



General Government & Social Services Committee

February 9, 2021

Summary and Motions

Committee chair, Council Member Susan Lamb, called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. Committee members Vice Mayor Steve Kay and Council Members Richard Moloney, James Brown, Hannah LeGris, Liz Sheehan, Fred Brown, Whitney Baxter, Jennifer Reynolds, and Kathy Plomin.

Lamb read the following statement: “Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and State of Emergency, this meeting is being held via live video teleconference pursuant to 2020 Senate Bill 150, and in accordance with KRS 61.826, because it is not feasible to offer a primary physical location for the meeting.”

I. Approval of January 12, 2021 Committee Summary

Motion by Kay to approve the January 12, 2021, General Government & Social Services Committee summary; seconded by LeGris. The motion passed without dissent. (Plomin was absent for this vote.)

II. CivicLex Public Comment Proposal

Richard Young, Director of CivicLex, presented a proposal to evaluate the city’s current public comment system and suggest recommendations to make public engagement more effective (this would affect public comment after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted). He explained how the current primary system is challenging and disempowering for residents and the council, especially because items are far along in the approval process when people often provide public comment (most commonly at the Thursday night council meetings). CivicLex would like to conduct a two-phase process, first focusing on input and public engagement from staff and the public; second creating a cost/benefit analysis between technologies, processes, and local needs. Ultimately a report will be presented back to the council for consideration. The project will partner with the University of Kentucky, University of Transylvania, and possibly Awesome, Inc.; lasting about six months. Intended outcomes include quantifiable data, cost-savings opportunities, understanding of the field, building trust through the process, and recommendations to move forward. It was acknowledged that a more concise project proposal was shared with the council before the start of the meeting.

Sheehan asked about the design of data collection methods and how CivicLex plans to reach a diverse sample of the population, particularly because policy changes may be recommended. Young explained they won’t start working with the colleges unless there is a commitment from the council to do the project but they would design this alongside the UK professors. Outreach will include CivicLex’s network throughout the community but also rely on the council to reach their constituents. Ultimately Young said the process needs to reach as many people as possible.

LeGris asked for target numbers and duration for the survey, as well as other details such as census tracts, digital versus paper, and the types of questions and how those will be framed. Since the current public comment process doesn’t reach many people now Young hopes to expand that net as much as possible. These details could be provided once there was an indication of a commitment to the project. Plomin confirmed the development process, outlined to take place in July, would consist of software or application development.

J. Brown talked about the public comment process being frustrating for the council too and that it’s complicated for residents because legislation and policy originate from many different places. Young

confirmed there is no financial contribution needed, just the city's cooperation. Kay asked about separating the folks who stay tuned into the council process versus the folks who only get involved for issues that specifically touch their life. Young said this effort would not target the folks who are already very engaged. Their target is people who show up at the first or second reading of legislation.

Young talked about earlier notification of items coming through committees or the planning commission to get folks involved earlier in the process and how these issues are communicated. A past attempt to do this was with *Buildingeye* (a no longer used web-based platform to access land use and building permit activity). Young also noted that resolutions and ordinances don't translate well to the layperson so helping folks understand the issues that come before council. Reynolds said public comment can be confusing; often there isn't a response from the council to comments made in meetings so it would be helpful to clarify expectations as well as help people understand how to provide public comment.

Lamb talked about the implementation of Granicus and Legistar around 2013 that was intended to provide transparency and more opportunity for the public to follow items in committee before they become resolutions or ordinances. She talked about educating folks about the resources that are available now. Evan Thompson suggested drafting a Memorandum of Understanding with CivicLex to understand what the plan is for this project.

Motion by Plomin to ask Law Department work with CivicLex to draft a resolution approving an MOU and for follow-up information to be brought back in March for review; seconded by Sheehan. The motion passed without dissent.

III. Lexington Nonprofit Coalition – City Nonprofit Partnerships

Danielle Clore, CEO of the Kentucky Nonprofit Network, presented on behalf of the Lexington Nonprofit Coalition, a unified nonprofit section serving Lexington. She described the city's partnerships with nonprofits as a vehicle to meet the needs of the community; advocating that without partners this work would fall to the city. Clore said nonprofits are the experts who have a frontline understanding of the issues that the community is facing. The Coalition hopes the council will consider how to use this expertise to structure a funding partnership and engage them in priority setting and ongoing decision-making. She acknowledged that the city cannot be the sole provider for nonprofits nor should philanthropy be solely responsible to provide these services; explaining that partial funding of programs threatens the delivery of results. With the pandemic presenting a time of crisis, Clore said 1 percent funding should be a minimum and questioned if it is enough to address the current issues.

Clore, who also distributed the ESR Program Subcommittee's survey, said that even some funded agencies believe there are fundamental challenges in the ESR Program. She said that assuming to understand the needs is dangerous with limited resources. Fayette County Public Schools will receive federal relief funds so the city will want to avoid overlap. She also suggested strategizing how best to tackle youth violence intervention. She talked about the challenges to launch a new program if it won't get fully funded and will only be funded one to two years. (Motion by Kay to approve an additional five minutes for the presentation; seconded by Reynolds. The motion passed without dissent.) She urged the council to consider more flexibility in the funding cycle, maybe even a three-year cycle while eluding to the cost of increasing city staff versus investing in nonprofits. Ultimately, they are hoping to have a seat at the table and believe that more collaborative partners will enhance partnerships. She concluded by outlining questions for the council to consider.

Moloney said the council saved the ESR Program last year and that the Coalition should meet with the administration. He is concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on senior citizens. He talked about ensuring there are programs to help these folks following the pandemic. Plomin agreed that nonprofits are the ones who understand the needs of the community and suggested the possibility of establishing working groups under the Social Services Commission that focus on the needs. She questioned if agencies might hold onto programs that have historically been funded by ESR. She advocated this effort needs to be a partnership to address community needs and find funding and also mentioned the mental health needs because the pandemic is unknown.

J. Brown said we are all striving to do the best for our community. He requested the Lexington Nonprofit Coalition to help connect the city with FCPS, in light of federal funding that may be coming and because of the opportunity to enhance student and family support. Regarding the ESR Program, he spoke about limitations to obligate funds for future councils but since the city has funded multi-year grant cycle commitments in the past there is some flexibility there (consider one, two, and even three-year funding cycles). Lamb talked about collaborating more. She commended all the work done by LFUCG staff and the administration who do a fantastic job with the ESR Program, which she described as a safety net that is not meant to take care of everything. She clarified that the Coalition doesn't represent all nonprofits in the community. No action was taken on this item.

IV. Reorganization of Parts of the Administration

Jenifer Wuorenmaa, Administrative Officer, Senior, explained how the proposal to create a new Department of Housing Advocacy and Community Development originated from the recommendations made by the Mayor's Commission on Racial Justice and Equality. The proposal addresses several recommendations that specifically came from the commission's Housing and Gentrification Subcommittee whose report had a lot of details about Code Enforcement. She mentioned a proposal that will come later for a program within Code Enforcement to help people avoid extensive fines and foreclosures. Programmatically this moves multiple offices and divisions to a new department to coordinate these housing-related efforts under one umbrella. She said policy becomes the next step.

Wuorenmaa outlined two new positions that would be created, a commissioner as well as an administrative officer, senior. She explained how they discussed at length whether to include Planning and ultimately decided to leave Planning under Economic Development; however, the proposal includes a planning specialist in the new department. The department is proposed to include Code Enforcement, Grants and Special Programs, Historic Preservation, Community and Resident Services, Homelessness, Prevention, and Intervention, and Affordable Housing. She concluded the presentation by reviewing salary and fringe costs associated with the new positions (annual salary for the commissioner is \$131,999; annual salary for the administrative officer, senior is \$74,181). There are two vacant positions in Planning that will cover the costs for the new community development and planning specialist position.

Kay talked about the past commissioner of the Department of Planning, Preservation, and Development and advocated that Planning should be included in the new department. He would like the council to consider this possibility. J. Brown said this realignment encompasses a lot of recommendations that came from the Commission on Racial Justice and Equality as well as conversations with the Task Force on Neighborhoods in Transition, which will help the city be more responsive to the needs of neighborhoods. He agreed Planning should be a part of the department. It was confirmed that the planning specialist position would be eliminated if the new department included Planning. Wuorenmaa explained, in part, the advocate role would fall to the administrative officer, senior but how there are

two staff members in Community and Resident Services whose role could pivot slightly to help folks navigate these issues and resources. J. Brown said the advocate needs to be an identified person but generally, this proposal more than meets the expectations of the recommendations.

Reynolds questioned the placement of Grants and Special Programs under the new department because it serves the entire government. Wuorenmaa explained a lot of work they do is related to housing, for example through HOME and HUD programs. Rather than disperse members of this division across government, they decided it was best to keep the division together, under the new department. F. Brown referenced the existing organizational chart and questioned if the creation of a new department is governed by the charter. He believes more details are needed, as well as citizen input. He suggested the council consider having a committee of the whole meeting.

Moloney supports the proposal and mentioned how many of the offices to be reorganized under the new department are currently under the COA's office. He argued the public has been involved in the proposal, through the commission's recommendations. He explained how housing ties into Planning but that the division has a bigger impact on economic development and bringing jobs, which is where he would like Planning to stay.

Kay interprets the recommendation from the commission for an office of housing advocacy to mean that one person is tasked with ensuring LFUCG is working on housing. He suggested that part of that responsibility ties into another recommendation for an ongoing group, similar to the structure of the Housing and Gentrification Subcommittee or the Task Force on Neighborhoods in Transition that would be staffed by someone to help the group do their work. In consideration of size, he said the new department compares to other departments. He advocated that Planning has to do so much with housing.

Glenda George, Managing Attorney, confirmed the Charter does give the authority to abolish, create, and restructure divisions and departments. LeGris feels the outward-facing liaison positions could help connect constituents to resources and ease the process to access resources that the city provides, which could go a long way with trust-building. She is interested in learning more about how the customer service role will take shape, which will impact the delivery of the program. Wuorenmaa added the importance of having someone the constituents can talk to. No action was taken on this item.

V. Items Referred to Committee

No action was taken on this item.

Motion by Plomin to adjourn (at 2:49 p.m.); seconded by Baxter. The motion passed without dissent.

Meeting materials: <https://lexington.legistar.com/MeetingDetail.aspx?ID=818862&GUID=BB11F10B-42AC-465C-9F0B-3A7B6EAF302&Options=&Search>

Recording of the meeting: http://lfucg.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=4&clip_id=5288

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