City of Aurora
Human Relations Commission
August 8, 2019

Meeting Minutes

Present
Bertha Baillie, Susan Sosa Bachmeier, Michelle Evans, Sheila Gray, Symone Lewis, Robert Lundquist, Ryan Maley, Mae Smith (Chairperson),

Absent
Zachary Draves, Vincent Gaddis, Hortensia Ramos, William Small, Kristen Ziman (ex-officio)

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. Aurora Fire Department Chief Gary Krienitz was also present.

Minutes Approval
Ms. Baillie moved the minutes from the June 13, 2019 be approved. Ms. Gray seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Aurora Fire Department
Chief Krienitz discussed various topics regarding the Aurora Fire Department (AFD). Highlights of the discussion are

• The AFD has nine stations, 208 sworn officers, about 70% of whom are paramedics.
• There are divided into two battalion commands.
• Fire and emergency medical service (EMS) are the same service in AFD, not separate as in many other departments.
• Personnel work a 24-hour shift then have 48 hours off.
• Because of this schedule, the work environment becomes almost like a family environment because of the amount of time spent together over the length of a career.
• 84% of call volume is EMS and are, in effect, the first line of health care and mental health care.
• The current opioid crisis adds to the burden.
• AFD will run 20,000 EMS calls this year.
Regarding recruiting:

- Fire departments have a history as a “good old boys club” consisting of white men.
- The culture of some groups precludes thinking of firefighting as a career.
- In order to recruit, AFD need to reach parents and needs to go direct to kids.
- AFD recruitment team is in many middle and high schools.
- AFD has an Explorers Club consisting of 15-18-year-old kids. 650 kids have been through the program. 15 have been hired into AFD. 50 have been hired by North Aurora, 50 hired by Oswego, and many others have found work in the field.
- AFD Cadet program offers part-time employment and payment for EMT-B school and paramedic school. People who complete the program are given preferential consideration for hiring into AFD.
- Cadet program has high attrition rate due to the learning requirements and many steps necessary to complete the process.

The Chief observed that many specific aspects of firefighting eliminate some candidates. People who are afraid of heights cannot climb ladders. If you are claustrophobic, it is difficult to wear breathing apparatus. Further, many young people do not have experience with tools that are required to perform the job (e.g. saws for cutting through roofs).

Chief Krienitz wants a more diverse fire department to communicate better to the people they serve. Requirements for employment are strict including psychological exam, criminal history background checks, filling out paperwork completely and accurately, and turning in information on time. State laws do not permit AFD to bypass any steps in hiring. Comparing AFD and Aurora Police Department hiring is not appropriate; they each have very different requirements.

Ms. Sosa-Bachmeier asked about regarding scholarships or other support for potential firefighters. The Chief said AFD does not offer scholarships. Ms. Evans said there are scholarship opportunities through Waubonsee including some for first responders. There are scholarships offered by some firefighters’ associations.

Mr. Lundquist said the challenge seems to be recruitment and this seems to mean that we must start educating earlier. The Chief said recruitment efforts include middle schools, but it seems parents need to push kids to pursue these careers. Outreach must include parents.

Ms. Evans commented that West and East Aurora school districts do not have dual credit offering by taking fire science classes unlike some other places such as Kaneland. There does not seem to be realization that there are career opportunities by those in charge of career programs.

Ms. Sosa-Bachmeier asked about communication with non-English speakers. The Chief said AFD offers incentives for speaking approved second languages including Spanish. AFD also has access to remote translator service via phone.

Chairperson Smith asked about the demographics of AFD firefighters. The stated that of 206 sworn employees in 2016 there are 6% Hispanic, 0.5% Asian, 0.5% African-American, and 93% White. 1% are female.
Chairperson Smith asked about salaries. The Chief did not have exact numbers, but stated starting salary was approximately 60,000 and approximately 90,000 after one year.

Chairperson Smith thanked the Chief for coming. Chief Krienitz left the meeting.

**Complaint HRC 19-001**
Commissioners discussed the compliant, response, and the follow-up information from the respondent.

Ms. Lewis commented that there should be more information in the follow-up report. She commented that a lifetime ban from housing seems excessive. She was concerned about the nature of the process and why there was no specific accommodation for the complainant. Chairperson Smith noted that in her experience, there are no options when a housing decision is made similar. This is similar to zero-tolerance policies in school.

Ms. Bachmeier didn’t see evidence to support specific claims in the report. Mr. Maley commented that the report contained description of testimony from the hearing.

Mr. Maley commented that he saw no specific claim that the respondent’s actions were based on complainant’s claim of disability. There was no direct comment or specifics on this in the original complaint or mention in the hearing report.

Commissioners discussed how to obtain more information including inviting the complainant to a future meeting or meeting with him in person with a few Commissioners in a confidential interview. Commissioners discussed how this might work and the issues involved including safety and the lack of specific process and training for this type of action.

After discussion, Mr. Maley moved the complaint be dismissed and complainant be encouraged to re-submit a new complaint with specific allegations of discrimination. Ms. Gray seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**HRC Strategic Planning**
Commissioners discussed the strategic planning. Chairperson Smith reviewed the previous discussion. Commissioner reached consensus about the general approach of selecting focus areas and allowing individual Commissioners to lead efforts in those areas.

Ms. Sosa-Bachmeier stated that she was specifically interested in religious discrimination issues. She also feels that employment is a key issue.

Ms. Baillie discussed her early efforts on the LGBTQ issue including specific outreach to Youth Outlook, PFLAG, and Aurora Police Department LGBTQ liaison. She expects to hear from East and West School district personnel as the school year begins. Her initial step will be holding a listening session to discuss issues with these stakeholders.
Ms. Lewis expressed an interest in multiple potential areas including senior and elderly issues and housing.

Mr. Maley felt it important to officially authorize work on these areas. After discussion, Mr. Maley moved to appoint Ms. Sosa-Bachmeier to lead the religion focus area, Ms. Baillie to lead on LGBT focus, and Chairperson Smith to lead on education. Ms. Lewis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Commissioner Attendance**
Chairperson Smith reported that she has contacted Mr. Draves and Mr. Gaddis.

Mr. Draves committed to attend this meeting but did not attend. Mr. Gaddis said his schedule is quite busy and he is not certain he can continue on the Commission. He is considering his future participation. Chairperson Smith said we will discuss the issue next month.

Chairperson Smith mentioned that Mr. Gaddis had wanted to bring a program to the attention of Commissioners. She will send more information about a Client Assistance Program to Commissioners.

**Next Meeting**
Chairperson Smith reminded commissioners that the next meeting of the Commission will be September 12, 2019.

**Adjournment**
The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 6:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ryan Maley