

Commission on Human Relations Meeting Minutes

Monday, August 31, 2020

Attendance: virtual meeting via Zoom.

Commissioners:

Wasiullah Mohamed, Chair

David C. Bush

Rabbi Sharyn Henry

Jen Presutti

J. Matthew Landis

Sonya Toler

Tracy Baton

Will Tolliver, Jr.

Zack Block

Brittany Beasley

Alberto Benzaquen

Leah Lizarando

Rev. Liddy Barlow

Staff:

Megan Stanley, Director

Wesley Speary, Deputy Director

Rita Porterfield

Emily Costello

Chris Sault

Rachel Shepherd

Jam Hammond

Kevin Carroll

Guests:

Chaz Kellum

Ernest Rajakone

Peter Harvey

Laura Drogowski

Saunders Ruffin

Sandra Smith (Captioner)

I. CALL TO ORDER

- a. Chair Mohamed Called the meeting to Order at 3:32 p.m.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT(S)

- a. Peter Harvey – Allegheny County working on assessing link between criminal history and housing. Tragic intersection between homelessness and criminal history with disparate impacts upon people of color. Even in Allegheny County—a couple hundred people are released from Department of Corrections over 70% POC, but general population is 80% White. HUD came out with guidance a couple of years ago on this issue. Guidance – if using criminal history, it can lead to disparate impact. Hoping that the Commission is eager to increase housing opportunity for those with criminal background. Denying housing increases recitivism rates.
- b. Tracy Baton – what should be used as an alternative to criminal background. Ms. Baton is a single Black woman who is also a landlord.
 - i. Peter Harvey – encouraging individualized assessment of what community supports exist, what corrective actions were undertaken, etc.

III. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

- a. July 13, 2020
- b. Comments: none
- c. Motion to Adopt Minutes as noted by Commissioner Bartley; Seconded by Commissioner Barlow; unanimous voice vote in favor. No abstentions.

IV. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORT

a. Director's Report

- i. Director's narrative report included with agenda items*
- ii. Americorps Vista intern – Saunders Ruffin*
- iii. Equity incentives*
- iv. Working to co-opt County anti-discrimination to account for refusal to grant/provide medical care in discriminatory fashion.*
- v. Legal clinic – still in its infancy and Professor Jerry Dickinson would update Commission as it occurs. Legal counsel as an equitable service.*

b. Executive committee Report

- i. Commissioner Mohamed: for 2nd period report, equity related reading; currently a 4 page document with 13 categories. Commissioner Baton: redlining is a consistent issue.*

- ii. *Megan Stanley: New topic each month. Living reading resource list; volunteer to teach Commissioners and Staff.*
- iii. *Commissioner Mohamed: important to establish shared terms, definitions, background knowledge, etc. To be able to address issues equitably and approach from an even level.*

c. Finance Committee

- i. *Budget presented to Mayor and COS and to Council.*
- ii. *Schedule for budget is Draft in November, Final in December.*
- iii. *Only made one ask – additional investigator for City and Police cases. Commissioners wanting to be involved with council to contact Megan.*

d. Community Relations Committee

- i. *Tracy Baton: had a great panel*
- ii. *Jam Hammond: separate workshop on housing*
- iii. *Youth Outreach Contest – excited, availability to creative funding for projects.*
 - 1. *Different Media*
 - 2. *Could happen quarterly*
 - 3. *Needs to have judges and prizes*

e. Housing Committee

- i. *Zack Block deferring to Wes; have not met as a committee since last meeting*
- ii. *Wes Speary:*
 - 1. *looking to meet more regularly;*
 - 2. *presentation today on criminal background checks in housing*
 - 3. *county rental relief program is up and running*
 - 4. *Concern about fed rule revision that could allow for rejection of trans persons from homeless shelters.*
 - 5. *Eviction moratorium ends today; emergency order in Allegheny County that magistrates have leeway to schedule evictions solely based upon nonpayment at later dates than normally required by rules*
 - 6. *Housing videos: RFP went out; have a vendor for Fair Housing videos, work to start soon; must prioritize topics. Flagship videos considering redlining, racism in housing, familial status.*

f. Personnel Committee

- i. *Commissioner Henry: evaluated Director this month*

g. Public Hearing Section

- i. *No updates*
- ii. *No hearings yet scheduled. Cases electing to go to court.*

V. NEW BUSINESS/OLD BUSINESS

- a. *Announcements: Cheryl's retirement. Commission "birthday"*
 - i. *Next month Cheryl retiring September 25th*

- ii. 65th anniversary from legislation establishing commission
 - iii. Looking to promote commission, email Jam Hammond with ideas
- b. Committee and section assignments
 - i. Circulate a roster with contact information
 - ii. Possible slate presented; removed section/committee to decide motions
 - 1. Require by-laws vote?
 - 2. Yes, but acknowledge that it is a question of law or legal knowledge beyond ken of Commissioners
 - 3. Need to amend by-laws
 - iii. Slate
 - 1. CRS – Lizarondo, Tolliver, Benzaquen, Beasley, Bush, Presutti, Henry, Mohamed
 - 2. Public Hearing – Barlow, Bartley, Toler, Block, Baton, Landis
 - 3. Housing – Lizarondo, Landis, Mohamed
 - 4. Community Relations = Baton (Chair), Bartley, Toler, Tolliver, Benzaquen, Beasley, Landis
 - 5. Finance – Bush, Presutti, Mohamed
 - 6. Personnel – Henry, Barlow, Baton, Benzaquen, Tolliver
 - 7. Ad Hoc Racial Justice & Equity – Landis, Mohamed, Tolliver, Block, Lizarondo
 - a. Discussion:
 - i. Equity could absorb housing
 - ii. There could be better education and education outreach
 - b. Abolishment of Housing Committee
 - c. Shift to Finance committee – approving ads for Fair Housing Month (as dictated by bylaws)
 - d. Need to sharpen mission of Ad Hoc Committee
 - e. Amend to Justice & Equity Committee – long discussion for a committee specific meeting
 - f. Meeting to be scheduled
- c. Outreach Plan Presentation
- d. Criminal History as a housing protected class discussion (Commissioner Leah Lizarondo)
 - i. Emerging interest to look at how criminal justice system has become a tool for injustice and promoting inequities on a systemic level
 - ii. Have been protections in Cook County, Illinois (Chicago) and Seattle.
 - iii. What this would look like in Pittsburgh.
 - iv. Looking at guardrails/limitations; guidance documents, proposal to change City Code.
 - v. Peter Harvey – in communication with organizers who worked on legislation in Cook County and Seattle. Getting input from those affected is very important.

- vi. Addressing housing as a way to divert recitivism
 - vii. Concerns about fear for landlords; Seattle blanket ban.
 - viii. Cook County – prequalifier; then notify background check – going back three years. If conviction w/in 3 years, proof of rehab is important can be a mitigating factor. Cook County legislation more clear/detailed
 - ix. NOLA public housing authority has done something similar.
 - x. DHS has risk mitigation fund for landlords; can get \$3,000 per unit in event of damage.
 - xi. Research to include buy in and goal for compromise; tools for landlords to utilize
- e. Commissioner volunteer to present at 10/5 meeting on redline from reading resource sheet - Brittany Beasley

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Commissioner Baton; seconded by Commissioner Mohamed; unanimous vote in favor at 4:58 p.m.