

Fairfax County Community Action Advisory Board (CAAB)
Meeting Minutes – Tuesday, December 5, 2023, 7:30pm
Virtual-Zoom

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm by Chair Michelle Jefferson.

Members in Attendance: Nermin AbdelWahab, Fairfax, VA; Sandra Barksdale, Reston, VA; April Hall, Reston, VA; Caroline Hockenberry, Vienna, VA; Michelle “Cookie” Hymer Blitz, Herndon, VA; Michelle Jefferson, Fairfax County, VA; Hari Kurup, Falls Church, VA; Maria Isabel Leiva, Fairfax County, VA; Michael Mahrer, Vienna, VA; Marcia McDevitt, Reston, VA; Ken McMillon, Falls Church, VA; Phil Rosenthal, Fairfax Station; Heather Thomas, Centreville, VA; Alice Yam, Herndon, VA; Shari Zamarra, Fairfax, VA; Benjamin Zuhl, Falls Church, VA; Kevin Hickerson, Centreville, VA

Absent: Matthew Bell, Alicia Doe, Mary Ann Floto, Hawa Hassan, Morgan Jameson, Ann Macpherson, Michele Menapace, Whitney Richardson, Alex Rodriguez

Guest(s)/Staff: Kristen Fegan, Sarah Selvaraj, Chris Topoleski

Minutes – October, 2023

The motion to approve the meeting minutes was made by Michelle Jefferson, seconded by Ken McMillon and was carried without objection.

CSBG First Quarter Report

Staff presented the CSBG FY24 1st quarter report, including the financial report for Federal CSBG and TANF and Narrative Report.

Ben Zuhl asked if the Family Counseling Center of Greater Washington is on track to meet their outcome goals and has some concerns about the budget allotted for the number of clients.

Michael Mahrer mentioned that the services can be costly for a year, and it is not best to look at the cost per person, but rather the return you are getting on that cost per person.

Michelle stated that when evaluating contracts, the funds are looked at and considered.

Nermin stated that the services of paying therapists costs more, as it is a professional degree.

Ken McMillon mentioned that we would help Food for Others find a way to recycle cardboard boxes. He is looking for assistance that would not come at a cost.

Shari said recycling would be a great service project to help Food for Others with the cardboard boxes.

Marcia mentioned that the churches have had their recycling costs double, so they are having people take things home. With the help of volunteers, it could be done.

Nermin addressed the services that Stepping Stones is providing is intense and it is going to be costly, but it will prevent children from ending up in the juvenile justice system or worse, the adult justice system, and providing mental health services is so important.

Michelle “Cookie” Hymer Blitz mentioned that it is important not to micromanage programs. Cornerstones has proven that they know what to do.

Michelle Jefferson and Kevin Hickerson moved to accept the first quarter report. Heather Thomas seconded. Motion carried.

Funding Priorities

The CAAB discussed funding priorities for FY2025 & FY2026: Housing services, Health and Social/Behavioral Development, Support Services, Education & Cognitive Development Services, Employment Services, Civic Engagement and Community Involvement, and Income and Asset Building Services.

Michelle Jefferson stated that housing services has been the CAAB’s number one priority. The CAAB chooses these funding priorities to focus on. At a future meeting, we will be choosing our categories for fiscal year 2025-2026.

Ken stated that all entities will be funded, and these are just the priorities for the CAAB.

Fairfax County General Assembly Delegation’s Pre-2024 Session Public Hearing

The Fairfax County delegation to the General Assembly will hold a public hearing regarding the upcoming 2024 session in early January (typically the first Saturday of the month).

Michelle Jefferson stated that anyone can testify as long as they are a resident of Fairfax County, but the CAAB will have three representatives.

Michelle Jefferson will be testifying and asked for two volunteers. Last year Nermin discussed housing, and Maria spoke about childcare.

Shari stated that it is important to have our low-income representatives speak. They need to hear from the people that we serve.

Michelle Jefferson explained the process at the General Assembly Delegation 2024 Session Public Hearing. The Board of Supervisors present their legislative funding priorities to the state. For the CAAB, housing is the number one priority for the underserved, underserved, and most vulnerable in the community. It is a tremendous burden as there is a housing shortage, and the cost to live here is high. Food insecurity and childcare are also at the top of the list. Each CAAB member prepares a speech on one of the funding priorities and will be submitted to the clerk of the Board of Supervisors to have a copy for the record. Each speaker will have 3 minutes or less.

Marcia McDevitt stated that homelessness is not addressed to a great extent in the legislative draft. A group that speaks to the homeless could talk about it in more detail.

Phil Rosenthal stated that it is important to practice the three-minute speech and time yourself to get your points across so that you are not cut off.

Heather Thomas mentioned that is important to share a personal story about how this issue has affected you and others in the community because it is impactful and powerful.

Ken McMillon stated that he can help Sandra with the speech, as he has personal experience.

Michelle Jefferson, Nermin Abdelwahab and Sandra Barksdale will be speaking at the General Assembly Delegation Public Hearing.

Membership and Election Committee Report

Shari Zamarra announced the February elections. The slate of candidates will be presented in January. That is the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary. In terms of membership, Shari reminded the CAAB that five people have terms expiring and must reach out to their supervisor to be reappointed. These include at large, Braddock, Lee, Springfield and Dranesville. Mason district has a new supervisor and Shari reached out for their appointment. There are two vacancies on the CAAB. Shari stated that any ideas would be appreciated, if anyone at NCS including the community developers, would know people interested in joining. There is a concern about absences. Heather said we will have a HeadStart representative, as they took an E-vote. Shari said the senior perspective is very important with our aging population, so hopefully our AARP representative can be pulled back in.

CAAB Member Sharing

Marcia McDevitt mentioned that an unhoused young woman in Fairfax County was admitted to a hospital during the day and was released at midnight. She was living in a tent and expected to return to those conditions. We need to figure out what we can do as a board to help solve this problem and get people into shelters quickly. There are people camping in Reston, waiting to get into shelters.

Heather Thomas shared that processes from HUD are moving down. Heather has been working with organizations, looking at the payment standards for the housing choice voucher program. Officially, the payment standards have increased for those that have housing choice vouchers. Fairfax County has three zones now, a yellow zone, a green zone, and a blue zone to include zip codes that charge market rate rent. Now families will have more options.

Michelle "Cookie" Hymer Blitz said AHAC was working on the payment standards for the housing choice voucher program. The shelters are now open, and we are making progress slowly but surely.

Michael Mahrer mentioned that CCFAC held a hearing back in October and would like to know the outcome. Today was the deadline for submitting proposals for community funds. It is important to get an update since this is one of the biggest matters that we handle.

Phil Rosenthal stated that he tries to be proactive so that we can accomplish things in the community. He participated in a coat distribution on October 31, and gave out 2,000 coats. This year, Phil worked with Heather and her group. Phil participated in a Turkey Trot at the beginning of November with the Tysons Corner Rotary where they raised money for the low-income community. On December 11th there will be a toy drive at the Fire Hall across from Beacon mall.

Shari Zamarra is looking for anyone that works with Afghan families. A friend is looking for help, supporting ten families.

Ben mentioned that he has a television show on Fairfax Public Access. Starting on Christmas day, there will be four Mondays in a row that require taped shows ahead of time, if anyone would like to speak on any issues.

Nermin mentioned that the strategic plan is missing the lowest income group of people, especially now that there is a tent city in Reston. It is important to think about families who have the lowest income in our county who deserve a safe place to live.

Michelle Jefferson stated it is important to address these housing issues before the board. We have addressed issues like expanding Medicaid, and there have been improvements. We must persistently bring it forward so people can see it and get a different perspective.

Heather wanted to thank Phil for his help getting coats for kids and for donating. To Nermin's point, Heather mentioned that the one of the biggest barriers is landlord relationships and not wanting to enforce rules and policies when it comes to landlords. Families and individuals get into a position where reporting simple repairs can be stressful, and you never know if it will be used against you. There needs to be more education around housing policies and keeping landlords accountable. Some landlords make it very difficult, putting impossible qualifications up such as making three times the cost of rent, or requiring a certain credit score.

Marcia McDevitt said there are two groups in Reston that have been very helpful with Afghan families. She will get Shari in touch. Marcia will be attending the League of Women voters session and will take note of the housing issues.

Susan gave Morgan's CCFAC update. There were over 40 community members at the public meeting, and some themes aligned with the CAAB's, including housing.

Shari mentioned that a former member of the CAAB came up with a program idea called "Faithful Landlords". It could be brought to the attention of faith communities.

Motion to adjourn was made by Ken McMillon, seconded by Ben Zuhl.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57pm.