



General Government & Social Services Committee

September 14, 2021

Summary and Motions

Committee chair, Council Member Susan Lamb, called the meeting to order at 1:03 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 attended the meeting.

I. Approval of August 17, 2021 Committee Summary

Motion by Plomin to approve the August 17, 2021, General Government & Social Services Committee summary; seconded by Baxter. The motion passed without dissent.

II. Overview of CASA of Lexington

Melynda Jamison, Executive Director of Court Appointed Special Advocates, provided some history on the program, which operates in 49 states. They are required to have one full-time staff person for every 30 volunteers. LFUCG funds the director position and discontinued funding an administrative assistant before she started working for CASA. Their current operating budget is about \$1M. They have 235 volunteers (including neighboring counties) and serve 461 children in Fayette County with 235 volunteers. Volunteers go through 30 hours of training with 12 continuing education training each year. She estimates CASA serves about 1 out of 8 children who need their services. There is not a lot of preventive work being done to break the cycle.

CASA if Lexington owns its building, which was an expansion from the basement of and LFUCG building. Their volunteers take an oath of confidentiality and have five background checks done. Volunteers serve ages birth up to 18 years of age, visiting the child monthly. Jamison explained what their volunteers do and the benefit of their volunteers, who get to know the child they work with, to help them with their specific needs. Volunteers are required to complete a report and make recommendations. State social works have to work towards unifying children with their biological parents; CASA does not have to do that. In 2020, Fayette County's rate of abuse and neglect is 12 out of every 1,000, which doesn't count cases that don't make it into the system. Jamison talked about one situation with a child who had been in 21 placements and was separated from his siblings; the CASA volunteer identified he suffered from hearing loss. Jamison concluded the presentation with their desire to build a space for supervised visitations (there is only one space in Fayette County). There is an empty lot next to the existing facility that they would like to purchase. Phase two and three would include a community garden and playground. This was submitted for ARPA funding.

Sheehan asked how the pandemic has impacted their work. Jamison said CASA volunteers did not stop visiting their children during the pandemic though they can't take another case until they hire another volunteer manager. The agency raises \$1M of private funds annually, which has allowed them to go from one employee to 15. During the pandemic, they got creative so visits could continue; the court closed for a while, then it opened, and now it's closed again. Volunteers attended virtual court at times but other cases, like the Termination of Parental Rights, continued to happen in person. They were one of the first programs to adopt virtual training, requiring their staff to learn an entirely new, 30-hour, curriculum but National CASA limits each virtual training to five people per group versus 30 people at one time when in-person. This caused training to slow down. Jamison said their staff and community

step up to advocate for these children. They have two large fundraising events, which happened but were modified and not as successful as in past years. She said services are needed more than ever.

Plomin asked why Kentucky continues to have the worst rate of child abuse and neglect. In her opinion, Jamison explained Kentucky was a late-adopter at funding something preventative. CASA of Lexington received state funding (about \$78,000 per year, which pays for two staff) for the first time five years ago; Kentucky was the 48th state to give funding to CASA. Kentucky has been doing preventative work; Stephanie Hong, Director of Youth Services, considers CASA preventative before the youth gets to juvenile probation. Jamison said they have seen increases with methamphetamine and homelessness as a component. Friends of CASA recruit volunteers to translate during court (seven languages are currently spoken). She concluded the short answer is to put more funding into preventative services. Plomin and Jamison discussed how they saw a 20 percent decrease (reports) in 2020 because educators are the number one reporters of abuse and neglect. During that time CASA took to social media urging community members to report when they see something, which can be done anonymously. Research shows that when stress increases; abuse and neglect increase. They saw a huge request in petitions once school started back in person. Jamison said CASA is completely full in Fayette County.

F. Brown and Jamison discussed how cases go through family court; CASA gets a copy of every petition and their volunteers are appointed by the judge. CASA takes all cases that are appointed to them but they work in close communication with the judge's, which helps determine what cases and when cases are appointed. Most volunteers only take one case but they can do more; most volunteers also work full-time. F. Brown established that the kids they serve can be in their family home, in foster care, residential treatment, and with relatives. Jamison said there is no duplicated service for CASA. State social workers are tasked with getting children back in the home of origin and may only see the child maybe 3-4 times per year. A CASA volunteer works solely in the child's best interest. They discussed most of their funds are from donors, plus the two fundraising events. Jamison said they submitted the visitation center proposal for ARPA funds through LFUCG; the full amount including phase 3 would cost \$1M, phase 1 will cost about \$350,000. Jamison will send F. Brown their budget.

In reference to the salaries of CASA's volunteer managers, how hard the non-profit sector works, and future CASA projects, LeGris asked if they have other staffing needs, including opportunities for their existing volunteer managers. CASA's biggest need is additional volunteer managers (starting salary \$32,500); as the executive director, Jamison is the sole fundraiser and writes all the grants so their funds go into volunteer managers.

Moloney is concerned that the state is providing CASA with very limited funding. He believes the state should reward CASA because they are doing work for the state. He asked how Kentucky compares to other states. Jamison said CASAs agencies in Kentucky are largely funded through cities and counties; she can get more details from the Kentucky CASA Network but California and Texas provide the most state funding, where it's not uncommon for local agencies similar to the size of Lexington can receive \$1M; those states are a bit of an outlier. Jamison cited examples of other CASA agencies getting ARPA funds. Moloney talked about their ongoing costs and how it should be an expense they help CASA with; ARPA is one-time funding. Jamison invited Moloney to join her when they visit with state legislators, which they do annually; her request for the state each year is to double their funding allocation. She emphasized the balance of paying staff more money versus hiring another volunteer manager to serve more children. They only hiring staff with sustainable funding sources.

Lamb talked about this program being a role model for other communities and their CASA Superhero 5k run/walk fundraiser. No action was taken on this item.

III. Creation of an Arts and Entertainment Authority and Amendment to KRS 67A

Moloney talked about when LFUCG maintained different parking garages and the partnership created with the Parking Authority (LEXPARK), who improved them. He sees an opportunity for a similar structure for arts-related facilities. The proposal is modeled off of what was done with the Parking Authority and would request approval from the state to give LFUCG a tool for the arts later down the road; particularly because of how expensive it is to maintain facilities. He believes LFUCG holds the arts down.

Plomin said the Lexington Arts and Culture Council started 50 years ago next year with a lot of community leadership, which morphed into the LexArts. Moloney said this is different from LexArts; the Parking Authority took the buildings. This type of authority could bond projects to help maintain these facilities. The proposal requests the state to authorize LFUCG to create an authority related to arts and entertainment; this would give LFUCG a tool. Plomin mentioned LexArt's 2009 executive order designation from Mayor Jim Newberry to be able to request federal funding, which is currently in the works to be updated. She is concerned that folks in the arts community don't know about this proposal and that this would be duplicative to other art organizations. She said a lot of this work is about programming, not buildings, and questioned why another entity with board members would be needed when there is viable arts leadership in the community.

Sheehan asked how this would coordinate with LexArts and the Public Arts Commission. Moloney explained a hypothetical situation of how an art authority could be formed to obtain the deed of the property and therefore create opportunity [for bonding]. A future mayor would decide how to bring various groups together to create it. J. Brown said this is about art agencies, many of which are downtown and have buildings; in many cases, the city owns those buildings and bears the brunt of their costs to maintain them. He supports petitioning the state to give LFUCG the flexibility to do this in the future. He referenced LexArts, who is in conversation with the city about their facility, as well as the Downtown Arts Center and the Kentucky Theatre, as examples.

Reynolds agrees with an entity that would help take care of the buildings but she is concerned because the materials suggest this is about arts, as a whole. She is interested in input from other art entities. Moloney said this is not about the details of the authority's structure and compared this to how LFUCG "got out of the parking business". Keith Horn, Managing Attorney, said a bonding authority would have to generate income to pay the bond; LEXPARK pays for their bonds by charging for parking. He and Reynolds discussed how this could be a way of viewing the arts in Lexington. Horn explained an authority has certain powers and responsibilities, it doesn't exclude other art organizations to overlap and it would depend on the council to establish it and what tools it would have.

LeGris confirmed this proposal would seek Frankfort's help to give LFUCG a tool; if this became a tool that LFUCG could access, stakeholder involvement would be needed to determine if this could be a tool to serve our community. Moloney compared the process of a task force making recommendations to the council who would ultimately approve the structure of the authority; the Parking Authority had to go to Frankfort before those steps took place. Kevin Atkins, Chief Development Officer, recalled this discussion going back 10 years and said part of the idea is to help the arts community collaborate better. For example, would it be beneficial to use one ticketing system? If the council approved this resolution,

the administration would have the city's lobbyists get it to Frankfort. A council workshop is scheduled on October 28, 2021, regarding the next state legislative session.

Baxter asked if other cities have this kind of structure, which Moloney said Cincinnati does. Kay is concerned that the arts community wasn't consulted. He said the Parking Authority has a simpler task and they have a revenue stream that supports their bonding capacity. Kay said this proposal is wide-reaching. Moloney explained revenue generated from ticket sales would help pay for an arts authority's bonds but that these questions would be addressed when the authority is put together. Kay is concerned about the message it sends to the arts community about its capacity.

F. Brown talked about seeking permission through the state (KRS 67A) early on, after the city merged with the county, for various items that weren't covered under the city's initial merged government legislation. He said it's premature to say this should be discussed with the arts community because it's not to that point. Lamb talked about this idea appearing to be collaborative and doing the work to make it more collaborative. She believes this could be a good tool down the road but that collective support would benefit the proposal in Frankfort.

Plomin talked about many of the activities described in the proposal already being done by local agencies and that the proposal appears it would create another arts umbrella. LeGris said she needs buy-in from the arts community and some additional details, particularly about the history shared today. J. Brown talked about the potential to bring art organizations together, similarly to the way (not the tax structure) the Downtown Management District has worked to make downtown safer and better. He added that until we have the flexibility in Frankfort we don't have anywhere to step off to next. Kay said there is no harm in consulting with the arts community to see how they feel about it; it could be a mistake to move forward with something that could be perceived as threatening.

Moloney only wants to go to Frankfort if he has his colleague's support. He has no intention to upset the arts community, he wants to gain a tool that other cities have to help the arts get to the next level. The mayor that creates this authority would need a plan that involves the arts community to do it. Frankfort meets in January so it could have to wait another year if it's not done now. Lamb said this is a concept but she sees an opportunity to collaborate with partners and the administration to get more people on board with this. No action was taken on this item.

IV. Items Referred to Committee

Motion by Kay to remove item 14 (*amendment to the nuisance ordinance, naturalized gardens*); seconded by LeGris. The motion passed without dissent.

Motion by Sheehan to adjourn (at 2:38 p.m.); seconded by LeGris. The motion passed without dissent.

Meeting materials: <https://lexington.legistar.com/MeetingDetail.aspx?ID=893801&GUID=D5A723C3-33F5-4A97-8A27-B44EBFEA232F&Options=info|&Search>

Recording of the meeting: http://lfucg.granicus.com/player/clip/5431?view_id=4&redirect=true