
Minutes

Tuesday, November 7, 2023 1:00pm – 2:30pm
Lakes Rooms, Kent County Health Department
700 Fuller Ave NE – Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Council Members/ Alternates Present:	Chris Becker, Tiffany Clarke, Candace Cowling, James Geisen, Kristin Gietzen, Bryana Hopkins, Maureen Kirkwood, Jason Loepp, Jacob Maas, Eileen McNeil, Mary Muliett, Joas Occes, Shaunte Paul-Oliver, Tracey Silas, Shannon Gardner
Council Members Absent:	Tracie Coffman, Misti DeVries, Lynne Ferrell, Tracey Fountain, Kendrick Heinlein, Ron Koehler, Adam London, Judge Deborah McNabb, Madelyn Olson, Leadriane Roby, Scott Smith, Bill Ward
Council Partners/Guests:	Heather Boswell, Leonica Erwin, Jennifer Headley-Nordman, Karen Lezan, Wende Randall
Kent County Staff:	Christopher Eakin, Brian Hartl

1. **Welcome & Call to Order**

Candace Cowling called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

2. **Approval of Agenda and Minutes of September 5, 2023**

A motion was made by Mary Muliett and seconded by Kristin Gietzen to approve today's agenda and the meeting minutes from September 5, 2023.

3. **Public Comment**

Wende Randall reminded everyone that today is Election Day and encouraged everyone to go out and vote.

4. **First Steps Kent Presentation**

Jennifer Headley-Nordman and Heather Boswell provided a presentation on the work of First Steps Kent, specifically around the Ready by Five (Rb5) millage renewal and the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (ELNC) situation.

The current Rb5 millage expires on 12/31/2024. Currently there is a millage subcommittee created by the County Board of Commissioners that is discussing a proposal to put a millage renewal on next year's ballot. There is one more subcommittee meeting before the proposal is forwarded to the Full Board, likely between December 2023 and January 2024.

In looking at how federal, state, and local funding meets children's needs by age, all ages between 0 and 5 years old have unmet needs; however, there is a greater need for programs and services for children between 1 and 4 years old. First Steps Kent proposed a modest increase in the millage request to help provide more

support for programs and services for children from 0 to 5 years old. While it would not come close to fully meeting the unmet needs, it would help close the gap.

As part of the original millage plan in 2018, First Steps Kent promised to increase participation in evidence-based programming, establishing countywide data collection, and developing an outreach and navigation network. Part of the Resident Review Proposal Board's responsibilities is to ensure that proposals are evidence-based. Over the years, data has been collected so it can be tracked; the data is showing that the millage is support children and families in every zip code. The focus continues to be on addressing areas where there have been underserved communities with underfunded services.

From a program outcomes perspective, program data that has been collected is showing effectiveness in early learning programming. Additionally, 730 children have been identified as having a potential developmental delay or disability and subsequently have been connected to resources. It was asked how mothers of children who have developmental concerns learn about these resources. Jennifer stated that part of the contractual requirement for receiving Rb5 funding is that organizations must provide navigation services.

In this year's proposal, First Steps Kent is asking to go from 0.25 mills to 0.45 mills, which would raise about \$12.5 million. Some of the increased funding would go to childcare workforce and quality investments in addition to sustain and expanding existing effective services and for administration/data/evaluation costs. It was asked what the status of getting the proposal on the ballot is. Jennifer shared that it is still at the subcommittee level. At the last subcommittee meeting there was a motion to update the language to allow for more flexibility. It is looking like the proposal amount will be between 0.25 and 0.35 mills. Continuing at 0.25 mills will require a reduction in reach because inflation has increased the cost of services, thus millage dollars do not stretch as far. It is also looking like it will be placed on the August ballot, not the November ballot. It was asked how heavily voters supported the original millage, and Jennifer responded that over 60% of voters supported it. Polling this time around suggests that it would be supported just as much if not more in 2024.

Discussion around the millage included the following questions:

- *Will some of the money be earmarked to help subsidize childcare costs for low-income families?*
That's an option but there may be better ways to help in that area.
- *What happens when ineffective programs are identified?*
Programs are evaluated on their effectiveness. If a program is identified as being ineffective and not meeting its metrics, it will be notified and if it continues to be ineffective it will risk losing funding.
- *What does the millage add in property taxes?*
For the average home worth \$300,000, it would add \$10 per year in property taxes.
- *What can we do to support the millage either as this group or through our networks?*
Attend subcommittee meetings. If interested in participating in advocacy, please contact Jennifer and she can pass along information to those doing advocacy for the millage.
- *Will there be other millages on the August ballot?*
At this point, it does not appear so. It will be a primary election though, so there may be some contested races.

Heather Boswell discussed the situation with the ELNC dissolution by first recognizing that several member organizations of KCFCCC have been helpful in navigating this transition. The community has also stepped up to help meet needs. ELNC had 15 classrooms through its partners, which were funding through Great Start Readiness Program (GRSP) dollars (for 4-year-olds), Early Head Start dollars (for childcare for 0–3-year-olds),

philanthropic funding, and Rb5 funding. All funding was blended for classroom and parental support, and the model was intended to support families where they were. ELNC's GSRP slots were quickly transitioned to Kent Intermediate School District (KISD). Early Head Start funding has transitioned to Community Development Institute (CDI), which has its own mechanism to oversee funding so they are managing classrooms and will provide support. The beneficial thing is that none of the slots through these programs will be leaving the community. The intent is to rebid those slots out in early 2024, and local agencies will be able to bid for those spots, so it is anticipated that this funding will stay in Kent County.

All agencies who were affiliated with ELNC have continued to meet and are trying to determine how to fund support services. They are taking the opportunity to look at a redesign. A report is being worked on this week and it is hoped to have final numbers about what is happening and recommendations about how to move forward. The Rb5 money that had been allocated to ELNC would need to be reallocated through a formal RFP process. It would probably be April before these programs are available again. No fiscal year 2024 funding was disbursed to ELNC before it dissolved; Rb5 funding occurs on a cost reimbursement basis.

Candace Cowling said that ELNC had 64 slots for 3-year-olds that had been planned but not fully created. These slots will not be lost. In ELNC's dissolution, there were 30 staff who were let go; fortunately, there's been a huge effort in the community to connect them with existing providers as we don't want to lose these individuals to other sectors.

It was asked whether there are any convenings happening so that parents know what is going on and how they are affected. Jennifer stated that there have been conversations with KConnect as they work with parents already. Heather stated that First Steps Kent has also been thinking about how to engage parent voice in a meaningful way. They have been asking agencies to think about how to incorporate parent voice into their programming.

5. Agency Updates

- Tiffany Clarke: The Office of Global Michigan is getting ready to release a request for proposal (RFP) related to capacity building and outreach for the refugee population; it will be due by the end of December. She also reported that AYA has an MDHHS worker stationed with them to help enroll individuals in various programs, and it has seen incredible outcomes in a short amount of time.
- Brian Hartl: Data collection for the Community Health Needs Assessment is complete. There are a few prioritization sessions this week and next week. Everyone is invited to attend. Brian will share information about these sessions with Chris Eakin, who will forward this information to KCFCCC members and community partners.
- Maureen Kirkwood: Health Net of West Michigan continues to have walk-in hours available if anyone needs assistance with applying for Medicaid benefits.
- Bryana Hopkins: There will be a celebration for Lynne Ferrell and her work with the Frey Foundation this Thursday.
- James Geisen: MDHHS is continuing with the unwind of the public health emergency, processing between 10,000 and 14,000 redeterminations per month. The state received approval to push back redeterminations for those with life-threatening conditions. MDHHS is also continuing to prepare for the rollout of universal caseload management starting in February 2024. A communication plan is currently being worked on.
- Shaunte Paul-Oliver: Healthish will be adopting a family for Christmas by providing a Christmas meal and presents. If anyone is interested in helping sponsor, please let Shaunte know before 12/10/23.
- Joas Occes: Migrants continue to move to Grand Rapids and face challenges finding housing.

- Tracey Silas: October 2023 saw the highest number of calls into Centralized Intake. The number of cases assigned is much lower than the number of calls received. There is a need to educate the community on what an appropriate referral is. MDHHS is currently working on redoing the risk assessments. She was happy to report that more children in foster care with family members for the first time ever.
- Mary Mullett: D.A. Blodgett-St. John's fundraising gala is on November 18. They are also doing a holiday gift drive.
- Kristin Gietzen: Arbor Circle will be having a fundraiser for The Bridge, its youth shelter, next week on Thursday, November 15. Details about the event are posted on Arbor Circle's website.
- Chris Becker: There is a Families Against Narcotics group meeting tonight at MSU Extension. There will also be a grief group available too.

6. **Miscellaneous**

- None

7. **Adjournment**

Candace Cowling adjourned the meeting at 2:35 p.m. Next meeting is January 9, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. at the Kent County Health Department (700 Fuller Ave NE, Grand Rapids).