

Human Relations Commission

Meeting Minutes
February 17, 2016

Members Present: Rev. John Clemons, Alice Lewis, Parrish Stahl, Lynn Isaacson-Zolman, John Hawthorne, Sue Mure, Jessica Embury, and Simon Foster

Members Absent: None

Ex Officio Present: Val Cochran-Toops

Also Present: Jonathan Greene, Staff, 2nd Ward Councilmember Freddie Dancy, and Lt. Christopher Simpson, JPD.

- I. **Call to Order:** Chair Alice Lewis called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
- II. **Roll Call**
- III. **Adoption of Agenda:**
Motion for agenda approval made by Rev. John Clemons. The motion was seconded by Sue Mure. Motion carried unanimously.
- IV. **Citizen Comments:** None.
- V. **Guest:** None.
- VI. **Approval of the Meeting Minutes for January 20, 2016:** Commissioner Stahl made a motion to approve the January 20, 2016, meeting minutes. Jessica Embury supported the motion. The motion carried.
- VII. **Community Liaison Police Officer:** Lt. Chris Simpson spoke to the Commission giving an update on Police Department hiring and retirements. Among which nine officers were hired in 2015. Two cadets will be in training for 18 months to two (2) years. He further reported on training offered at Baker College dealing with veterans with PTSD. Bridges Over Poverty, Generational Poverty was also provided with training. Lt. Simpson expressed appreciation for Commissioner Foster's service on the interview panel. Deputy Hitt is still accepting applications until March 1st for the Police Academy. A discussion followed about the applications regarding people of color. Lt. Simpson responded that six applications were received of which there were no people of color, and that two of the applications were female. Discussion followed regarding the need for diversity throughout all of the City departments. John Hawthorne requested an update on the Bridges Over Poverty for the next HRC meeting on March 16th.

Lt. Simpson offered ride-a-longs for new commissioners. Rev. Clemons complimented the Police Department regarding their quick response and finding of a missing runaway child. Simon Foster inquired about the body camera situation. Lt. Simpson reported that this is still being researched.

Chair Lewis asked about the heroin problem in Jackson, and if the rate of heroin deaths is presently lower in 2016 compared to 2015. Lt. Simpson said that the abuse of drugs is through the roof, which means heroin is also being abused. Heroin deaths are being treated as homicides. Connections have even been found as far away as Afghanistan. Discussion followed regarding drug abuse in the city of Jackson. Jessica Embury suggested that the Chief at United Way had information on heroin issues with a good presentation that might be recommended for the Commission to present. Simon Foster asked about the frequency of repeat calls. Lt. Simpson reported some are occasionally repeat calls. Simon Foster also mentioned that a lot of coalitions have also been working with the epidemic, and Lt. Simpson stated that all hands are on deck to work towards a solution.

- VIII. **Community Update/Chairperson Correspondence:** Chair Lewis stated that she has been working with the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce in order to network with them on the MLK Breakfast, as well as requested a mailing list from them. She also made contact with the Jackson District Library on a diversity program.
- IX. **Staff Report:** Jonathan Greene reported that a person who had initially filed a complaint with the HRC, and was referred to the Fair Housing Center, called again to complain that he is being discriminated against at the Nelson Towers. Staff reported that the Fair Housing Center can send in testers. Parrish Stahl questioned if the complaint was verbal or written, and Staff responded that it was a written complaint and that he is following up.
- X. **Ex-Officio Report:** No Report.
- XI. **Committee Reports:**
- a. Complaint Committee: No report other than what was previously reported by staff.
 - b. Public Relations and Information:
Commissioner Stahl reported that the newsletter should be ready to be published soon, and John Hawthorne has agreed to assist Parrish. Parrish requested a biography and statement of vision from the new Commissioners, and he also asked that if Commissioners are attending an event, to please take pictures with captions and send them to him for the newsletter. Alice Lewis asked if the HRC Newsletter could be put out in churches in paper copy. Sue Mure suggested contacting churches to see if they can include the newsletter along with their online information. Staff said that he would have to talk with the City Manager about that. Staff suggested the HRC have a section in the City's newsletter and the Blazer. Discussion followed regarding getting the HRC in the media to educate the public about what the HRC does. Jessica Embury suggested that perhaps this can be added to the next meeting agenda. Simon Foster suggested a press release explaining the new direction the HRC is taking. Staff agreed to follow up on the cost of options.

The Pow Wow was discussed, and Val Cochran-Toops reported that they had gathered a lot of information with the participants and compiled with Move Jackson Forward. A report will be made in the future. The report will include subjects like Alcoholics Anonymous and attending recovery, as well as the need for more community support.

c. Policy Committee:

Rev. John Clemons stated that the HRC Ordinance will be reviewed, as well as the study groups. Therefore, there is no report at this time.

d. Nominating Committee:

Chair Lewis stated that two or three applications have been received. Parrish Stahl reported that there is a blind individual in the community who might be interested in serving on the HRC. Simon indicated that this is someone who has a solid voice in the community and is not afraid to stand up and voice his opinion. Chair Lewis reviewed the procedures for nominations, and hopes to interview applicants no later than April. The recommendation would then come to the full HRC for their approval and then on to the Mayor for his recommendation to City Council. Alice Lewis stated that she will need to be excluded from the nominating committee as chair of the HRC according to the HRC Ordinance. Simon Foster stated that since he is already on the committee, he offered to serve as chair. The Commission agreed that Alice Lewis can serve on the Nominating Committee as a member.

e. Events Committee:

Chair Embury reported that the committee met last month and identified projects for the next year for HRC to attend. Also, Kidsfest is a possibility for HRC to attend as a way to get its name out into the community. She will follow up with dates and how to get involved. Simon Foster also reported that he was in contact with the Community Action Agency to learn about financial programs they have to help the community. Simon will forward the names of the programs to Sue Mure. The committee will meet again sometime in February.

- i. Picnic Committee – Alice Lewis reported a committee meeting will be planned for April. The picnic is planned for the second Saturday in July. Discussion followed regarding the need to solicit for funds and donations.

f. Emergency Needs Coalition:

Chair Embury provided information and charts on the needs of the community and Community Action Agency. The main focus is for people who need help with rent. Rent fund assistance information is also covered on the VITA Program, and how it saves people money with filing taxes. She also reported that the Food Pantries and Rent assistance was down, but furniture assistance requests were up.

XII. Old Business:

a. HRC/City Council Study Groups

Chair Lewis reported that she has reached out to the new Mayor and has not gotten a response to date. She also stated that she would like to have the new Mayor and City Councilmembers attend the HRC meetings to get to know the HRC members in order to get input from the Council. 2nd Ward City Councilmember Freddie Dancy introduced himself. Councilmember Dancy stated he has spoken with the Mayor and Council to

help build relationships with the HRC. The HRC welcomed Mr. Dancy to the meeting and expressed their appreciation for his attendance.

b. Other:

Val Cochran-Toops mentioned several questions regarding the HRC's relationship with the City Council and the Mayor.

Further discussion was held regarding the HRC budget. The HRC is looking for clarity on what they can do with the funds. Jessica Embury requested that staff include a budget report on the agenda moving forward. Sue Mure requested a copy of the budget for each meeting. Staff clarified the fiscal year City budget and when it will go to City Council for approval. Chair Lewis recommended a requested amount of \$7,000 be allocated for the HRC for the upcoming fiscal year. Staff agreed to take this request back to the City Manager.

XIII. New Business:

City Council meeting attendance – Chair Lewis asked the HRC to review the material given to Commissioners and to sign up to attend a City Council meeting.

The process of replacing the current vacancy on the HRC was discussed.

HRC Ordinance:

Sec. 15-3, Bids, Nondiscrimination Clauses; Sec. 15-4, Employment Policy, and Sec. 15-31, Created purpose were discussed.

Sec. 15-3 – Staff stated that he could ask the Purchasing Agent to create a report for the HRC to review all projects that are let. He also offered to bring generic bid documents for the HRC to review.

Discussion followed regarding the ordinance, and HRC's work in the community.

John Hawthorne suggested the Policy Committee meet to review the HRC Ordinance, and develop some ideas to present to the full HRC. Simon Foster stated that he feels that it is important that the HRC present a united front with a solid plan when meeting with the City Council.

IX. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn was made by John Clemons and seconded by Jessica Embury. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Suzanne Mure
Secretary