

**Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations**  
**Minutes of Meeting**  
**December 3, 2018**

**Attendance:**

Liddy Barlow, secretary	Eric Holmes
Winford Craig	Wasiullah Mohamed
Allyce Pinchback	Mariana Padias (chair, by phone)
Helen Gerhardt	Lori Roth (acting chair)
Sharyn Henry	Gwendolyn Young

*Absent: Eric Horwith, Gabriel McMorland, Richard Morris*

Staff: Mark Hamilton, Rachel Salem, Megan Stanley, Carlos Torres

Guests: Valerie McDonald-Roberts, Jackie Smith, Thea Young

**I. Call to Order**

Commissioner Roth called the meeting to order.

**II. Public Comments**

At the September meeting Dr. Smith proposed the consideration that the name of this body be changed to Human Rights Commission, to be congruent with similar bodies across the nation and to recognize the progress of human rights nationally and internationally. Dr. Smith and her colleague Dr. Michael Goodhart believe that this name change would further the mission of the Commission. She distributed a proposal naming several rationales:

- 1.) The language of "Human Relations" is a historical artifact that does not accurately reflect all the work of the Commission.
- 2.) The expanded participation of the United States in international human rights treaties brings formal legal obligations for municipal and county authorities; the changed name would reflect this relationship and our commitment to being in compliance with international norms.
- 3.) The experience of the Commission shows that its work is most effective when it is able to work with the public to promote greater awareness of anti-discrimination laws; the name change would make it easier to communicate with the public and gain support for its work.
- 4.) The name "Human Rights Commission" is widely used across the United States and internationally to refer to commissions of this sort.
- 5.) The name change will reinforce the City's existing commitment to human rights.

Commissioner Craig said that changing our name to "Human Right Commission" would give people a better understanding of who we are. Commissioner Mohamed agreed; a rebranding campaign inspired by the name change would assist in our public relations efforts.

Solicitor Hamilton asked if the PA Human Relations Commission has been approached for a similar change. Dr. Smith said they are beginning here.

Ms. Stanley asked if the PA Human Relations Act affects this proposal; Dr. Smith said that was just the language of the day and it should not matter.

Commissioner Craig asked how this would affect our relationship with EEOC and HUD. Director Torres said It would affect our contracts since they are currently with Human Relations Commission, so at a minimum it would involve paperwork. He added that “human rights” may be misleading for the work that we do; “civil rights” may be more appropriate. We don’t work with other human rights issue, such as the environment.

Commissioner Roth asked if we have the authority to make this change; it would need to be approved by city council. Director Torres said it would change the home rule charter. Commissioner Roth clarified that any vote today would be to recommend the change, not to make it.

Commissioner Mohamed asked Dr. Smith about the option of using “civil rights” language. Dr. Smith said no, they did not come across other civil rights commissions in their research of similar bodies nationally and internationally; civil rights is more narrow and doesn’t reflect some of the work you are doing, such as social, economic, and cultural rights. Human rights is an international language that is becoming accepted and expected by the international community. Commissioner Gerhardt said she agrees with the idea that human rights may be broader than we are able to protect. Ms. Stanley said the phrase “civil rights” may be too narrow. Commissioner Young said we may want to consider other options; she likes “human rights,” but what we do is relationship-based.

Commissioner Mohamed said none of these terms sounds fully accurate. He would like to choose the term that inspires the largest number of people coming to us – if it’s too broad then we can refer them elsewhere; but if it’s too narrow they may not come to us at all.

Commissioner Gerhardt said she is persuaded that the broader term “human rights” is a better outreach tool; better to be broad. Commissioner Craig said who knows, we may grow into a bigger human relations mandate.

Ms. McDonald-Roberts said a change would require a 2/3 vote of the City Council and a change in the home rule charter. It’s important to speak with the mayor and City Council in advance to make sure we can have their support before moving further. Commissioners Mohamed, Craig, and Holmes agreed that this is a clear next step once we determine that a change is the will of the commissioners.

**MSP (unanimous): that over this next month we ask these questions of the mayor and city council to thoroughly explore the necessary changes in the home rule charter involved in changing the name of the commission.**

Ms. Stanley noted Council has budget meetings this month so we are not likely to get meetings with them. Ms. McDonald-Roberts said that the change involves more than changing the charter, letterhead, and business cards; there are communications implications, and a change in the budget book: they’re going to have to amend the budget to reflect it. Ms. McDonald-Roberts does not want to discourage us, but wants us to be strategic. Commissioner Roth said we need to look at our budget and see if it’s feasible for us to do it. Ms. McDonald-Roberts said some Councilors will not want to make the change; it’s a 50-year-old tradition. Use this time to develop your argument, decide if you really want to do this and make sure it sticks.

In a separate public comment, Thea Young is working with the Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit, formerly known as the Summit Against Racism. They will hold a pre-meeting next week at the Union Project. The opening ceremony will be January 25 at the Union Project; the summit will take place January 26 at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. She distributed fliers.

### **III. Adoption of Minutes**

**MSP (unanimous): that the minutes be adopted.**

### **IV. Committee and Staff Reports**

#### **A. Director's Report**

Director Torres said that the Commission has done several outreach events, including the Urban League Thanksgiving event. Ms Stanley they printed enough materials for 250 bags, and ran out at 1 p.m.; by continuing to talk with people, they probably reached 400 people total. Not all were city residents, but the event was still useful.

There are some commissioners whose terms have expired or will be expiring. Commissioner Gerhardt's term expired in October; Commissioners Padias, Horwith, and Morris expire this month; and Commissioners Lien and Ruffin have resigned. The mayor has decided he will appoint to fill those positions "soon." When the appointments happen, we will have a new election within 30 days of the appointments because our chair and vice-chair positions will be vacant. We will use the same process as in our regular process, with nominations and elections. Commissioner Craig said this election would be to fill the remainder of this term, through July. Ms. Stanley said we may need to adjust committee assignments accordingly. Commissioner Holmes said we will have a very young commission. Director Torres said we will need to do a robust new commissioner orientation. Ms. Stanley said they are creating training videos for new commissioners, staff, and the public to help orient all to our work.

The budget hearing is on Thursday at 1:30 in Council chambers.

#### **B. Finance Committee**

Commissioner Young had no report.

#### **C. Community Relations Committee**

Ms Stanley reported that Commissioner Pinchback has no report. She asked if the committee would like to meet before the holidays or in early January. The consensus was early January. Ms. Stanley will coordinate with Commissioner Pinchback.

#### **D. Housing Committee**

Commissioner Roth said the committee had planned to ask the Commission take a vote on whether to move forward on proposals related to two items raised at the last meeting: the definition of family as it relates to how many unrelated individuals might live in a dwelling unit, and the possible requirement of accessible sidewalks, doorways, and corridors for all structures, including housing.

Commissioner Gerhardt said she doesn't feel ready to take a vote. Commissioner Barlow asked for more information about the political ramifications of these items. Commissioner Roth

said this is going to be challenging, maybe we aren't ready. Commissioner Gerhardt said with so many new people coming on and the change in leadership we may not be able to take this on. No vote was taken.

The AFFH task force has two community meetings coming up; the first will be December 6 from 7-9 p.m. focusing on community land trusts to preserve permanently affordable housing. The proposal includes various forms of CLTs for a range of income levels. This meeting is one of three subgroups working on particular AFFH issues in more detail; this meeting will focus on CLTs, with lots of time for discussion, Q&A, and feedback. It begins with a 20-minute film, "Ark of Justice," about John Lewis' CLT in Georgia.

Additionally, the final regional meeting to review the AFFH proposals will be at West End Sheraden Healthy Active Living Center, a great location with a meal provided and a raffle for a gift card.

#### **E. Public Hearing Section**

Commissioner Barlow said she would like to raise the topic of a public hearing inspired by Tree of Life. Commissioner Roth and Craig have been in discussion with the DOJ about this. Commissioner Craig said the DOJ, in conjunction with the CHR, state CHR, and mayor's office, came together to look at this. They would like to convene a meeting with core groups and expand it. The leadership would come from local government, nonprofits, clergy, etc. to look at racism and bigotry due to the rise in this kind of activity. It's fluid at this point; next steps are undefined but one possibility is to have a listening session with Squirrel Hill, Greenfield, and Hazelwood. They may also have a workshop at the Summit on Racism if a late workshop entry is permitted.

Commissioner Roth clarified that this DOJ initiative is being led by the same group that was discussed at our November retreat. The focus is wide, encompassing race and anti-Semitism and more. The Commission discussed the importance of ensuring all necessary parties are at the table before making decisions, and thinking carefully about locations for any public meetings.

#### **F. Bylaws Committee**

Commissioner Young said she and Commissioner Morris have been discussing their work on the bylaws and where to begin. They suggest looking at officer term limits (3 years per office), reviewing the process for staff and executive director hiring and approval by commissioners, establishing timelines for the annual Executive Director evaluation by the personnel committee, requiring committees to issue yearly schedule of reports, reexamining committee descriptions, and discussing the idea of whether or not the Commission should issue a yearly report or hold a meeting each year to look at trends and upcoming plans. She invites comments from commissioners. Things have changed, so the bylaws need to change too, and some things need to be spelled out more clearly. The meeting of this committee is open to any interested Commissioner.

#### **V. Executive Session**

Staff and guests departed; the Commission and Counsel entered executive session for the remainder of the meeting.