

**Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations
Minutes of Meeting
November 5, 2018**

Attendance:

Liddy Barlow, secretary	Mariana Padias, chair
Winford Craig	Allyce Pinchback
Marian Lien	Lori Roth
Richard Morris	Gwendolyn Young
Wasiullah Mohamed	

Absent: Sharyn Henry, Eric Holmes, Eric Horwith, Gabriel McMorland, Jessica Ruffin

Staff: Mark Hamilton, Rachel Salem, Carlos Torres

Guests: Leslie Bonner (retreat facilitator)

I. Call to Order

Commissioner Padias called the meeting to order and welcomed the commission to this retreat, hosted by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

II. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

III. Adoption of Minutes

MSP (7 aye, except Mohamed and Young abstaining): that the minutes be approved.

IV. Executive Session

There was no business requiring an Executive Session.

V. Committee and Staff Reports

A. Director's Report

AFFH recommendations: The first regional AFFH task force meeting open to the public, held at the Kingsley Association, drew over 50 people.

EOC meeting: Director Torres attended an EOC meeting in Delaware, where discussion focused on the need for joint trainings among all the enforcement agencies. They also discussed the U visa, which puts a stay on immigration proceedings for undocumented immigrants who have been victims of crimes; the federal government has not been approving applications for this visa, and has instead been sending immigration authorities to apprehend those who have applied for it.

Pregnancy as protected class: When Director Torres met with Councilwoman Strassburger earlier in the year, she had earlier asked what the city could do to improve civil rights. Director Torres suggested specific protections for pregnancy, creating a new protected class in the city's codes. Councilwoman Strassburger is pursuing this.

Tree of Life shooting/work with the Dept of Justice: Pittsburgh experienced a horrendous hate crime a week ago. The Department of Justice has a Community Relations arm that works at the federal level. Several commissioners attended a meeting with them afterward. They are planning to bring resources to Pittsburgh to work in the schools and in the wider community, and in long-term planning. Further work will happen by this Commission, the PA Commission, and the City. Commissioner Craig noted that the DOJ was particularly interested in youth HRC. DOJ wants local leaders to be face of this initiative. Commissioner Lien said DOJ may organize a community meeting, hosted in Squirrel Hill to encourage feelings of safety and security. They have worked in other communities and bring that experience to us. They are also asking what we need most; they are not calling the shots; this is something that would be collaborative and mutual.

Commissioner Mohamed shared his experience of applying for DOJ grants for security, which have not been successful. There has been a hesitancy to work with them among the Muslim community due to past surveillance and other unpleasant experiences. He believes local institutions bring more resources to bear. Commissioner Lien said we should avail ourselves of all available resources. Commissioner Roth said she felt the representatives they met with were committed to the work, but perhaps not fully resourced by the federal government. Director Torres reached out to Charles Philips at the DOJ after Antwon Rose shooting and did not hear anything; Philips later said he was told to stand down. Commissioner Roth felt the DOJ representatives' frustration with the current administration was palpable.

Commissioner Morris said maybe we need to have policy discussions with federal officials. Commissioner Pinchback said when we meet with these officials we need to bring up these poor past experiences and recognize that these responses are part of systemic racism: any discussion of safety needs to take into account that there are people who have never felt safe in Pittsburgh. Commissioner Young agreed; all of this is about hate and disrespect for human life, we can't focus on one aspect of the problem. You need to look at the whole picture.

Commissioner Roth said she had the feeling that they didn't have to educate them. They were there; they got it. But their hands are tied. Commissioner Pinchback said calling out white supremacy is never futile and always needed.

Commissioner Padias asked, so how do we position ourselves moving forward? Commissioner Lien said now we have access to the federal government; we should use that.

City budget: Director Torres said none of our budget requests were included in the city's budget, but after many requests they added the outreach and education position. Fingers crossed that it will happen. Director Torres will meet with Council to answer questions before the budget is approved.

B. Finance Committee

Commissioner Young had no report.

C. Community Relations Committee

Commissioner Lien reported that Ms Stanley has developed a good template for the newsletter.

Plan continue for the Liberty School event in March; the students will be examining case studies relating to civil rights.

D. Housing Committee

Commissioner Morris asked for time during New Business to discuss the committee's working paper.

E. Personnel Committee

Commissioner Padias said that the director's evaluation is almost complete; it will be shared with the director and presented to the Commission at our next meeting.

Commissioners Young and Barlow will be working with Director Torres on developing policies for hiring so that the Commission's staff might reflect the diversity of the city.

F. Public Hearing Section

Commissioner Barlow had no report.

G. Bylaws Committee

The committee has not yet met. Commissioner Young said she will connect with Commissioner Morris and will report back. Commissioner Padias said additional members of this committee are welcomed.

VI. New Business/Old Business

A. Commission Appointments: Commissioners Ruffin and Lien are resigning from the Commission. Commissioner Padias was told by the mayor's office that appointment of new commissioners is solely the jurisdiction of that office (it is not our responsibility to suggestion potential commissioners) and that they plan to work on appointments soon.

B. November 6 Election: Commissioner Craig suggested that commissioners visit polling places in our CHR shirts. Our charge to ensure equal access to public accommodations also applies to polling places. Discussion followed about the legalities of commissioners observing at the polls. Solicitor Hamilton said observers from parties have to be certified, but we do not represent a party so we can enter. If told to exit we can do so and wait outside, reporting any violations to poll watchers and/or Court of Common Pleas. Solicitor Hamilton suggested introducing ourselves to officials at polling place to ask where to stand and observe. Commissioner Padias read aloud the statutes regarding who is permitted in polling places, which does not seem to allow for our engagement.

MSP (7 in favor with Morris opposed and Young abstaining): That the Human Relations Commission, at each commissioner's availability and option, may go to polling sites and observe from the exterior November 6, 2018.

Commissioner Craig asked that those participating in this effort contact the CHR office to let them know we are participating.

C. Tabling Opportunities. Director Torres said the Housing Summit will take place on November 10 with a table from 12:15-1:30. The Urban League Thanksgiving distribution will take place on November 17 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Convention Center. Usually we several hundred people stop by the table at this event. Director Torres will follow up with email about these opportunities in hopes that commissioners might help staff the tables.

D. Housing Committee working paper. The committee circulated their working paper. Commissioner Roth said that the committee thought it would be useful to compile information relating to housing, so this working document includes reference materials from the history of housing-related legislation as well as ideas for future policy. They hope to receive feedback from the commissioners on additional information that needs to be included and other policy ideas.

The section on future policies includes a variety of ideas in process. In the coming year, the committee would like to focus on the statute that defines “family” for reasons of defining how many unrelated individuals might live in a dwelling unit; this is discriminatory as not all families are connected by blood, marriage, or adoption, and also affects affordability for students and others. Instead, the city could refer to HUD standards on how much space is required per individual.

They would also like to extend zoning and building codes to include accessible sidewalks, doorways, and corridors for all structures, including housing.

Commissioner Padias thanked the committee for their hard work on crafting this report.

VII. Adjournment

MSP (unanimous): that the meeting be adjourned.

The commissioners continued their gathering in a retreat considering the commission’s mission and vision.