

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, JULY 16, 2019  
7:00 p.m., City Hall  
301 King Street, Room 2000  
The Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Danielle Beach  
Francisco Durán, Chair  
Amy Blackwood, Vice Chair  
Damien Hammond, Sr  
Christopher Harris  
Matt Harris, Vice Chair  
Susan Kellom  
Michael Kreps

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher  
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez

Excused Members

David Rigsby  
Jenny Wade

Unexcused member

Scott Schwartz

Guests:

Lisl Brunner, Citizen  
Barbara Wilmer, Grassroots Alexandria

**1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair, Francisco Durán**

Chair Durán called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. Introductions were made.

**2. Approval of Minutes of June Meeting**

Upon a motion by Commissioner Vice Chair Harris, seconded by Vice Chair Blackwood, the Commission approved the minutes of the June meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye.

**3. Executive Committee Report**

Chair Durán reported that the Executive Committee did not meet this month.

**4. Annual Report**

Chair Durán stated that the annual report has to be submitted in August and asked Commissioners to review it and provide comments. Upon a motion by Commissioner Beach, seconded by Commissioner Kellom, the Commission approved the annual report drafted based on the minutes for the fiscal year. All Commissioners present voted aye.

**5. Legislative Proposals**

Chair Durán stated that Sarah Taylor, the City Legislator will come to the September Commission meeting. Director Kelleher stated that Sarah Taylor expects the basic draft legislative proposals around Labor Day. Director Kelleher asked Commissioners to come up with ideas of what they would like to propose this year. Commissioner Kreps suggested proposing Police body worn cameras. This will be item number 15 on the legislative proposal draft. Commissioner Beach suggested proposing something related to refugees, who are being targeted now, and migrants from Central America. Commissioner Beach suggested keeping the following items:

Equal rights for women, Driver's Licenses for undocumented immigrants, immigration and higher education. Commissioner Beach would like to add something on temporary protected status (TPS). Vice Chair Blackwood suggested adding something on expansion of protection for gender identity and transgender. Director Kelleher stated that there are three major cases that are coming before the Supreme Court and she is hoping that there will be a good ruling from the Supreme Court. Director Kelleher suggested adding gender identity to the Human Rights Code.

Commissioner Kreps suggested having a debate about what the Commission should recommend based on the three court cases. He also suggested inviting the City Attorney to talk about what their opinion is about the Commission's constraints. Commissioner Harris stated that the NAACP is proposing the following: Allowing students convicted of minor drug offenses to receive federal financial aid, reducing financial disparities between schools, and updating the Second Chance Act to help reintegrate ex-offenders and to address recidivism.

## **6. Topics and Speakers for Upcoming Year**

Chair Durán stated that City Legislative Director, Sarah Taylor, will be coming in September. Commissioner Kreps suggested inviting the City Attorney in October; in February: Black History Month Program. Chair Durán suggested inviting the School Superintendent in January. Vice Chair Harris suggested exploring the income inequality issue throughout the City. Commissioner Chris Harris suggested inviting the Police Chief and giving him specific issues to talk about. Director Kelleher suggested inviting the new person from the Department of Project Implementation. Director Kelleher will schedule a Taser training with the Police Department. Vice Chair Blackwood suggested doing a tour of the detention center and meeting with the Sheriff.

Lisl Brunner (member of public) brought up a concern with the use of facial recognition technology by law enforcement. She said some cities have prohibited its use and said that there are concerns about the accuracy of the technology. Ms. Brunner said that Georgetown University has a center that is focusing on this and maybe it would be a good idea to invite someone from there. Chair Durán suggested inviting City Council to come to the Commission meeting to talk about their priorities. Commissioner Kellom stated that she would like to have an appointed liaison from City Council to the Human Rights Commission. Commissioner Kreps suggested having a report of actionable items and present it to City Council for them to work on. Commissioner Hammond, Sr. mentioned an issue about the use of fingerprints to unlock cell phones. Apparently, the finger print is considered property and it can be used to unlock cell phones by the Police. Chair Durán asked Commissioners if they have any other ideas that they can think about to send those to Director Kelleher.

## **7. Equity Initiative Update and Next Steps**

Chair Durán stated that the City has been working on this initiative and asked Director Kelleher to provide an update and also to talk about what is the next step and how the Commission might become involved in this process. Director Kelleher stated that the City Manager has asked specifically for the Human Rights Commission to have oversight over the City's Equity Initiative.

Director Kelleher reiterated the need for the Equity Initiative, especially given the history of Alexandria, data and statistics collected, and institutional racism in the country in general. She said that the City is now a member of GARE, which is the gold standard in equity work. She also stated that GARE helps municipalities tailor their program according to their needs. The Equity initiative is two-phased: it started with an internal focus on the quality of our services and eventually we will move to phase II, which is community engagement, and that's where the Commission will play a crucial role. The initiative started with four city departments, DCHS, Police, Court Services and OHR, the first two being test departments, collecting data about disparities and conducting some internal training, surveying employees about the work. She further informed that the City and its non-profits are studying equity and learning its importance. A number of non-profits have expressed that their boards don't reflect the community they serve and are not inclusive enough. The new superintendent of Schools, Greg Hutchings, is also committed to equity and he is embarking on the race and equity initiative for ACPS. A cohort at MWCOG will be trained on equity principles starting in September and will continue through the entire legislative session.

The City Manager has embraced our idea and the City will now hire an equity officer. The job description has been written and will be posted soon. The City should have an equity officer by this fall, the position will be under the City Manager. Once the new person is hired, Director Kelleher will hand over this project to him/her. She informed that the equity group meets regularly the third Friday of every month and is receiving buy-in from other departments as well. The equity group has bonded well with each other and will continue to be the core group that will assist the new officer. Director Kelleher informed that she will ask the City Manager to instruct all departments to have a representative on this group, and an alternate, to make sure that all departments are represented at the monthly meetings. She stated that she would like a formal expression of what an oversight responsibility means for the Human Rights Commission and indicated that GARE can help in that regard.

She further stated that as GARE members, the equity working group is sharing and learning from others around the country. We are planning on having professors from AU talk about redlining, which is a big issue in terms of equity. The goal is to have everyone in the City look at their projects/initiatives through an equity lens and hopefully every marginalized group will benefit through this approach. As surrounding counties are joining GARE, it will expand our opportunities to work on this together. We are embarking on this now and there will be a role for the Commission on this in terms of community engagement. We need elected officials to endorse this initiative – they have not passed a resolution yet, and that would be our next step.

In terms of role of the Commission, Director Kelleher said that Commission can define its role by using the GARE model. It is available online; Director Kelleher will share some resources for the Commission to look at. In addition, the Commission's role can be refined by discussing with the City Manager and the new person who will take the new office.

Chair Durán requested that Director Kelleher to find out from the City Manager what his vision is in terms of the Human Rights Commission's role in engagement of this new position and the equity work. It will remain a standing item on our agenda.

## **8. Old or New Business**

### Census 2020 complete count:

Director Kelleher informed that Citizenship question will not be on the census. Planning and Zoning has organized a Census 2020 Complete Count Committee, and there are three different sub-committees: education, communication, and partnerships. She informed that everyone is working very hard and that it is important to have trusted messengers in the community to get the word out. Vice Chair Harris inquired whether there are any funding issues. Director Kelleher said that the Federal government will be providing some money; in addition, the City has \$50,000. Vice Chair Harris asked if the census takers inform citizens that there is no retaliation, or no retribution. Director Kelleher stated that the census takers are going to be trained as further leg work is needed and the goal is to meet people where they are. Director Kelleher stated that the information is being prepared to be sent in kids' backpack in September. Vice Chair Harris asked if there is a point of contact person for this committee who can be invited to the Commission. Director Kelleher stated that Sierra Latham is in charge; Director Kelleher will contact her to see if she is available.

### Equal Justice Initiative

Director Kelleher reported that this group is meeting tomorrow. There will be a Public meeting on Saturday, September 21, at Durant Center.

### Rebranding Columbus Day

Chair Durán shared with the Commission a memo from City Councilman Seifeldein and Vice Mayor Bennett-Parker who are looking at the potential of having Alexandria rename the Columbus Day holiday as Indigenous Peoples Day. They are trying to gather some support and want to hear Commission's input. Director Kelleher had the interns do some research about which municipalities around the country have adopted it and then there are some concerns among the Italian community, which does not support it. The two council members are working to gather some support and they seem to have the majority in support. The Commission is requested to discuss this and move to a resolution calling the City to recognize the Indigenous Peoples Day. Director Kelleher informed that Gretchen Bulova, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria, Debra Collins from City Manager's office met with councilman Seifeldein early on and informed him that it needs to come from an elected official, not staff. There is a comprehensive list of states and localities who passed something similar. There is already a day in recognition of indigenous people in Virginia, which is celebrated a day before thanksgiving – it is a state recognized day. Director Kelleher said the idea is controversial, but it has been done in Pacific Northwest. Nevertheless, that area has a lot more sacred land. Chair Durán pointed out that there are 26 states that no longer celebrate Columbus Day. Upon a motion by Vice Chair Blackwood, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Commission will support the Council to draft a resolution rebranding the Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. The motion was approved unanimously. All Commissioners present voted aye.

## **9. Liaison Reports None.**

Director Kelleher informed that two individuals (one from the Commission on Women and one from the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board) have expressed interest in serving as liaisons and they will be present at September's meeting.

Chair Duran announced that the Commission will take a break next month and meet in September.

**10. Announcements /Adjournment**

**MOTION:** adjourn the meeting.

Kellom/Chris Harris **PASSED** unanimously

The meeting adjourned at 8:41 p.m.