



City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Meeting Minutes

Human Rights Commission

Wednesday, July 13, 2016

5:00 PM

3rd Floor Conference Room

Note - Conference room changed from 5th to 3rd

Call to Order, Roll Call

Present: 5 - Jai Johnson, Fabio Burgos, Shaundel Spivey, Will Van Roosenbeek, Elizabeth Digby-Britten

Excused: 2 - Ashley Lacenski, James Parker

Absent: 1 - Lu Lee Yang

- 1 [16-0686](#) Approval of June 8th Minutes

Attachments: [Approval of June 8th Minutes](#)

Motion to approve June 8th meeting minutes passed by voice vote.

Agenda Items:

- 2 "Sundown Town" presentation - Jennifer Derocher

Jennifer DeRocher, UWL graduate, presented on her research on La Crosse as a "Sundown Town". A sundown town is a town or city that purposely keeps a primarily white population by keeping African-Americans from moving in through usage of violence, threats of violence, ordinances, formation of new suburbs, and freeze-outs. She covered Spivey's story used in the "Hear, Here" project, the history of racism against African-Americans in La Crosse, as well as the current discrimination African-Americans face. She stated that Jim Loewen's idea to work to change sundown towns is to first acknowledge the problem and history, then to apologize for it, and then to change the behavior. There was discussion about how systematic racism continues to exist and what can be done to combat it. There was also discussion on how to address discrimination that occurs systematically, but isn't explicitly written into a policy. The commission thanked DeRocher for her presentation and information.

3 Discussion on Jim Loewen updates

Spivey updated the commission that there is a group working on bringing Jim Loewen to La Crosse. The hope is that he can give his presentations on "Lies My Teacher Told Me" and "Sundown Towns". The Human Rights Commission could use this to help kick off action plan items and help get dialogue started on these issues in La Crosse. It is currently expected that he will be in La Crosse on October 27th and the group planning this event would like his evening presentation to be at City Hall. Jason Gilman said he would look into reserving space for this.

4 Discussion on the needs that closing "tent city" produces

Van Roosenbeek stated he wanted to ensure the commission keeps asking questions about what is being done to help those that have been displaced due to the closing of "tent city". He talked about wanting to put dumpsters and portable bathrooms at the locations where homeless populations are living to help improve their current conditions while long term solutions are being worked on. Kim Cable, Housing and Community Services Department Director for Couleecap, Inc., stated that the La Crosse Homeless Coalition is working on possible solutions. She stated there is hope to turn the warming center into a year round facility. She also stated that right now there is a problem providing shelter for women and children but there seems to be more room for single men. She stated there is outreach being done with staff going to locations where there are homeless individuals living and getting them on housing lists for when there are openings. She also stated that Erin Healy's presence in La Crosse has helped generate ideas and hopes and continued work with her will help service providers in La Crosse combat homelessness. Right now the needs are greater than the services available and they are working to find a solution to work towards ending homelessness. Jason Gilman, Planning and Development Director for the City of La Crosse, stated that this is an issue that the community is working collaboratively on. He stated that his department is working on continued CDBG funding for programs for affordable housing, inclusionary housing policy and inclusionary economic development policy. He also stated that Healy said housing without strict policies is needed so those suffering with addiction have a place to live if they do not want to subscribe to insutional setting housing programs. He also stated that Healy discussed looking for triggers for homelessness and creating programs to help fix those issues so the individual or family doesn't become homeless.

5 Discussion on community member letter

Digby-Britten stated that on June 15th a community member received an anti-semitic letter after her editorial piece relating to the Department of Natural Resources was published in the La Crosse Tribune. The commission discussed what they can do to prevent this type of discrimination from continuing to happen to La Crosse residents. Van Roosenbeek stated that he continuously sees an increase of hateful and biased comments being left in comment sections of news sources. He asked if there is something the commission can do to help on stopping this type of behavior. The commission stated they would work on drafting a letter to the La Crosse Tribune to request that anonymous comments can no longer be posted in the comments section of their articles. Instead, the commission would like to request that comments must be associated with a name, such as how your name must be attached to comments on news articles posted on Facebook. There was also discussion if addresses of elected officials could be private information rather than publicly posted to protect the safety and privacy of these members. Johnson stated that part of being an elected official means being accessible to the public and while she appreciates the sentiment of trying to protect these community members, she believes that part of being an elected official is being available for the public.

6 Debrief June 16th Listening Session

Spivey stated that he thinks the listening session went well, but said it would have been helpful to hear more first hand experiences of discrimination from the Latino Community. He stated it is important for the commission to remember that the experiences told at this session do not represent the stories of everybody in this community. Digby-Britten stated that perhaps some people with experience being discriminated against did not come to tell their stories because they may not feel safe. Sister Marie Kyle stated that in her experience people do not come to these sessions because they are afraid. Spivey suggested the commission do additional outreach to try and hear some experiences from the community and perhaps administer a survey at Centro Latino. Burgos stated that he hopes that as the commission becomes more established they are able to engender trust throughout the community of La Crosse. Chandra Cox was in the audience and stated that although the commission may not have seen the demographics they were hoping for at the listening session, it is important to note that many people came to this session to learn more about the experiences of others. She stated that this session got community members engaged and dialogues started about discrimination that occurs in La Crosse.

7 [16-0687](#)

Approval of June 16th Listening Session Executive Summary

Attachments: [june 16 executive summary final](#)

Motion to approve the June 16th Listening Session Executive Summary brought by Johnson, seconded by Spivey. Motion passed by voice vote.

8 Updates on planning for Commission's future

Burgos stated that he would like to have updates bimonthly from the Human Resources department on efforts to diversify the City workforce. He also stated that he would like to partner with the Greater La Crosse Diversity Council in the future to plan a free event celebrating diversity. Spivey stated since the Commission continues to hear concerns about housing discrimination that he would like to see a map of La Crosse showing where populations of races are located. This would be used to help work on fighting housing discrimination based on race. Jason Gilman said he would look into using Census information to create this type of map. Spivey stated this map would allow the commission to work on preventative strategies to keep people from being discriminated against. Digby-Britten agreed that preventative strategies should be worked on. Johnson suggested having a listening session for tenants to hear about the types of problems and discrimination tenants are facing. Gilman also offered to facilitate a planning session for the commission. He stated that this would allow the commission to come up with annual goals and Gilman could work on putting some of those goals into the planning department operations plan. The commission agreed that this would be a beneficial session and is planning on having this session on July 27th.

9 Regular meeting date finalization

The commission agreed that meetings will be held on the third Wednesday of the month unless there are extreme circumstances in which it needs to be moved.

10 Next Meeting Date/Agenda Items

The next meeting will be held on August 17th at 5:00 pm in the 5th Floor Conference Room at City Hall. Suggested agenda items are updates on bringing Jim Loewen to La Crosse, continued dialogue on homelessness, planning for the next listening session, and inviting the Human Resources Director to come to the meeting to discuss efforts her department is making.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn brought by Spivey, seconded by Digby-Britten. Meeting adjourned.

Notice is further given that members of other governmental bodies may be present at the above scheduled meeting to gather information about a subject over which they have decision-making responsibility.

NOTICE TO PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY

Requests from persons with a disability who need assistance to participate in this meeting should call the City Clerk's office at (608) 789-7510 or send an email to ADAcityclerk@cityoflacrosse.org, with as much advance notice as possible.