

**Human Right Commission
January 5, 2010 Meeting Minutes**

Members Present: Negar Jackson, Jessica Macy, Thomas O'Toole, Mark Thomas, Marissa Todd

Members Excused: Mary Bixby

Staff Present: Steve Hollis, Marie Glaze, Shawna Victor, Fred Boeckmann

Others Present:

- I. **Call to Order/Introductions:** The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.
- II. **Approval of Agenda:** Thomas moved to amend the agenda to include the City Council Questionnaire under New Business. The motion was seconded by Jackson and passed unanimously.

O'Toole moved to approve the amended agenda. The motion was seconded by Todd and passed unanimously.

- III. **Approval of December 1, 2009 meeting minutes:** Jackson moved to approve the December 1, 2009 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Thomas and passed unanimously.

IV. Old Business

- a. **Revision of the Human Rights Enhancement Program Funding RFP:** Hollis said staff is working on this item and would like to have a draft available for the commission to review at the February meeting. He would also like to simplify the application in the near future.

When the commission approves the changes, Hollis said there will likely be one application for the commission to consider for funding from Hickman High School Amnesty International.

The applications will be considered on a monthly basis until the funding is depleted.

V. New Business

- a. **City Council Questionnaire:** Thomas said staff forwarded the questionnaire from City Council to the commission along with last year's questionnaire and the commission's responses. This year's questionnaire is slightly different from last year's.

Thomas said the commission does not have to come up with answers at this meeting but will need to discuss and finalize their responses at the next meeting. He believes the commission can work from the answers submitted on last year's questionnaire for the questions that are the same.

Hollis said he made note of the questions that are the same such as any policy changes and projects that the commission will work on and if those projects will require any funding.

Thomas said he will draft answers and forward those to the commission for consideration. If other commissioners would also like to draft answers for consideration, that will be very helpful for the commission's discussion.

Hollis noted one item that was changed by other commissions was their attendance policies but that was done outside of the questionnaire. This commission is a bit different as the ordinance tied to the work of this commission is more complex.

Boeckmann said the commission should look over the whole ordinance for this commission and advise any changes they would like to make to Council.

Thomas said the commission will discuss the questionnaire at the February meeting.

VI. Staff Reports

- a. **Manager of Human Services:** Hollis said Tom Lata, City Planning and Development, has previously discussed the Consolidated Plan with this commission. This commission has been involved with the planning because of the fair housing issue. Hollis spoke with Lata's boss, Tim Teddy, and HUD is not accepting the City's Consolidated Plan because HUD did not believe there was a complete analysis of the impediments to fair housing. During the writing of the last Consolidated Plan, this commission formed a subcommittee to explore fair housing issues. That subcommittee actually did some investigative work. There have been discussions in the last few years about forming a Fair Housing Commission. Hollis does not believe another commission is necessary because the Human Rights Commission is charged with investigating fair housing complaints. Hollis believes Lata will be requesting time on the agenda to discuss the impediments to fair housing. Hollis believes there are fair housing issues in this community, especially in rental properties.

Hollis said the Columbia Values Diversity Celebration is Thursday, January 14. The number of sponsors has increased this year but general ticket sales are lower than in previous years. Hollis asked the commission to spread the word about the availability of tickets. This commission is a sustaining sponsor and has eight available tickets.

Al Terrill has resigned from the commission.

Hollis said Don Love, a volunteer with Missouri Association of Social Welfare, has contacted staff about partnering with staff and this commission on human rights issues in the community.

- b. **Law Department:** No report at this time.
- c. **Human Rights Specialist:** Glaze said as a long standing partner in education with the Columbia Public Schools, staff attended the World Café on December 4th. There were roughly 130 participants discussing the district's long-term goals and five year plan. Discussion mainly centered around the idea of 100% student achievement in eight of the 12 objectives identified by the six long-term plan school committees that have been meeting since September

December 10th was Human Rights Day. This year's theme was "Embrace diversity, End Discrimination". The theme was particularly fitting since the Diversity Celebration has consumed so much of staff time in recent weeks. Staff teamed up with diversity award winner Jonette Ford at West Boulevard Elementary School to bring the mini-museum created by her 5th grade class to the Department of Public Health and Human Services. It is currently on display and will remain until mid-January when it will be displayed at Missouri United Methodist Church.

Glaze noted she will be promoting the Diversity Celebration on KFRU and KBIA.

VII. Commission Reports

- a. Columbia Citizen Police Review Board:** Boeckmann said the board has been receiving training on procedures of the commission and the Police Department's internal investigation and use of force training. He believes there will be additional trainings from the Prosecuting Attorney and a local defense attorney.

VIII. Public Comment: There was no public comment.

- IX. Commissioner Comment:** Thomas asked the commission to make themselves available to the community regarding community concerns. If there are topics commissioners would like to bring forward, they should not be shy in doing so. The Council Questionnaire is another way for the commission to bring ideas to the table.

Thomas said the Citizen's Review Board was an important issue to him and he is confident it will be useful tool for the community. He is also interested in mental health and mental health issues related to human rights.

Thomas urged the commission to bring forward ideas that can be pursued before City Council. At this time, the complaint case load is very low and the commission could put time into a specific topic.

Hollis said staff does field some suggestions and relays that information to the commission.

Hollis said what the commission received along with the Council Questionnaire is just the section of the ordinance that forms this commission and the remaining portion is the Human Rights Ordinance. There are times issues are discussed and put forward to Council outside of this questionnaire. Any time there are human rights issues raised, they can be discussed by the commission or forwarded to Council.

Jackson said there is a large refugee population, from countries such as Burundi, in Columbia and they have no resources and have no knowledge of things like running water or electricity. She was wondering if the funding this commission has would be available to help the refugees find housing and how to function in society. She does not see this as a human right issue here but believes it is an important issue. She believes that if the refugees do not receive help to learn skills and find housing then they cannot function or survive in the community.

Hollis said the Department of Public Health and Human Services staff works with the refugee population on a daily basis. While he does not believe providing financial assistance is allowable with human rights funding, he understands Jackson might also be referring to helping the refugee population through inclusion.

Hollis said creating a climate of inclusiveness in the community for the refugees is more along the lines of being a human rights issue. Hollis has had discussions with people in the community about putting together a coalition to raise awareness of the refugee and immigrant population.

Jackson said she knows of someone that is trying to start a non-profit for refugees. Hollis said there is already a program in the community like this.

Hollis said the human rights ordinance charges the commission to promote inclusion and diversity. These are certainly isolated populations within the community.

Jackson said it is difficult to reach these populations when they do not speak English. She asked would this commission's roll be to let others in the community know about the refugees.

Hollis said these populations may have experienced human rights issues in the past which is why they are now here where they facing other challenges such as depression and isolation.

Jackson said the commission would need to find someone to perform these services. Hollis said that is one reason he would like to form this coalition to raise awareness about immigrants and refugees. This commission has covered many different topics in the past. This commission can hold public hearings on issues.

Thomas said this is an example of a community issue that relates to both basic needs and human rights and is one in which the commission can play a role. That role could be to educate the community about this population's needs or organize service agencies. He asked Jackson to do more research on this topic and see how it would fall into the grant guidelines.

Thomas said he has also heard this is an issue in the community.

Glaze said she has met with Refugee Services and they try to let their clients know about the Human Rights Commission.

Thomas said this commission could be the voice in letting state and federal agencies know about the refugee population in this community.

Macy asked if this commission could hold a community forum to discuss the needs in the community to bring potential collaborators together.

Hollis said Stop Human Trafficking is an active organization in the community, which is somewhat related to the refugee and immigrant populations. His thinking is that refugees and immigrants are more at risk to experience civil rights issues.

Jackson said there is also the issue of what actually brought them here and the trauma they had to go through.

Macy said many social service agencies do not know how to deal with the refugee and immigrant population. Another option is community training on how to deal with the refugee and immigrant population.

Jackson said she had issues to deal with and overcome when she immigrated here but she cannot imagine coming here from a place that had no electricity or running water.

Hollis said he is hearing there is interest from this commission in educating people about why refugees have moved here in order to avoid issues of resentment and prejudice that have taken root in other communities. He would include immigrants in this conversation because of the large influx of Latinos in the community in the last decade.

Thomas asked Jackson to take a lead on this issue. He would like to begin with educating this commission on the process and how people are placed in the community. Hollis said Refugee Services can come to a meeting.

X. Closed Session to Discuss Pending Cases Pursuant to Section 610.021 (1) RSMo.:
Jackson made a motion to move to closed session to discuss cases pursuant to Section 610.021(1) RSMo. The motion was seconded by Todd and a roll call vote was taken. Jackson called the roll with the following vote: Jackson – Aye, Macy – Aye, O’Toole– Aye, Todd – Aye, Thomas – Aye.

XI. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steve Hollis, Manager of Human Services