

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

City Hall

January 19, 2000

Minutes

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Gilbert Blanks  
Bescye Burnett  
Teresa Delph  
Ed Peterson  
Susan Smith  
Harold White

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Rosemarie Herbert

STAFF PRESENT:

Henry Jenkins, Staff

GUEST:

Rudy Serra, Detroit HRC

1. Call to order: Meeting was called to order by Chairman White at 6:30 p.m. Chairman White welcomed new HRC Member, Bescye Burnett. Ms. Burnett thanked the HRC for the opportunity to serve.
2. Guest:
3. Approval of Meeting Minutes:  
A motion was made by Susan Smith to approve the meeting minutes of December 8, 1999. Ed Peterson supported the motion to approve the minutes. Motion carried.
4. Chairman's Correspondence/Community Update -  
Chairman White reported that a press conference was held regarding hate crimes. He felt that a good cross section of people attended as well as good press coverage. It was expressed that there was an interest in having a dialog with the churches. This will be continued to be worked on.

Chairman White also reported that the HRC will be interviewing for new members. He suggested putting on the agenda for this year meeting with the County government to see how they are doing with their affirmative action policies and their diversity.

Chairman White commented that the City Council referred the Civil Rights Ordinance back to the HRC for further revision. A copy of the proposed Civil Rights Ordinance was given to members for their review. Chairman White suggested that the Commission compare the Elliott Larson Act with the proposed ordinance, because City Council is saying that the proposed ordinance is much stronger than the Elliott Larson Act. Henry said that he would make copies of the Elliott Larson Act available to Commissioners. Mr. White stated that one City Councilmember stated that the HRC has no business investigating complaints. This is a part of the charge the HRC has. Edward Peterson asked how this ordinance was patterned. Chairman White stated that it was patterned after the Elliott Larson Act and also an Ypsilanti

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ordinance. A discussion followed by members at length. Susan Smith stated that she has asked the Manager and Mayor to send a liaison to the HRC meeting to discuss their concerns with the proposed ordinance. So far there has been no response. Staff stated that the City Council did ask the HRC to conduct public hearings as a way to get public input in terms of redrafting the ordinance for City Council consideration. Staff recommended that an ad hoc committee be formed to work on the ordinance. The committee would consist of Gilbert Blanks as Chairman, Susan Smith as Cochair and Bescye Burnett. Gilbert stated that the newspaper reported the City Attorney as saying that he had not reviewed the proposed ordinance when in fact Gilbert was sitting across the table from him when the attorney reviewed the ordinance. Gilbert wanted direction on how to request something from the City Attorney and have it register with him that he did it. The committee will get input from various organizations and the public, and then report back on the findings.

Rudy Serra, an Attorney from Detroit who serves on the Detroit Human Relations Commission, introduced himself and spoke to the commission answering questions the members had in regards to the proposed civil rights ordinance. Mr. Serra spoke to Dr. Blanks' concern expressed about the Jackson City Attorney. He stated that it is better to make a formal request in writing. He suggested the HRC send the City Attorney a formal request in writing to review the existing proposed ordinance. Discussion followed regarding the proposed ordinance and how Detroit was able to get their ordinance approved, as well as possible ramifications that could develop because of the ordinance. Mr. Serra reported that there are 11 states that have sexual orientation statewide human rights law. There are eight additional states that protect against sexual orientation discrimination by executive order. In the state of Michigan the Cities of Detroit, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Birmingham have ordinances. Wayne County has sexual orientation included in their hiring regulations. Rudy Serra defined Civil Rights. Government can only bring civil action against someone, so if you are not covered by local laws, then you are not protected. He further defined sexual orientation according to the American Psychological Association. Further discussion took place regarding how to get the City Council to overlook their own personal feelings for the betterment of the whole community. Mr. Serra presented a human rights journal article, "Human Rights Local Levels". This is an attempt to look at these issues and compile some statistics. He also shared an article from the Michigan Bar Journal, "Sexual Orientation and Michigan Law." Staff, at the request of a citizen, handed out a letter written Judy Sheppard, mother of Matthew Sheppard who was killed in Wyoming because of his sexual orientation.

John Hoffius and others spoke to the HRC regarding the sexual orientation issue. Mr. Serra responded to issues brought up by citizens who spoke to the issue.

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Diane Worthy asked the HRC what will be done as followup to the recent press conference. Staff responded that it was his understanding that the NAACP will be sponsoring a forum which will include representatives from the Sheriff's department and State Police to talk about Driving While Black or Brown (DWB) issues. Staff reported that the next two HRC meetings will be held in the community rather than at City Hall, and that the Executive Director of the ACLU has been invited to attend the February meeting to speak about DWB.

5. Staff Report:

The financial report was reviewed by Henry Jenkins. A motion was made by Susan Smith and supported by Gilbert Blanks to approve the financial report. Motion carried.

6. Committee Reports:

Community Needs Committee - Gilbert Blanks, Chairman

Gilbert Blanks reported that the King Day Games took place on January 17. There was a smaller group of children that attended this year, and it was diversified.

He also reported on the Junior Human Relations Commission. He has been invited to a meeting that will be held in February at Parkside. This will be a second meeting. The High School Human Relations Commission is not doing as well. A teacher at the High School has expressed some interest.

A date has been set to meet with a lady from JCC, January 26, 2000, regarding the survey. This will serve a two fold purpose: statistically, this can prove that there is a need for this ordinance, and it can serve as a needs assessment of where the HRC can head in the future. The survey will be addressing racism in the community. Discussion followed whether this survey needs to be done. It was decided that it is very important that a City leader be the one to express the importance of the need to heal racism in the City. A motion was made by Teresa Delph and supported by Bescye Burnette to have Dr. Blanks continue with work on the survey. The motion passed. Staff reported that JCC had expressed interest in helping to defray the cost of doing the survey.

Teresa Delph reported on the Oratorical Contest which will be held on March 4, 2000 at the Jackson Crossing Mall.

Labor and Industry Committee: Rosemarie Herbert, Chairman

Staff reported that there was one mediation meeting held which was not successful. The complainant was directed to pursue other avenues if she was not satisfied with the outcome.

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Public Relations Committee: Susan Smith, Chairman

Staff reported that the HRC has been working with the Civil Rights to put a mechanism in place to deal with hate crimes. They have been attempting to get law enforcement onboard. He reported that there seems to be some reluctance in putting a formal mechanism in place. A meeting will be arranged for law enforcement members of MIAAHC to meet with local law enforcement agencies to address their concerns.

NEW BUSINESS:

A motion was made by Susan Smith and supported by Gilbert Blanks to accept the resignation of Ben Chamberlain with regrets. Motion carried.

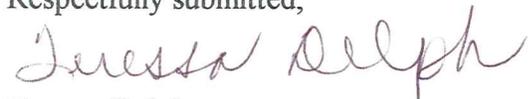
A special HRC meeting will be held on February 9, 6:30 p.m. to interview people for HRC vacancies.

A motion was made by Susan Smith and supported by Teresa Delph to continue with the same officers for the year 2000. Motion carried.

A motion was made by Susan Smith and supported by Bescye Burnett to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Teresa Delph  
Secretary