

Erie County Human Relations Commission (ECHRC) – Commissioners Meeting

Minutes – November 24 2020

Call to Order/Roll Call:

The Meeting was called to Order by Commission chair Shawnta Pulliam-Brown via zoom at 6:04 PM.

Commission Members Present: Shawnta Pulliam-Brown, Mary Jo Campbell (V-Chair) Christine Mitchell (Sec.); Michael Martin, Jeff Pinski.

Commission Members Not Present: Tracy Leet, John Steiner, Willy McAdory.

ECHRC Staff Present: Tony Logue, Wayne Harbison, Attorney Atchley Holmes, Attorney Lanre Kukoyi Attorney Charles Sunwabe.

County Council Ellen Schauerman

City Council None

Advisory Board Diana Ames

Approval of Commissioners Minutes / Notes:

Approved October minutes by Commissioner Campbell and Martin approved

Public Comment Director Logue asked for recognition as a public citizen for public comment. Mr. Logue asked if Chair Pulliam-Brown was appointed to the Pennsylvania Human Relations commission per the prior event indicating she was being considered. The chair indicated that she is still being considered for that position by Chad Lassiter and the Pennsylvania Human's Relation Commission. Mr. Logue asked about this process since nobody from Erie County ever had been appointed to this before and several people had asked about this and why they did not have an opportunity to apply. Chair Pulliam-Brown shared with Mr. Logue that she assumed that the State HRC process is the same appointment process as our local City and County Appointments as we were recommended and appointed by a City or County Council member. Chair Pulliam-Brown did not know about the process and suggested Mr. Logue contact Chat Lassiter and the state human relations commission with questions on the process. Commissioner Campbell commented when a state commission has a state opening, they have every right to appoint who they want to.

Mr. Logue acknowledged this and requested that transparency be key.
The Chair acknowledged our new attorneys.

Director's Report:

Director Logue indicated that were at 12 active cases which he expected to jump with recent inquiries.

Director Logue welcomed our two new attorneys who have extensive experience and will join Attorney Sunwabe and he felt very confident they could handle the workload successfully.

Director Logue discussed the ordinance change with County Council that was done back in 2018 allowing county council to control the hiring and firing of commission personnel. It was brought back up before the new council to rescind this and return hiring and firing to the commission and it was defeated by a 5-2 vote.

Director Logue then discussed the case on Georgia Pacific 1991 on comingling of responsibilities and indicated it was reviewed by the county clerk, county solicitor and others and was not on point with our business here.

Director Logue indicated that in the prior minutes the chair requested that he should have been keeping on top of Attorney Spry. The chair indicated that the commissioners should inquire about staff. The hearing panel was trying to coordinate hearings and provided dates. Three 3 emails were sent out to Attorney Spry and we received no response. Also Ordinance 105 Commission Oversees and works with staff our job is to make sure the work is getting done and that we are following the bylaws and ordinances of the HRC regarding scheduling hearing dates.

Director Logue indicated that the county courthouse would be closing November 30th for day to day operations and only emergency proceedings would be conducted.

Extensive discussion of the situation with Attorney Spry and Commissioner Martin wanted to move forward with our agenda and let our new attorneys do they work. Commissioner Campbell clarified that she never sent any emails to Attorney Spry. Chair Pulliam-Brown indicated she wanted clear communication on status. Chair Pulliam-Brown that the commission is a valued group who serves the community with one common goal.

Chair Report / Commissioners Comment(s):

Annual Report The chair thanked all commissioners and staff for the hard work and dedication completion of the 2019 annual report. It was a strong accomplishment since it had never been done in the history of the commission.

Old Business:

The annual report was sent to county and city staff and commissioners and advisory board. It has been sent for publication. Chair Pulliam-Brown thanked Mr. Harbison on his work on the well done nice cover.

Attorney Sunwabe reviewed details on status. They are doing the best we can to keep things on track given the conditions and rules. One case had a settlement offer made if not resolved will be scheduling a hearing. One very old case from 2010 has many issues he is trying to work though from inaction from prior executive director. Director Martin asked about the statute of limitations which is normally 2 years. Attorney Sunwabe indicated some cases one specifically are moving and others have some delays. Director Logue will update with the next directors report

Training on the general hearing and investigation process will be coming from the state. The chair will be meeting with them on November 5th to set at date. 1st Thursday of the month proposed. Zoom to be available for any that cannot attend.

New Business:

Commissioner Martin requested written action on those members that have not attended. The chair will be doing this communication and copy all next week. Director Logue also requested that the County executive who has an empty appointment also be included. The chair will also address the end of terms and ensuring that commissioners will get end of term thank you.

Carl Summerson from Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission will do our workshop Thursday January 7th. We selected the time of 6 P.M. and will last about an hour. This is to be confirmed by Mr Summerson. Flyers will be made. Question from commissioner Campbell as to who will be invited and from the chair was the flyer will go to all staff commissioners and advisory board members.

We discussed the reorganization scheduled historically we have been doing reorganization in January since we have no December meeting although the bylaws indicate reorganization in December. Since technically the terms end before our January meeting we discussed options for doing this have via email vote with nominations in November.

If we need a bylaws modification they have to be ratified by county council. Commissioners Campbell and Martin motioned to conduct nominations tonight and vote in December. That motion was approved. Chair Pulliam Brown and Commissioner Campbell motioned to amend the bylaws to move the nominations from December to November since no December meeting approved.

Mr. Harbison has a concern that we normally advertise as the reorganization meeting. Mr. Martin mentioned the sunshine law and since this was not previously advertised a reorganization meeting and there was not sufficient time to have bylaws approved because they need at least 20 days notification before county council meeting to ratify we agreed to continue reorganization in January and possibly revisit the change in 2021 for next time. We reversed the motions in view of this information. Mr. Harbison requested meeting dates for 2021. Commissioners Campbell and Martin motioned for 2021 meeting dates including a first Tuesday in December for reorganization in 2021 approved.

Adjournment:

There was a motion to adjourn by commissioners Campbell and Mitchell and the meeting was adjourned at 7:21 p.m.