

Erie County Human Relations Commission

Minutes – March 20, 2017

Attendance

Commissioners: Bob Howden, Willie McAdory, George Morgan, Connie Manus and Amy Danzer

Staff: Joe Aguglia, Charlotte Scalise and Wayne Harbison

Guest: Fiore Leone

Commission Members Not in Attendance

Louisa Heifner informed staff that she is sick

Tracy Leet notified us at the last meeting that she would be working (because the meeting had to be moved to a Monday)

Meeting was called to order at 6:13 pm

Approval of Minutes

Bob Howden made a motion to approve the minutes from January. This was seconded by George Morgan. They were approved unanimously.

George Morgan moved to approve the notes from February. This was seconded by Bob Howden. They were also approved unanimously.

Directors Report

The housing seminar will be held next month. Joe Aguglia expects that the gendered bathroom issue will be an issue of concern and discussion at the seminar.

The employment case for which we had a hearing scheduled settled for \$7,000. Because of this, the hearing is cancelled for Thursday. Willie McAdory wanted the information from this case to be made public and argued that the Commission members should be directing the actions of the Director and other staff on what to investigate and report back to Commission members. For almost an hour, members of the Commission and staff tried again to explain to Willie McAdory the following:

- restrictions of a sealed court order,
- why settlements are often preferable to a public hearing for both the complainant and the defendant,
- the requirements and restrictions of the investigation being done by the HRC staff,
- requirements that files of investigations are kept by staff but that they must remain confidential,
- the inability of the staff to act as legal counsel for either the complainant or the defendant,
- the importance of both the complainant and defendant retaining legal counsel,
- the inability of the Commission members to know about an investigation so that they can hear cases,
- the importance and necessity of Commission members' impartiality when hearing cases,
- the inability of the office staff to create lists of landlords and employers that have been accused of violating the Human Relations Ordinance,
- the roles of the Commission and the Advisory Board in educating the community about discrimination, the Human Relations Commission, and the Ordinance,

- the attendance of the Commission, Advisory Board and staff at community events (not political rallies or other partisan events) for education about the HRC,
- the legal requirements in determining what is admissible and non-admissible evidence, and
- the relationship of staff being hired by the County and not under the direct supervision of the Commission members.

Amy Danzer suggested to Willie McAdory that if his desire was to inform the community and tell people about the discrimination that was taking place in the community more than what the Commission was doing, he should consider joining the Advisory Board which is specifically tasked to do that. Willie McAdory responded that he will be staying right here on the Commission.

Joe Aguglia asked if we should publish the fair housing testing results. Joe Berdis from the County Planning office does not want the results to be published as he feels it would “shame” particular communities. We had planned to provide the results to County Council and the public. Amy Danzer moved that the staff be instructed to draft a report, due at the next meeting, using the housing testing data as well as information from the office on the number of complaints, resolutions, hearings, etc. and identifying those that are employment, housing and public discrimination without singling out specific geographic locations as much as possible. Discussion ensued with Fiore Leone saying that that was the problem with the Commission, there have not been any hearings within the last few years. Commission members and staff explained that that was the purpose of the HRC, to provide a way to address the issues without having to have hearings, but to allow those who have been wronged to be provided justice. Amy Danzer said by providing the information, we could inform the public better. Fiore Leone argued that the Commission hasn’t been doing that. Amy Danzer countered that that was why she was making the motion so that the report could be written and distributed widely around the county to inform not only individuals but the organizations that serve them as well as employers, landlords and those providing public accommodations. Commission members and staff members felt it was important to have this information for the entire county with the statistics from the HRC office such as the number of complaints, resolutions, etc. being included. This motion was seconded by Bob Howden and passed unanimously.

New Business

Elections: George Morgan nominated Bob Howden for chair. He accepted the nomination. Amy Danzer nominated Connie Manus for vice chair. She accepted the nomination. Connie Manus nominated Amy Danzer for secretary. She accepted the nomination. Each was elected unanimously.

There are still two empty seats on the Commission.

Old Business

Bob Howden moved that the proposed ordinance revision from the special January session be approved and sent to County Council for review and approval. George Morgan seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The draft brochure is still being worked on by Louisa Heifner.

Amy Danzer moved that the April Commission meeting be moved to April 18 as a joint meeting with the Advisory Board because it was originally scheduled to be on the same day as the all-day housing seminar. This was seconded by George Morgan. It was approved unanimously.

Public Comment or Open Discussion

George Morgan discussed the Advisory Board plan to go to the various organizations in the community to provide presentations on what the Human Relations Commission does. This will be taking place when the brochure is done. The Advisory Board has three working committees that are being much more active than they have been in the past.

Adjournment

George Morgan moved that the meeting be adjourned. It was seconded by Willie McAdory and approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:23 pm.