

Head Start official conducts community forum on EOB

By *Lés Pierres Streater*
Sentinel-Voice

The meeting place was crowded with parents, staff and supporters. The atmosphere was charged. The subject was the Equal Opportunity Board of Clark County.

Many who attended the April 7 meeting at Nevada Partners were concerned EOB is in jeopardy of losing funding that could necessitate an elimination or reduction in programs and services.

The state Welfare Division announced on Tuesday it isn't going to cut funding immediately, saying it will extend a \$9.8 million contract with the nonprofit group for six months to provide childcare to low-income families.

Welfare Director Nancy Ford said the agency would seek other contractors to provide childcare services.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Windy Hill, assistant commissioner for the Head Start Bureau in Washington, D.C., addressed concerns about the solvency of local Head Start programs at forum last Wednesday at Nevada Partners. The scrutiny is the result of a federal probe of EOB.

The meeting was an opportunity for the community

to address concerns over accounting practices that have recently raised more questions than answers. Officials from the Office of Community Services, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, were on hand to hear from the community.

Officials came from Washington, D.C. with the express purpose of gathering audit information. Reports have widely circulated that \$2.1 million is unaccounted for at the EOB. The funds were advanced by the state to cover payments to childcare providers.

"At this point, we are reviewing the documentation and information collected last

week so there is nothing I can comment on at this point," Windy Hill, assistant commissioner for the Head Start Bureau in Washington, said later.

At last week's meeting, she said, "I can tell you that part of the reason that we're here is because we want to ensure that children get a quality head start. We know that there are challenges in delivering Head Start. It is a very complicated program that requires a great deal of time and energy. I think what we want to know is what those issues are. We will try to answer those questions. I can tell you that our commitment is to children and the staff that works closely with the

children."

An EOB spokesman said the money isn't missing

"The \$2.1 million was money that was not actually lost or taken by anybody," said State Sen. Joe Neal, a member of the EOB board "It was funding that was given to the agency in advance to pay the grantees for childcare of which we have about 500. They submit vouchers to us to be approved and then the agency sends the vouchers back to be paid. We were getting behind on those payments and we asked for an advance because people weren't receiving their money.

"So, what happened is we had a change of our financial officer. When the new person came aboard, they did not figure out that this money had a change of our financial officer. When the new person came aboard, they did not figure out that this money was supposed to go to childcare and they put it into the general fund and paid all kinds of things with the money."

Neal made his point clear.

"It was an accounting mistake based on the lack of knowledge, the new person coming in, not understanding about how the money was received in the first place," Neal said. "So the money was not lost, it was just misappropriated to other categories within the EOB without going to childcare."

Some gave public comments, including Latisha Henderson, Tonya Crochet, Maggie Freeze, Pamela Henry, Davida Colquist, Gabrielle Franklin and

Charles Baker.

They spoke about programs and services offered by the EOB, programs that benefited them and/or their families, especially the Head Start program.

Others, including Dawn Olsen, Willa Cheney, Betty Acosta and Beatrice Turner, spoke of problems at EOB. Teachers do not have enough funds to purchase supplies for their classes, not enough emphasis on mental health care for students and a lack of effort on behalf of the EOB to expand programs and services with other childcare providers. Some voiced there is a lack of accountability by board members or the unwillingness of the EOB to address individual concerns of operational effectiveness.

In recent weeks, Marsha Rose Walker, executive director, Mike Husted, the agency's deputy director, and George Cotton, human resources director, have resigned. Husted, in a resignation letter, cited board interference in operations, Neal said.

The EOB board is operating the agency. Neal said the board was previously not sold on the idea of getting involved in daily operational matters. Not being involved, he said, led them to suffer the fiscal problems that they now face.

Hill reiterated that their agency is committed to making sure that this community has a viable Head Start program.

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Westside

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Some major changes with preservation efforts, undoubtedly, are required.

The Westside or Old West Las Vegas, as it is now being referred to, lies just west and slightly north of downtown. The Historic Westside is generally bordered on the east by Highway 15, Rancho Dr. on the west and by Carey Avenue and West Bonanza Road, north and south, respectively.

The area is rich with early and recent Las Vegas history. It is 3.5 square miles, according to handouts provided to the meeting attendees. Handouts provided volumes of information about demographics, comparative statistics about income, and housing, economy and other factors. Additional facts were included in 100 pages of information participants received.

Within West Las Vegas, there are more than 30 historic landmarks and sites with irrefutable value. More than one is already on a national registry of landmarks. The Moulin Rouge Hotel, site of the city's first integrated casino, still stands with an incredible history. Last year it was nearly destroyed by a fire.

In 1904, the McWilliams town site is where lots were sold. The area, which developed due to its nearness to railroad tracks and jobs, later became known as the Westside. The Historic Westside is a place where more than 20,000 residents call home, planners said. Most have family or other deep community ties there. Others have business interests on the Westside. Still others have affiliation with places of worship. And, yes, some are newcomers interested in moving there.

Another goal of the meeting was to advise participants on progress of major works and updates on others. Martin and Perrigo did that, introducing guest speaker Flinn Flagg, urban design coordinator for the city. Flagg gave a detailed update on plans for the Pioneer Trail Project initiated by grant writer Sam Wright.

The trail will be built over sidewalks along the Westside. Planned as a banner-lined, walking and driving tourist attraction, it will link the target area with the two neighboring areas on the east and west. Fixed markers will call out landmarks along the trail to visitors. It will start at the newly developed Springs Preserve on the west end and wind through the southernmost side of West Las Vegas with some spurs of the trail leading into the interior to include historic sites. The other end of the trail is the Old Mormon Fort downtown. More public information will be available about the Pioneer Trail as plans for West Las Vegas are finalized.

More information can be found on the city's Web site at www.ci.las-vegas.nv.us or call (702) 229-6022.

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