; 60% of the judgments issued happened after the "shut down". Alexander then discussed the ways in which the City has addressed each of the five recommendations. He mentioned that, like Lawrence, recommendations 3 and 4 (right to council and the eviction history shield) require some policy decisions from Council or others to fully implement. Related to the one-stop-shop recommendation, the department has been working on streamlining its website for its users. Alexander then discussed proactive activities guiding the Housing & Planning Department's anti-displacement tenant related work. These include: understanding policy impacts and best practices in tenant protections (such as funding expungements, source of income protections, an continued up-stream assistance); providing assistance to 'bridge the gap' (such as looking at capital stacking to provide noninterest forgivable micro loans to those who qualified for assistance but still owe back rent); understanding and mitigating the 'pseudo' mechanisms that displace renters (such as stipulated agreements and constructive evictions); improved resources for landlords and tenants; exploring mortgage relief and assistance for vulnerable homeowners who are renting units to vulnerable families; and the previously mentioned Displacement Navigators program to be launched later this year. Councilmember Metayer suggested that to increase legal representation, consider reaching out to the local Bar and affinity Bars, especially now since folks are moving back to in-person work downtown.

Tamara Atkinson concluded the meeting with a recognition of Sherri Fleming, who is attending her last Board of Director's meeting as she will be retiring from working at the County at the end of this month. Sherrie thanked everyone for their great partnership through the years and recognized the importance of collaboration in doing community development work.

Adjournment: Tamara Atkinson adjourned the meeting at 3:02 pm.