

# HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

## Meeting Minutes

January 18, 2017

**Members Present:** Chair Alice Lewis, Rev. John Clemens, Jessica Embury, Hassan Ahmad, John Hawthorne, Melissa Morse, and Suzanne Mure.

**Members Absent:** None

**Ex Officio Present:** Valerie Cochran-Toops

**Also Present:** John Willis, Jonathan Green, and Vice-Mayor Derek Dobies

**I. Call to Order:** Chairwoman A. Lewis called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**II. Roll Call**

**III. Adoption of Agenda:** Motion by J. Clemons to adopt the agenda with the addition of a Youth Council proposal by H. Ahmad, under new business. Supported by S. Mure. Motion carried.

**IV. Election of 2017 Officers:**

Chairperson: J. Clemons opened nominations for Chairperson. H. Ahmad nominated A. Lewis to the position of Chairwoman, J. Clemons supported. Motion carried.

Vice Chairperson: Chair Lewis opened nominations for V. Chair. J. Embury nominated J. Hawthorne, no other nominations. Chair Lewis supported. Motion carried.

Secretary: Chair Lewis opened nominations for Secretary. S. Mure nominated M. Morse, no other nominations. Chair Lewis supported. Motion carried.

**V. Citizen Comment:**

Vice Mayor D. Dobies spoke about the most recent draft of the Non-Discrimination Ordinance (NDO), introduced to the City Council on October 11, 2016. He recognized the long journey the HRC has had in past support of the NDO. He spoke about the formation of the Jackson Together Group, who have been regularly attending Council meetings to bring support and awareness to the NDO issues. He stated this is by far the closest the NDO has come to passing. Staff Willis handed copies of the full NDO for review. Dobies requested we move to support the draft, making the HRC input official, before taking action at an upcoming Council meeting. J. Hawthorne asked if there was a timeline for when the NDO would go in front of Council. Dobies could not confirm as the agenda was not yet out. S. Mure asked what was the biggest opposition the NDO faces as it hits the agenda. In reply, Dobies discussed it potentially being a controversial issue for some and that the limited number of cities (41 in Michigan) having a similar ordinance, narrows the scope of experience in dealing with related issues. He discussed

the failure of the NDO in the past due to a range of issues. He stated that there was a likelihood of there being opposition, but was not aware of any written correspondence to members of Council. V. Toops asked about the type of financial burden the NDO would put on the city. Dobies responded by stating that there is currently no way to measure that since this type of ordinance has never been in place before. Also noting, in a large number of cases, other cities with an NDO in place were able to resolve issues of discrimination through mediation and avoid fines. Staff Willis presented a summary of his meeting with City Manager Patrick Burtch to help further explain the details and the language of the NDO. He noted the areas of the ordinance that had been changed to include sexual orientation and gender identification. He also explained the role of the HRC in the event of a complaint as cited in the NDO. His notes also stated the Chamber of Commerce had voted unanimously (35-0), in favor of the NDO. Chair Lewis asked about how housing discrimination. Dobies explained how the NDO would change the law to include protection for sexual orientation and gender identification. J. Clemons asked if other community organizations have seen a copy of the NDO, to which Dobies did not have confirmation of, but did note that it was available for anyone to see. J. Embury asked if the complaint process would still go through the same channels. Dobies replied that complaints of sexual orientation and gender identification would go through the City Attorney's office. He gave examples of the typical process and how it works in other cities with an NDO.

S. Mure made a motion to take a 15 minute recess to go over and discuss further questions regarding the NDO. J. Clemons supported. Motion carried.

A 15 minute recess was taken.

J. Clemons made a motion that the NDO be accepted by the HRC, and that we appear at the City Council meeting in support when it is on the agenda. H. Ahmad supported. Motion carried.

J. Clemons expressed interest in the HRC speaking at the Council meeting in support. Dobies suggested one statement on behalf of the HRC, in light of the volume and number of people that may want to speak considering the sensitive nature of this issue.

**VI. Guest:** None

**VII. Approval of Meeting Minutes for November 16, 2016:** Motion by S. Mure to approve the November 16, 2016, meeting minutes. M. Morse supported. Motion carried.

**VIII. Community Liaison Police Officer:** None

**IX. Community Update/Chairperson Correspondence:** Chair Lewis reported that she

attended the MLK Breakfast and that it was a very nice and successful event with nearly 480 people in attendance. She also reported on the 75 food baskets she helped put together through her church, to feed the needy for Thanksgiving. They had enough extra in the boxes for an additional week supply of food, and also did an extra 25 hot meals for the sick and shut-ins.

- X. Staff Report:** Staff Willis reported no complaints or changes at this time. He also passed out copies of the HRC annual report that he had prepared. J. Clemons and Chair Lewis expressed gratitude to the staff for our HRC tables at the MLK Breakfast and the MLK Dinner. J. Greene commented on the financial report in regards to the HRC budget. He reminded the committees to be prepared to submit budget requests by February 17, 2017, for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2017. He suggested that after the February meeting, Chair Lewis set up a meeting with the City Manager and Mayor to make a formal request and approval of HRC budget. Chair Lewis stated the annual report would be presented to City Council.

**XI. Committee Reports:**

- a. Policy Committee: No report
- b. Nominating Committee: J. Clemons moved that Ex Officio V. Toops and Miriam Brown-Dorsey fill the two vacancies on the HRC and that their names be recommended to the City Council for their consideration. Discussion of qualifications of applicants. Both came highly recommended by several commissioners. J. Clemons stated there is one applicant left in the pool to fill the Ex Officio position. Chair Lewis supported the motion. Motion carried.
- c. Events Committee: J. Embury reported on the February movies at the Michigan Theatre for Black History Month. Due to short amount of planning time and difficulties in communication with the theater, we aren't planning to do speakers or extra events to go along with the movies. She said she would attempt again to connect with Steve Tucker and work together to make the movies an HRC supported event. She said she would email Chair Lewis updating the status.
- d. Teresa Delph Oratorical Contest: V. Toops reported the event would be held Saturday, February 25th at Frost Elementary. The cut-off for receiving essays is February 3rd. Staff Willis stated that the flyer is ready and will be released upon final approval. V. Toops requested a few larger posters. Chair Lewis discussed details on subject, rules, and history of the contest. She also stated that we have approximately \$500 in the budget to work with for this event and requested all members of the HRC attend.

**XII. Old Business:**

Selection of 2017 Committees and Committee Chairpersons:

- a. Nominating Committee: J. Clemons to continue as Chair. J. Embury, A. Lewis, V. Toops.
- b. Complaint Committee: Chair Lewis to continue as Chair. Staff Willis stated that in order to serve on the Complaint Committee a member had to have mandatory mediation training. He informed commissioners of an upcoming mediation training course provided by South Central Michigan Dispute Resolution Center. Short discussion on the importance of this type of training for all HRC members and everyone expressed an interest. Staff Willis noted that he will email everyone details of the training.
- c. Policy Committee: Chair Lewis and J. Clemons both requested to be taken off. H. Ahmad volunteered to Chair. V. Toops and J. Hawthorne to remain.
- d. Public Relations Committee: J. Embury volunteered to Chair. J. Hawthorne to remain. J. Embury requested to obtain administrative rights of the Facebook page.
- e. Events Committee: J. Embury to remain as Chair. S. Mure to remain.
- f. Harold White Breakfast Committee: J. Clemons to remain as Chair. Chair Lewis added. V. Toops and J. Hawthorne remain.
- g. MLK Breakfast/Challenge Day Committee: M. Morse volunteered to Chair. V. Toops to be added. S. Mure remains.
- h. HRC Picnic Committee: Chair Lewis remains as Chair. M. Morse and J. Embury to be added. V. Toops remains.
- i. Teresa Delph Essay/Oratorical Contest Committee: V. Toops remains Chair. Chair Lewis and H. Ahmad remain.

**XIII. New Business:**

Staff Willis presentation and preview of the 2016 HRC Annual Report. S. Mure made a motion to accept 2016 Annual Report to present to City Council for approval. J. Hawthorne supported. Motion carried.

Chair Lewis discussed Will Forgrave's running series of 'meet the commissioner' articles for the city newsletter and website. She encouraged everyone to participate.

H. Ahmad discussed the formation of a Youth Council with J. Willis being the staff

mentor. He requested support and endorsement from the HRC. J. Clemons made a motion to support the formation of the Youth Council. J. Embury supported. Motion carried.

**XIV. Commissioner Comments:**

Decided collectively to dedicate time in the next meeting to discuss strategic plan for the upcoming year.

Motion to Adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

*Melissa A Morse*

Melissa Morse  
Secretary