

Erie County Human Relations Commission (ECHRC) – Commissioners Meeting

Minutes/Notes – January 22, 2019 Meeting

Call to Order/Roll Call:

The Meeting was called to Order at 6:25 PM.

Commission Members Present: Shawnta' Pulliam-Brown (Chair); Mary Jo Campbell (Vice Chair); Christine Mitchell (Sec.); Hallie Hilinski; Tracy Leet; Connie Manus; and Willie McAdory.

Commission Members Not Present: James Wandless.

Commission Members to be Appointed: N/A (appointment by County Executive).

ECHRC Staff / Attorney Present: Tony Logue and Wayne Harbison (Atty. Spry was not available due to illness).

Invited/Public Guests: Erie City Councilperson Kathy Schaaf.

Commissioners / Public Comment:

City Councilperson Kathy Schaaf raised a question concerning an eviction of a tenant from her apartment that was deemed uninhabitable by City Code Enforcement and Erie Fire Dept.. She needs assistance in moving. Several options and local agency resources were discussed, but because of some assistance limitations those may not be available at this time. Property upkeep by landlords and code issues in general were also discussed and how a tenant may file complaint through local district justices if facing an eviction. Payments to landlords could be ordered by the DJ and monthly rental payments be made through County's Prothonotary's Office until owners make necessary repairs.

Election of Commission Officers / Formation of Hearing/Motions Panel & Commission Analyst:

Currently officers that were previously accepted and approved for interim balance of 2018 are: Shawnta' Pulliam-Brown as Chairperson, Mary Jo Campbell as Vice Chairperson, and Christine Mitchell as Secretary. As with standard practice and this being the start of the new year, new officers can now be nominated. Shawnta' Pulliam-Brown was the sole nomination for Chairperson and was appointed by the Commission by acclamation. Mary Jo Campbell was also nominated and appointed by acclamation as Vice Chairperson, and Christine Mitchell was also nominated and appointed by acclamation as Secretary.

The current Hearing Panel consists of Commissioners Pulliam-Brown, Campbell, and Leet. A long discussion was held involving the establishment of a Motions Panel. This may be expected to be assigned to any Commissioner who is without conflict. This Motions Panel may be appointed by the Chairperson on a rotating basis. Further discussion was also made regarding an alternative member for the Hearing Panel in the case of conflicts of interest.

Commissioner Mitchell volunteered to serve on the Hearing Panel when necessary. The discussion continued regarding the proposed appointment of Commissioner McAdory as the Commission Analyst that will assist Attorney Bryan Spry and the ECHRC staff in the case dismissal process that is to be presented to the full Commission body for approval. Commissioner McAdory was appointed unanimously appointed for a one year term.

Director's Report:

Director Logue discussed our plans for revitalizing the ECHRC including the expansion of the office to include Suite 811 adjoining our current Suite 812 as our new Conference Room in the Renaissance Building. Renovations details include a pass-through door, the removal of a partition, painting, and carpeting. The County's Administration and County Council have been consulted and seem to be in agreement regarding the office revitalization needs. Director Logue assured the Commissioners that this office is going to be a lot more transparent than before. ECHRC Advisory Members along with Commissioners will be strongly encouraged to utilize the space to further enhance our efforts in serving the community.

The ECHRC is also moving on a number of old and new cases by bringing in a couple of other attorneys to assist us and Atty. Spry move cases forward at a quicker pace. Most of these cases are related to employment. Approx. 75% of cases are employment.

Director Logue also brought to the attention of the Commissioners about a GM employment harassment case making the papers. This was brought to their attention due to the proximity and similar demographics of Toledo, OH and what we are seeing across the US. Discussion also continued on the recent African-american poverty issue raised in a national publication about Erie. It was also noted about the low number of African-americans and other minorities on the City's police force.

There was also discussion concerning moving the Commission forward with a stronger emphasis on the Advisory Committee and their involvement in education and outreach efforts. Members seemed positive in making the community a better place. The process of making appointments to the Advisory Committee and Commissioners and the terms of service was also discussed. The process and terms of appointment were also discussed. Members are appointed on a four-year basis with replacements serving the balance of resigned member's term to be fulfilled before a full term is assigned.

New Business:

Staff discussed the ECHRC's submission of City of Erie Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for FY 2019 funds to continue Public Service Announcement (PSAs) on TV for 2020 and for the purchase outreach promotional materials for the office. The 2019 CDBG funds for PSAs will be shown next Spring. 2019 funds for promotional materials will be purchase after July of this year when those funds become available. We are looking to request up \$12,000 under this 2019 application. We are looking to work with Advisory Committee members and possibly involve local school students in producing video and other outreach ideas. Promotional material funding is to be equally matched with ECHRC budgeted funds for the purchase of outreach/promotional materials. We will place City / County co-sponsorship on these materials.

We are expecting to share the Hearing Panel's Findings concerning the Housing Public Hearing Case as soon as possible. Atty. Spry is working to complete this for the Commission's review. It is expected that it will appeal.

Old Business:

PSAs from 2018 CDBG funds, we will be running PSAs soon. The same two versions from last year are being considered.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 PM.