

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 21, 2002

MEMBERS PRESENT

Gilbert Blanks
Kathleen Conley
Teressa Delph
Rosemarie Herbert
Alice Lewis
Ed Peterson
Thomas Ramundo
Will Riley
Robert Whitman

MEMBERS ABSENT

STAFF

Henry L. Jenkins
Lt. Mary Jo Kennedy, JPD

GUESTS

Carl Breeding,
Councilmember
Dr. Constance Johnson

1. CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Blanks at 6:35 p.m. Roll call was taken.

2. CITIZEN COMMENTS:

Lt. Mary Jo Kennedy answered questions from HRC members. She also invited the Commissioners to participate in the Ride Along program. Secondly, a discussion took place regarding Racial Profiling and data collection. It was expressed that it is critical to see where the stops took place. Lt. Kennedy reported that the current computer program is not able to pull up this data. Lt. Kennedy also requested that the HRC sit down with the Chief to discuss this. Robert Whitman commented on Blackman Township police conduct in the City. He suggested that this be investigated with Blackman Township.

Carl Breeding, 1st Ward City Councilmember, spoke to the HRC regarding the Blackman Township police department. He reported that he was told that the Sheriff's department had deputized Blackman officers. He also spoke about a letter from the HRC Chairman regarding tabling the proposed civil rights ordinance. He stated that the reason for this decision to table and the actual decision to table the proposed ordinance was not included in the minutes of the Special Meeting. He asked if this was in fact the will of the HRC. Rosemarie Herbert spoke to Councilmember Breeding's concerns. A poll was taken of the HRC members to see if they agreed with the letter and the majority did. Discussion regarding the letter followed. Robert Whitman stated that he came to the meeting prepared to discuss the language of the proposed Ordinance and not to table it. Rosemarie Herbert and Tom Ramundo stated that they had reviewed the letter and agreed with it. Kathleen Conley stated that it appeared to her that Councilmember Breeding appeared to be angry and questioned why. Councilmember Breeding stated that he perceived the language in the letter to be a veiled threat and very political. He further stated that the HRC could very well have appointments come up that the City Council would have to consider. Robert Whitman reminded Councilmember Breeding that the U.S. Constitution guarantees certain rights and that they are for all people, and that it is not a subject that the majority can become a tyrant. Will Riley agreed with Robert Whitman that laws don't change people, people change people.

No matter what is passed it will not change the attitudes of people, but it will give people a recourse and an opportunity to submit a grievance. He further stated that just because the proposed ordinance was tabled that this doesn't mean that it will not be brought up again. He stated that the HRC realizes that they are appointed at the will of the City Council, and that the HRC has a right to agree to table an item they are working on. He also stated that as far as diversity, the HRC is far more diverse than the City Council. This includes business, ecumenical, and racially. He stated that he feels that the HRC was not put into place to be a rubber stamp for the City Council and that they were put in place to bring forward issues to the Council that would be representative of the needs of the citizens of the City. Tom Ramundo voiced his opinion that in reading the letter over again, he did not see a veiled threat. He further read the references regarding the City Council. Kathy Conley stated that she felt the intent of the letter was to inform. Rosemarie Herbert expressed that the HRC knows that it serves at the pleasure of the City Council, but it also serves a mandate to address discrimination where ever it exists. She went on to thank Councilmember Breeding for attending the meeting and that its ok to agree to disagree. Councilmember Breeding stated that he feels that the proposed ordinance should not be tabled, and took issue with the wording of "political climate". Will Riley stated that one of the main issues for tabling the ordinance he felt was to clean up the language to make sure that it is clear and addresses as many concerns of everyone as can be done. Rosemarie Herbert stated that although the draft of the proposed ordinance was not in perfect language, another reason the proposed ordinance was tabled was due to the fact that information received indicated that perhaps extreme groups on both sides of the issue would be involved in the process. Councilmember Breeding stated that he would prefer to see the proposed ordinance come before City Council rather than be tabled. Robert Whitman asked Councilmember Breeding that if the HRC brings the proposed ordinance back before the City Council, if he would speak up for it and vocally support it. Councilmember Breeding indicated that he would personally do so.

3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

A motion was made by Will Riley to approve the July 17, 2002, minutes with corrections. The motion was supported by Robert Whitman. The corrections were that Chuck Meade was from PFLAG and the members that met with the Jackson Citizen Patriot were Robert Whitman and Kathleen Conley. The motion carried.

A motion was made by Rosemarie Herbert and supported by Ed Peterson to approve the amended minutes of the July 31, 2002, Special HRC Meeting. The amendments included a change in the second sentence of the first paragraph under Citizen Comments to be, *Beth spoke to the Commission regarding equal rights and what happens in a community when these issues are put on a ballot.* Another change to the minutes included the deletion of the third sentence of the second paragraph under Citizen Comments. The motion carried.

4. COMMUNITY UPDATE/CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE:

Chairman Blanks reported that he had talked to Dave Kiesel regarding the continuation of the mentoring program at Jackson High School. A meeting will be scheduled with Mr. Kiesel to work something out.

Chairman Blanks received an e-mail regarding a study circle meeting. He spoke with someone from the Study Circle Resource Center about the possibility of having a representative come to Jackson to do a study circle orientation.

5. STAFF REPORT:

Staff reviewed the financial reports. There was a question about a \$162.00 credit in the community promotion line item. This would be investigated by staff. Staff also reported that regarding the NAHRW Conference, all city departments were required to freeze all travel and also to take a five percent reduction in budgets. He feels that the travel freeze will probably stay in effect.

He further reported on several workshops being offered in the near future. Those workshops include: Building Cultural Competency, September 12, 2002; Healing Racism, September 18, 2002, in Kalamazoo, and National Association of Human Rights Workers in Virginia, October 26 - October 31, 2002.

Robert Whitman made a motion to accept the staff report. Kathleen Conley supported the motion. Motion carried.

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Community Needs -

Chairman Blanks, Kathleen Conley, Robert Whitman, and Will Riley reported on a meeting they had with the City Attorney regarding the proposed Civil Rights Ordinance language. The City Attorney is willing to assist with the language. Chairman Blanks, Robert Whitman, and Kathleen Conley will serve on the committee to work on the proposed ordinance language. Chairman Blanks asked Councilmember Breeding if he would also like to serve on this committee. Robert Whitman once again welcomed any input the City Council would have regarding the proposed ordinance.

Diversity Training - Tom Ramundo introduced a film, "The Basket." The film would be an effort directed at the community to generate discussion of differences as the film's storyline is based on this. Robert Whitman made a motion to appoint a committee to discuss and outline a comprehensive film festival and speakers for the next meeting. Rosemarie Herbert supported the motion. The motion carried.

Dr. Constance Johnson reported that she has a list of films in all areas of interest that could be helpful in this effort. The committee will be Kathleen Conley, Alice Lewis, Tom Ramundo, and Chairman Blanks. Chairman Blanks also invited Dr. Johnson to participate with the committee.

Chairman Blanks reported that he has left a message with the Chamber of Commerce to talk with them about a diversity award.

Labor and Industry - Staff reported that there were no current complaints, and that one person had requested a complaint form. Rosemarie Herbert asked if any Commissioners were interested in mediation training. Alice Lewis, Robert Whitman and Kathleen Conley responded that they were interested. Mrs. Herbert indicated that she would notify the trainer.

Public Relations and Information - Staff reported that the HRC will have a table at Summerfest which is Labor Day weekend. Tom Ramundo suggested that there needed to be a give-a-way to attract people to the booth. Will Riley suggested using the new HRC posters. Ed Peterson will take suggestions from members for give-a-way's for the HRC booth.

Distribution of HRC posters were discussed.

7. OLD BUSINESS:

Designation of Memorial for Harold White - Chairman Blanks reported that he had expressed the HRC wishes at the last City Council meeting during his report. Also a letter was sent to them. Councilmember Breeding reported the Jackson County Branch NAACP will send a letter to the City Council in support of renaming Francis Street for Harold White, and West Avenue for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Chairman Blanks stated that he would be at the September 10, 2002, City Council meeting. Councilmember Breeding stated that he would like to see the HRC formally request the renaming of Francis Street to Harold White Street at a City Council meeting. This way it will be recorded in the City Council meeting minutes. Staff stated that he would do this.

8. NEW BUSINESS:

Tom Ramundo announced that there will be 106 churches in the county coming together to have a conference in September called Encounter 2002. This will be held at the Jackson County Fairgrounds. There will be billboards advertising this around town, and there will be a speaker, Rev. Steve Wingfield.

Rosemarie Herbert requested a list of HRC members and when their terms expire. Staff stated that he would have that sent to each HRC member.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Teresa Delph
Secretary