



City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Meeting Minutes

Human Rights Commission

Wednesday, December 20, 2017

5:15 PM

5th Floor Conference Room

Call to Order

Spivey called the meeting to order at 5:17 pm.

Roll Call

Present: 6 - Ashley Lacenski, Shaundel Spivey, Will Van Roosenbeek, Elizabeth Digby-Britten, Rose Reinert, Jacqueline Marcou

Excused: 2 - Vacant 1, Vacant 2

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Marcou made a motion, seconded by Reinert, to nominate Spivey as the chairperson. Spivey accepted the nomination. He was elected by a voice vote.

Marcou made a motion, seconded by Reinert, to nominate Digby-Britten, as the vice chairperson. Digby-Britten accepted the nomination. She was elected by a voice vote.

Approval of Minutes

Marcou made a motion, Reinert seconded, to approve the minutes from 11/15. The motion carried by a voice vote.

Agenda Items:

1. [17-1790](#) Update on proposed resolution 17-1579

Mayor gave an overview of ordinance; City doesn't have ability to enforce State or Federal programs, so HRC review of those programs may raise false hopes; City Housing and Housing Authority are governed by HUD; HRC can still advocate for fair housing, take complaints, and do investigations; HRC's role is still being defined.

Digby-Britten asked what authority HRC has over private housing? Enforce Municipal Code.

Reinert - relationship of Authority to City? State permits Cities to create authority, governed by Fed; Mayor only appoints board; How Board paid? Jane Van Roosenbeek asked about term limits? 5 people with staggered term limits Spivey asked if the board selects director? Yes Digby-Britten asked how many vacancies there are currently? 2

Spivey asked about the timing of the legislation. Mayor didn't know; more about education and outreach

Spivey asked why HRC didn't get advanced notification? apologize on timing
Spivey suggested possibility of finding a better way had HRC been involved earlier.

Reinert - recommends transparency and advocacy then? Not discouraging taking complaints; city doesn't have power to resolve issues; met to address issues with Housing Authority on 10/5; suggest working collaboratively w/ HA, since City has no authority.

Marcou suggested open dialog between HRC, Mayor, Attorney, and safe space to help and offer advice or direction; figure out process for handling complaints

Van Roosenbeek expressed skepticism of ability to offer safe space since HRC doesn't have authority; doesn't want to be misleading; needs to figure out what HRC can do; need to be honest

Spivey looking for response from City staff on what HRC can do.

Digby-Britten expressed need to do investigation properly; need another meeting to discuss ordinance to pick apart

Spivey requested that the HRC knows who is holding people accountable for discrimination.

Reinert request more communication with Housing Authority.

Marcou wondered what City needs to do to hold offenders accountable, and if it is equipped with those resources.

Licenski expressed displeasure with inability to hold biggest offenders accountable.

Marcou suggested 2-3 Commissioners meet with Mayor to fix ordinance.

Public comment:

Deborah Kelly noted difficulty of dealing with State and Federal housing agencies; expressed need alternative process; asked if can City sue HUD; and asked if Housing Authority manual could be made more widely available.

Julie McDermid shared difficulty of transitioning out of Housing Authority; felt conversation have been productive since Housing Authority has attended meetings; supported cooperative approach.

CM Marshall - burden of proof isn't on intent, just existence of discrimination; hoping for conciliatory role among stakeholders; move ahead where all stakeholders work together

Sarah Fortune - responded to request; HRC didn't get, need up-to-date contact information

Reinert expressed frustration, but doesn't want HRC perceived as difficult to work with.

Spivey expressed anger about feeling powerless when faced constantly with discrimination.

McDermid - public comment process to hear and pass along complaints; hoping to establish outline

- need model

Tracy Littlejohn - standing agenda item to address housing policy issues

Digby-Britten - prepare in advance?

Marcou suggested a strategic planning process, informed by training and education about powers.

McDermid recommended education and setting a timeline for review of the ordinance.

Mayor expressed desire for HRC to be as effective as possible.

Digby-Britten suggested try a different process, possibly self-guided, to define strategic plan objectives.

Marcou made a motion, Digby-Britten seconded, to open up for a public hearing. The motion carried by a voice vote.

2. [17-1791](#) Clarification of complaint process by Assistant City Attorney Paul Fredrickson

PF - HRC acts as quasijudicial role; advocates must recuse self

SS - when hearing complaints? recusal all.

WV - what judging? need to define role

SS - no okay with that; only single person must recuse; could be difficult to advocate or educate; must recuse;

JM - can hire private investigator? RR - yes

Need to get prices on investigator; budget; collaborate with DA

SS - need list of private investigators City has used; who's responsible for that, not in meeting notes;

PF - HRC needs list of questions for investigators to answer

Public comment:

Julie loss of confidence that HRC can do anything; define role as advocate or judge - direct trained advocate

SF - Training for how to advocate

TL - need to think outside of box

Matty - Attorney needs to defend integrity of commission

3. [17-1318](#) Complaint filed by Genean Thomas vs. City of La Crosse Housing Authority
-Update on November 8, 2017 directive to find an independent fact finder.

Attachments: [Request received 9-28-17 from Housing Authority attorney](#)

[Letter from Genean Thomas 11/7/17](#)

RR - time period for action

SS - ask for update on independent investigation

Need to be on next agenda

Reinert made a motion, Marcou seconded, that this complaint be referred for 30 days. The motion carried by a voice vote.

4. [17-1537](#) Complaint filed by Patricia Thomas vs. City of La Crosse Housing Authority
-Consideration of request received by the City of La Crosse Human Rights Commission from Hale Skemp Hanson Skemp & Sleik Attorneys & Counselors at Law, representing the Housing Authority of the City of La Crosse, dated December 4, 2017.

Attachments: [Request received 11-27-17 from Housing Authority attorney](#)

[Request received 12-4-17 from Housing Authority attorney](#)

RR - two additional weeks

EDB - next CC meeting 1/11; already asked for extension to 12/20

Clarification 20 business days, so actually 12/22

Waiting on response

Reinert made a motion, Marcou seconded, that this complaint be referred for 30 days. The motion carried by a voice vote.

5. [17-1002](#) Review of Arts Board Listening Session on December 6, 2017

*EDB - need more education; 1/4 @ 6:30 pm 3 Rivers House
SS - collaborative resolution to send to Parks Board and Council*

*TL- specific line item for maintenance? No, City working on a policy for all art
Staff - noted legislative deadline*

JM - more process before legislation

EDB - provide more education, but not willing to face attack; need caution

*SS - not just perception, but has happened; need to work toward a better
representation of City*

TL - suggested working with Ryan Cornett; awaiting Ho-Chunk decision;

Public comment - sovereign nation

EDB - agreed and pointed to rules

WV - not listening; just education

6. [17-1004](#) Update on letter to school district following complaint filed by Elizabeth Digby-Britten

*No update at this time; SS - received complain on school district and need to track
down letter from Burgos.*

Complaint referred for 30 days.

7. [17-1506](#) Fair Housing Outreach event

Julie - possible whole day event; free; small charge for private landlords

8. [17-1164](#) Announcements/Community Events

Education events with the Center last Thursdays Jan - June

on LGBTQ issues relevant to HRC Include on next agenda

WV - vandalism of Lesbian home and flags at The Center vandalized

9. [17-1111](#) HRC Member Vacancy

Mayor received 7-8 applications and may interview candidates

AL - take in to consideration diversity, in terms of color and ability

10. [17-1317](#) Public Forum

Julie earlier public hearing was exhausting

The motion to open up for public comment passed by a voice vote.

The motion to close public comment passed by a voice vote.

Next Meeting Date/Agenda Items

*The next meeting will be 1/17 @ 5:15 pm. Agenda items may include mayor's
resolution, complaints, school district letter, and support of The Center educational
events.*

Adjournment

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.