City of Aurora
Human Relations Commission

June 13, 2019

Meeting Minutes

Present
Bertha Baillie, Michelle Evans, Sheila Gray, Symone Lewis, Ryan Maley, Hortensia Ramos, William Small, Mae Smith (Chairperson), Kristen Ziman (ex-officio)

Absent
Susan Sosa Bachmeier, Zachary Draves, Vincent Gaddis, Robert Lundquist,

Call to Order and Roll Call
Chairperson Smith called the meeting to order at 5:32 PM.
Ryan Maley took roll call. Chairperson Smith noted that a quorum was present.
Ms. Voigt from the City of Aurora was also present.

Minutes Approval
Mr. Small moved the minutes from the April 11, 2019 be approved. Ms. Baillie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Complaint HRC 19–001
Commissioners discussed compliant and response. Commissioners reviewed assertions by Respondent denying any allegations of discrimination and discussed how to weigh the assertions of Complainant and Respondent.

After discussion, Ms. Baillie moved that the respondent be asked to provide a transcript of the hearing. Ms. Lewis seconded the motion. Ms. Gray suggested that the transcript may not be sufficient to evaluate the hearing and that if audio recordings are available, they should also be provided. Ms. Baillie and Ms. Lewis agreed to amend the motion so respondent be asked to provide any transcripts and recordings of the hearing. The motion passed unanimously.

Size of Commission
Chairperson Smith reported that she has contacted several Commissioners about their participation and desire to continue participating. Since there was not a response, the matter will be tabled until the next meeting. Commissioners briefly discussed the expected level of on-going commitment and the need to make an effort to regularly attend meetings.
Marie Wilkinson Event
The Wilkinson Family Day will be held at the Aurora Public Library on July 13, 2019. The Commission will have a table and display banner at the event. Ms. Gray will staff the table. Other Commissioners were invited to attend.

HRC Bylaws
Chairperson Smith reported that the Commission by-laws document has been updated to include all approved changes. This has been provided to the City. Mr. Maley will send by-laws to Commissioners for their records.

Committee Reports:
Due to time constraints, only one report on Event Participation was delivered:

Event Participation (Gray and Baille)
Ms. Baillie reported that Representatives Foster and Hernandez are sponsoring an immigration workshop at East Aurora High School. Ms. Baillie will represent the Commission. Ms. Sosa-Bachmeier will also attend on behalf of World Relief. She will also appear on a discussion panel.

Ms. Baillie suggested the Commission might pay for tickets to various community events such as the Hispanic Heritage Advisory Board Community Breakfast. Chairperson Smith reminded Commissioners of a previous idea to place ads in the programs to publicize the logo.

Ms. Baillie made a motion to provide funding for Commissioners to attend the functions of other Commissions and take ads to support them. The motion was seconded by Ms. Gray. The motion passed unanimously.

Aurora Housing Authority
Chairperson Smith introduced Mr. Ralph Jordan of the Aurora Housing Authority (AHA) who joined the meeting.

Mr. Jordan discussed his career in public housing. He has been working at the AHA for eleven months. When Mr. Jordan arrived at the AHA, he discovered some financial issues. He converted the agency to asset management basis of operations and has created a cash reserve. Prior to his arrival, there was no budget, but this has been corrected. A financial audit was completed in December 2018.

AHA has moved from 94% to 99% occupancy. They have addressed issues of some residents causing problems at AHA sites including evicting known drug dealers. At this point, AHA is primarily dealing with day-to-day management issues such as how to upgrade housing properties that have not been repaired or modernized in years.

Mr. Jordan discussed the housing wait list. The wait list has been closed for ten years. He has never worked at an agency with this issue. AHA is investigating how to provide more affordable
Chairperson Smith asked why people outside the community are entering units. Mr. Jordan said that when people apply and are eligible, they cannot be denied under HUD regulations.

Mr. Jordan further discussed the wait list issue. The list has been reviewed and people no longer interested have been removed. There are currently 32 people on the revised list. Mr. Jordan’s goal is to serve those people and get them into housing. In the future, they want to open the list but limit it to 500 or 600 people. Historically, only 1/3 of people applying for housing are actually eligible. AHA is investigating how to properly manage the list going forward.

Mr. Jordan stated that the availability of affordable housing is a top concern. He also reported that his direction to staff is to help their residents. He is quite concerned by how to modernize the properties in AHA stock now. There are some capital funds available, but it would be a three year process to gain further credits from Illinois Housing Development Authority.

Chairperson Smith thanked Mr. Jordan and asked about the maintenance and inspection of housing. Mr. Jordan stated that the units are inspected by the City and any necessary work is performed. He discussed that the work is often difficult because of the age of housing. One of his goals is to modernize the stock to lower the cost and time of maintenance.

Ms. Lewis asked about the behaviors that may cause problems. Mr. Jordan discussed drug activity and violence. There was also a list of people who owed $3,000 in rent and were not evicted. AHA has made an effort to address all these issues.

Commissioners discussed complaint HRC 19-001 with Mr. Jordan. Mr. Jordan discussed various issues with the complainant’s behavior including co-occupying a unit without authorization, causing damage to a unit, and being verbally abusive with AHA staff.

The complainant was applying for housing but was denied based on past behavior and was offered a hearing. The Complainant appeared at AHA offices. The person was loud and demanding Mr. Jordan spoke with him one-on-one to calm him and direct him to request a hearing.

At the hearing, the Complainant was denied housing based on prior behavior.

Ms. Gray asked about the Complainant’s disability. What is it? Mr. Jordan did not know. He stated that disabled applicants are given a preference for housing but this information is supplied on a housing application.

Chairperson Smith asked about due process in hearings and the hearing process. Mr. Jordan stated that all residents are given information apprising them of the process. AHA is looking into a third-party to manage hearings to further reduce any issues about conflicts of interest between AHA staff initiating hearings and those overseeing the hearings.
Chairperson Smith asked if there are resident councils. Mr. Jordan stated that there are no current resident councils. He is discussing forming councils at two sites. AHA has experienced that residents at some sites are “unable to get along” which makes councils difficult to organize manage. There is money in the budget for the councils.

Chairperson Smith asked about the ethnic make-up or AHA residents. Mr. Jordan reported that the majority are African-American and 7-8% Hispanic. He noted that he was working from memory and will send actual numbers later. Chairperson Smith asked if scattered site make-up matches main properties. Mr. Jordan said that the generally are the same, although there may be some more Hispanics in scattered sites.

Chairperson Smith thanked Mr. Jordan for his hard work at AHA and for his appearance at the Commission.

Mr. Jordan left the meeting.

**HRC Strategic Planning**
Mr. Maley gave a presentation on strategic options for the Commission. The presentation followed discussion from some Commissioners after the last meeting regarding Commission effectiveness and opportunities to make a difference in the community.

Highlights of the presentation include:
- A brief review of relevant sections of the Human Rights Ordinance.
- A definition of strategy as “a mix of policy and action designed to achieve a major objective or overcome a significant challenge.”
- A diagnosis of the Commission’s challenge as either “not making a difference” or “wasting time and resources”.
- Strategic options ranging from minimizing time and resources and only handling complaints to assuming a leadership role and actively working on shaping policy and pursuing high visibility projects.
- Discussion of the details of various options and the need for more resources (time and money) in order to pursue the leadership option.

The presentation shifted to a discussion of possible topics to focus the Commission’s efforts.

On behalf of Ms. Sosa-Bachmeier, Mr. Maley suggested some working topics to help the Commission focus its efforts including the area of religion discrimination and employment discrimination.

Ms. Baillie suggested a working area of LGBTQ issues. She presented a draft plan to with activities to Support, Educate & Communicate, and Advocate. These activities would be developed in cooperation with the community as the result of “listening sessions” with community representatives.
Ms. Gray discussed the Human Rights ordinance’s text that the Commission was created to “further the policy of the United States and the State of Illinois as expressed in their constitutions and law”. She discussed federal legislation to protect right of the LGBTQ and a possible role of the Commission to support such legislation.

Ms. Gray also discussed her experience in seeing the Aurora Fire Department at the Memorial Day parade and the lack of diversity. She discussed the possibility of direct action on this to fund raise, advocate for, or otherwise address this issue. Ms. Evans has significant experience on this in her role at Waubonsee and discussed the various issues in detail.

Commissioners discussed the issue at some length including the different strategic options, the current operations of the Commission, and possible ways to move forward. There was general support for assuming a leadership strategy in order to make a larger difference in the community.

Mr. Small and Chairperson Smith proposed some ideas on how to move forward including naming disbanding the current committee structure and replacing it with a structure based of topic areas each led by a Commissioner who was passionate about the topic. This leader would be responsible for asking for resources and help from other Commissioners.

After some discussion about details, Chairperson Smith said the issue would be further discussed at the next meeting and that Commissioners interested in particular topics should be prepared to discuss at that meeting.

**Next Meeting**
Chairperson Smith reminded commissioners that the next meeting of the Commission will be August 8, 2019.

**Adjournment**
The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 7:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ryan Maley