

**Human Right Commission
May 5, 2009 Meeting Minutes**

Members Present: Glenn Glasgow, Negar Jackson, Jessica Macy, Al Terrill, Mark Thomas

Members Excused: Mary Bixby

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

Others Present:

- I. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.
- II. **Approval of Agenda:** Glasgow made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Macy and passed unanimously.
- III. **Approval of April 7, 2009 meeting minutes:** Jackson made a motion to approve the April 7, 2009 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Glasgow and passed unanimously.
- IV. **Old Business**

- A. **Discussion regarding educational outreach efforts:** Glaze said the Fair Housing Symposium on April 24, 2009 was a joint effort with the Missouri Commission on Human Rights (MCHR). She believes partnering with other agencies, such as MCHR, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is an excellent way to conduct educational outreach on public accommodation, employment and fair housing. Bixby notified staff about another organization in town, Human Resources Association, which could also be another forum for educational outreach.

Hollis said that based on his experience, he believes the previous educational outreach program did not reach the people that were most often the respondents in cases of discrimination. He understands that many people with professional licenses, such as realtors, are required to have continuing education and hopes this can be a continuing education tool for them while also bringing awareness to the community about discrimination.

He would like Glaze to begin to start speaking with businesses, organizations, and institutions, in a systematic way, about issues of discrimination and about trainings and their relevance and importance.

Hollis said partnering with other organizations, in ways similar to the Fair Housing Symposium, is fairly inexpensive. He would like for the trainings to allow the City to get back to the mission of the ordinance which is to prevent acts of discrimination.

Terrill asked who he should refer people to if they ask him questions about possible discrimination. Hollis said they should be referred to Glaze.

Terrill asked if it is mainly small companies who have had cases filed against them. Hollis said there have been some small companies but there are also large corporations who have been involved in complaints

Terrill said from his experiences, many small companies do not have a human resources department to do trainings for their employees.

Hollis said another component of the educational outreach program would be to educate consumers about their rights. Currently, staff sends out a weekly e-mail about human rights related events and trainings in the community. There is also a Health Department newsletter that will have a section for Human Rights updates. The final component would be to possibly do some segments for the Columbia Channel and public service announcements.

Terrill asked how businesses would be contacted about possible trainings. Hollis said

they will be reached through Glaze's contacts with the business community and through the Chamber of Commerce.

Jackson said the Access to Justice Project is interested in helping advertise trainings. The Access to Justice Project covers people who are not covered by legal aid, up to 150% of poverty level. The project will soon have an office and will have pamphlets to provide to the community.

Macy said she thinks partnering with other organizations is a great way to reach more people in the community.

Hollis said staff is basically starting from scratch on a new educational outreach program.

Thomas said he appreciates the increased communications staff has done regarding community events and trainings.

The commission will continue this discussion at future meetings.

V. **New Business**

- A. Discussion regarding Westboro Baptist Church protest scheduled for May 14, 2009:** Thomas said Westboro Baptist Church, based in Kansas, will be in Columbia to protest the Domestic Partnership Registry. They are scheduled to be at City Hall from 12:00 p.m. to 12:30 p.m., then at Missouri United Methodist Church from 12:30 p.m. to 1:00 p.m., Thursday May 14.

Hollis said in response to this visit, he called a meeting of several community groups, many from the LGBT community, to organize alternative events. Some who attended the meeting have been to other protests organized by the church. The church members try to entice and provoke onlookers into violence so they can then sue the onlookers.

At the meeting, the group proposed having three events. The first will be May 13, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the Health Department where there will be a screening of a documentary about the church and a panel discussion.

The day of the visit, there will be an alternative event at the Missouri United Methodist Church beginning at 12:00 p.m. This will be a non-violent response to the protest.

The following week, there will be another community event to discuss what happened during the visit and how the community can continue to move forward.

Jackson asked why this group is coming to Columbia. Hollis gave a brief history of the Westboro Baptist Church. The church is coming to Columbia because Council passed the Domestic Partnership Registry, which is open to any couple, gay or straight, who sign a self affirming statement.

Hollis said there was a comment in a local newspaper from a Stephens College student who was trying to organize a counter-protest. He had a meeting with her, Dick Blount and Bruce Alspaugh to discuss other options. The student opted out of organizing the counter-protest and is working with the group for the alternative events.

Hollis said the group organizing the events was hoping this commission would sponsor the film screening on May 13, co-sponsor the alternative event on May 14, host the community discussion the week following, and issue a statement about staying positive and peaceful during the Westboro picket.

Jackson asked how much money would be involved. Thomas said he believes \$500 would cover the cost of food and drink for the events May 13 and the week following. Also, funds would be used to cover the cost of advertising and printing costs for

flyers.

Hollis said the funds are available in miscellaneous contractual.

Thomas said the commission has sponsored alternative events in the past, such as when the Neo-Nazis marched in town.

Terrill said this group is different because they want to entice violence from others. Hollis said that is why it is important to get the word out to the community, educate the community about this group and have alternative events.

Hollis said having an alternative event is a more powerful statement than telling the community not to go at all. Hollis said that regardless of what takes place, the biggest challenge is that passer-bys cannot be totally planned for. Jackson suggested training volunteers to walk around to try to prevent possible altercations between the protesters and those passing by.

Thomas said this group has their protests scheduled weeks in advance so he does not believe there will be a possibility of lingering confrontations.

Glaze said one of the women who attended the organizing meeting said she had attended many of the group's protests. The church sends women and children to their protests.

Boeckmann asked if the Columbia Police Department has been involved or notified. Hollis said he made CPD aware of the picket but CPD has not been asked for or issued a permit. They will not be marching, only protesting. They are a very organized group.

Macy asked what time the alternative event will begin on May 14. Hollis said the event will begin at noon at the Missouri United Methodist Church on 9th Street. The alternative event will be in a courtyard area on the church's property. The event was scheduled to begin at noon in hopes that people will arrive before the protesters arrive. There was discussion about utilizing the funds and transferring the funds between Human Rights budget and the Community Services budget.

Thomas moved to authorize the use of up to \$500 of Human Rights Enhancement Funding to co-sponsor alternative events in response to the Westboro Baptist Church visit to Columbia. The motion was seconded by Jackson and passed unanimously.

Thomas said the press release should include statements about Columbia being a community that is not comfortable having hate groups and would like the media coverage to focus more on the positive alternative event rather than focus on the protesters. Hollis said staff would issue the press release with the Human Rights Commission Chair as the contact person.

Thomas said he does not want this press release to entice the group to change their schedule and come to town the night before. Hollis said he got the impression from the group's website and other's stories that the group does not stray far from their schedule.

Jackson asked if there was more time to schedule an alternative event when the Nazis were in town. Hollis said not much but there were divisions between groups about how to handle that event. There was a police presence during that event as that group was marching. It was a large expense for the city as the Nazis actually marched downtown.

Hollis noted research shows having alternative events for protests or other gatherings, like this one, is a best practice.

There was discussion about this church and how they have made negative statements against many groups such as the military, other religious groups and

homosexuals.

Thomas said the following is a press release statement he prepared for discussion:

"The Human Rights Commission affirms that Columbia is a better town because it is diverse. We encourage the community to attend the alternative events instead of empowering hate. The Human Rights Commission encourages the media to devote significant news coverage to the positive, alternative community events."

Jackson said she liked the statement because it is general but addresses the issue. Macy also agreed with the statement.

Jackson moved to approve the statement as read by Thomas and have said statement be issued as a press release. The motion was seconded by Terrill and passed unanimously.

VI. Staff Reports

- A. Community Services:** Hollis said staff has been working on organizing the alternative events for the Westboro Baptist Church visit.

Parkade Elementary submitted their final report for the Celebrate the Dream program which received Human Rights Enhancement funding.

West Boulevard Elementary again had their Civil Rights Museum. Staff and a few commissioners attended the museum. Staff has spoken with West Boulevard staff about possibly applying for Human Rights Enhancement funds in the future. Hollis said another group that might qualify for these funds would be Stop Human Trafficking. He knows that human trafficking happens in the community, not just for prostitution but also in the form of restaurant employees being held as indentured servants of sorts.

City Council approved the Domestic Partnership Registry. The city does not see this registry as a LGBT issue; the registry is open to anyone. The document that is signed is not a legal document but more symbolic for the couple. Staff is giving a copy of Life Choices from the Missouri Attorney General, which provides legal documents such as a living will and durable power of attorney, to those who sign up for the registry.

- B. Law Department:** Boeckmann said the Citizen Oversight Committee gave an update regarding the draft Citizen Review Board ordinance at the May 4, 2009 City Council meeting. The draft ordinance contains language to include a fixed position for a liaison commissioner from this commission. Two on the committee that helped draft the ordinance opposed the fixed position. Boeckmann will leave that language in the draft as it was requested by the commission.

A report will be given to Council and the ordinance is scheduled to be first read on June 1. There will be a special Council meeting on June 8 for public comment on the ordinance. The Council may or may not pass the ordinance at that meeting. The City Manager has read the draft and has not raised any issues.

- C. Human Rights Specialist:** Glaze said the Fair Housing Symposium was held April 24, 2009. This was a collaborative effort with the MCHR. The mayor was also at the event and proclaimed April to be Fair Housing Month.

Glaze said she attended a lecture and panel discussion on April 28, 2009 about Sexual Assault and the Disabled. Most service providers are not aware that 70% of the developmentally disabled will be a victim of sexual assault in their lifetime. The guest lecturer was Christina Meneses of the St. Louis Regional Sexual Assault Center. Panelists included representatives from The Shelter, Columbia Police

Department, Prosecuting Attorney's office, Boone County Sheriff's Department, Services for Independent Living, and LEAD Institute. She was surprised to learn that many service providers in town do not know about the city Human Rights Ordinance.

Glaze said there were three employment inquiries in the last month; one has been filed with this commission while the other two were outside of this commission's jurisdiction. There was one housing inquiry but that was also outside of this commission's jurisdiction.

Bixby had suggested staff attend the Human Resources Association 2009 Labor and Employment Law Update: Keeping Your Organization Out of Court meeting on May 12, 2009.

Glaze said she and Hollis have met with the Helping Youth Succeed Ad Hoc Committee with the new Police Chief, Ken Burton, and new Public School Superintendent, Dr. Chris Belcher.

VII. Public Comment: There was no public comment.

VIII. Commissioner Comment: There were no commissioner comments.

IX. 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 Macy and a roll call vote was taken. Jackson called the roll with the following vote: Glasgow – Aye, Jackson – Aye, Macy – Aye, Terrill – Aye, Thomas – Aye.

X. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steve Hollis, Manager

Office of Community Services