
Minutes

Tuesday, February 6, 2024 1:00pm – 2:30pm
Lakes Rooms, Kent County Health Department
700 Fuller Ave NE – Grand Rapids, MI 49503

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| Council Members/ Alternates Present: | Kim Baron (designee for Leadriane Roby), Tracie Coffman, Candace Cowling, Mandy DeWilde, James Geisen, Kristin Gietzen, Bryana Hopkins, Carissa Judy, Maureen Kirkwood, Ron Koehler, Jason Loepp, Adam London, Jacob Maas, Judge Deborah McNabb, Mary Muliett, Madelyn Olson, Tracey Silas, Scott Smith |
| Council Members Absent: | Tara Aday, Chris Becker, Kendrick Heinlein, Trudy Ngo-Brown, Joas Occes, Michelle VanDyke, Bill Ward |
| Council Partners/Guests: | Heather Boswell, Ashley Karsten, Karen Lezan, Clarkston Morgan, Wende Randall |
| Kent County Staff: | Christopher Eakin, Sandra Ghoston-Jones, Brian Hartl |

1. **Welcome & Call to Order**

Adam London called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

2. **New Members, Roundtable Introductions, and Icebreaker**

Adam London asked new members to identify themselves as such while roundtable introductions were completed. Brian Hartl led the group in an icebreaker exercise. The exercise was to find someone in the room whom one did not know and identify five things in common. After completing the exercise, each pair or group reported their findings.

3. **Approval of Agenda and Minutes of November 7, 2023**

Adam London summarized the meeting of November 7, 2023. Because First Steps Kent presented at that meeting about the early childhood millage at that meeting, he updated the council that the Finance and Physical Resources Committee this morning recommended moving forward ballot language that maintains the current millage rate at 0.25 mills to the Legislative and Human Resources Committee. If approved by the full Board of Commissioners, the millage renewal will be on the August ballot.

A motion was made by Mary Muliett and seconded by Maureen Kirkwood to approve today's agenda and the meeting minutes from November 7, 2023.

4. **Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

5. **"A Path Forward" Presentation**

Clarkston Morgan, Kentwood city commissioner, has been involved with "A Path Forward" and presented about the initiative to the Council. Over the last four years, Kent County has seen an increase in youth crime. FOX 17 decided to be part of a broader solution, so it convened 60 community members from various sectors to better understand the causes behind youth crime. Subsequently an advisory board of 16 members was formed and "A Path Forward" was created. The initiative's mission is "to lift up young people from underserved communities through engagement, partnerships, and storytelling. We will use our platform to connect families with resources, address obstacles, celebrate successes, and create lasting change." To date, FOX 17 has run 130 stories related to this initiative and highlighted 85+ organizations or community initiatives. Additionally, it has created a resource guide available on FOX 17's website.

Currently "A Path Forward" is working to identify how and where to create a countywide platform that can serve as a resource for teenagers and their families. Part of the action steps towards that goal is to identify other initiatives that share a common goal, and that is why Clarkston was presenting to this council today. Additional action steps include pinpointing grassroots organizations that have capacity and mainline organizations that have funding and resources, as well as looking at community data to identify what/were to target and ultimately connecting teens and families to resources they need.

The following questions/comments were asked after the presentation:

- *One of the slides mentioned Access Kent. Does that refer to the County's website?* No, it does not specifically refer to the County's website as what would host this resource guide.
- *What is the number of young people "A Path Forward" is trying to impact on an annual basis?* There is no specific number that has been identified. The outcome measures being used are from a high level.
- *How many people are participating in events highlighted by "A Path Forward"?* "A Path Forward" has not asked event organizers for this information. FOX 17 has highlighted 130 events put on by 85+ organizations, but there has not been a formal tracking of the number of participants at each event.
- *Different communication platforms are being used by organizations. Is there a strategy to use those platforms to help reach youth?* A lot of messaging to teenagers is through social media. It was suggested that information from "A Path Forward" could be shared on member organizations' social media. Additionally, any events that member organizations would like to highlight can be communicated to FOX 17.
- *Sometimes systems are set up to intentionally limit demand for services. In creating a one-stop shop, there is concern about driving people to one place only to learn that a program or resource isn't available.*

Adam London stated that some of the driving forces behind youth crime are related to social determinants of health. There are so many organizations, partnerships, and initiatives in the community working to address these issues. Coming out of the pandemic there is a lack of clarity on how everything should be aligned. He said that the County will work on convening strategy sessions to help identify the work happening in our community and how to better align these efforts.

6. **Postponement of Executive Committee Selection**

This Council's bylaws state that the Executive Committee should be selected by February of each year. The Executive Committee discussed at its last meeting that it would be favorable to postpone this selection until the April 9, 2024, meeting. Adam London stated that there will be a call put out over the next month to ask members to consider putting their names on that ballot. If any member is interested, they can let Adam know.

Adam noted that over the last few years the Executive Committee has experienced the loss of several important contributors. The ideal number of members on the Executive Committee is seven to nine.

7. **Agency Updates**

- Tracie Coffman: The Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative closure is complete. The Kellogg Foundation made whole all partnering organizations who were owed money. Candace Cowling added that there were some slots that had not been created yet due to insufficient resources, but those are now in the process of being created through the Grand Rapids Southeast Promise Neighborhood (GRSEPN) project with participation from the YMCA, Baxter Child Development Center, and the United Methodist Community House. Ron Koehler also added that Kent ISD has been working with First Steps Kent on slots through the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP).
- Mary Mullett: D.A. Blodgett St. John's recently opened a mixed-gender, independent living home on their campus for older youth who are aging out of the system and do not want to be adopted or have a guardian. If there is good uptake, the plan is to open a second home.
- Candace Cowling: Over a year and a half ago there was a commitment to doing some intense anti-racism work within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. An Anti-Racism Transformational Team was formed. That group had been working hard behind the scenes on issues related to child welfare (e.g. mandated reporting, fatherhood programs). Tracey Silas added that they are looking to partner with EMBRACE, which has also been working to address disparities within the child welfare sphere.
- Tracey Silas: The U.S. District Court of Eastern Michigan issued an order on January 29, 2024, that reduces the number of requirements (31 provisions were eliminated) that MDHHS needs to meet before being released from federal oversight with respect to the state's child welfare system. It was noted that there has been a substantial decrease in children in the state's care as well as a decrease in children in congregate care settings. MDHHS has been working hard to help the state exit federal oversight.
- James Geisen: Universal case load implementation in Kent County has been pushed back until August.

8. **Volunteers for Next Meeting's Icebreaker**

Jason Loepp volunteered to lead the icebreaker at the April 9, 2024, meeting.

9. **Adjournment**

Adam London adjourned the meeting at 2:28 p.m. Next meeting is April 9, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. at the Kent County Health Department (700 Fuller Ave NE, Grand Rapids).