



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
Monday April 25, 2011
REGULAR MEETING
City Hall Council Chambers & Room 1027
First Floor, 301 W. Second Street, Austin, TX 78701

MEETING MINUTES

Chair Judy Cortez called the Board Meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Commission Members in Attendance:

Judy Cortez – Chair
Elizabeth Brenner
Tom Davis
DeWayne Lofton
Delia Meyer
Paul Rhea

Human Resources Staff Present:

Yamile M. Ortiz, EE/FHO Staff Liaison
Tony Robertson, EE/FHO Executive Liaison

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting of March 28, 2011 were approved - Commissioner Meyer motion, Commissioner Lofton second on a 6-0 vote.

2. CITIZENS COMMUNICATIONS

None

3. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Presentation of Mr. Wayne Krause, Attorney for Marcus Marshall, Complainant who appeared before the Commission at our September 2010 meeting, to speak to the Commission regarding his thoughts on the hearing process.

Mr. Krause: Legal Director of the Texas Civil Right Project a non profit organization; congratulated the Commissioners for having their first hearing case review of an Equal Employment Fair Housing Office (EEFHO) determination. Mr. Krause said that he appreciated all Commissioners for the job they did during the hearing.

Mr. Krause expressed that he wanted to communicate his opinion on some of the facts and the process involved before a determination was made. He mentioned that his

experience dealing with the Equal Employment Fair Housing office was negative for his client and him during the interview and the ineffective process done by the investigators.

- b. Presentation, discussion and action on April 18th hate crime. Presentation by Jackie Wood or Rosemary Lehmberg, District Attorney, Karen Gross, Anti-Defamation League-Hate Crimes Task force, Candice Towe, Our Youth, Executive Director.

Commissioner Rhea commented that their thoughts and prayers go to the victims and their families. He talked about the LGBT - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender hate crimes affects the individuals and the community especially for a city that celebrates diversity and progressive values.

Commissioner Rhea mentioned there have been some hate crimes to the LGBT community with attacks in February and December of 2010 and April 2011 in the Austin area He emphasized that the Human Rights Commission denounces all hate crimes and as a community we need to advocate our city officials to educate the public about anti- gay bias and how it leads to violence.

Chief Art Acevedo: Austin Police Department; expressed sadness for the crime of two woman killed in the city of Austin on April 18, 2011. He mentioned that he felt very proud of his department and the investigators who took the suspect into custody.

Chief Acevedo explained that the suspect targeted the victims because he did not agree with his daughter's life style and the relationship she was involved in. He stated that his department will provide the district attorney all the evidence to prosecute the suspect for the capital crime he had committed. He wanted to tell the Community that we do not tolerate hate bias in our city.

Chief Acevedo said he is proud of the relationship with the Anti- Defamation League and all the community partners and requested that the task force continue looking for opportunities to assist the community. He commented that despite the challenges we have, we are one of the safest cities in the country. He closed his presentation saying that Austin is a progressive city welcoming and accommodating to all diverse groups and we look for a quick resolution and some justice for the families and the victims of this type of crime.

Jackie Wood: Assistant District Attorney and a member of the Hate Crimes Task Force; said that just recently, she got the assignment to work on assisting law enforcement and prosecuting hate crimes that comes to the District Attorney's office. Ms. Wood explained hate crimes in Texas and how the process of a hate crime is prosecuted.

Karen Gross: Austin Community Director of the Anti- Defamation League; talked about the progress done since the last time she came before the Commissioners on November 2010. Ms. Gross presented some information and a hand out to the Commissioners showing the new structure of the Hate Crimes Task Force and some meeting notes explaining that on December 15, 2010 this organization was created along with a Steering committee. On April 14, 2011, they had their second meeting where they developed the vision, mission, and the structure of the work groups of prevention, response and restoration.

Candice Towe: Executive Director for Our Youth, talked about the resources available for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender in Austin. She spoke of the sad tragedy on April 18, 2011. Ms. Towe mentioned that the Our Youth hosted a vigil last Thursday evening on April 21, 2011, where over 100 people attended.

Ms. Towe spoke about the four centers this organization has in Texas, where they provide mental health, psychological services, educational support and counseling for over 300 people every year. Ms Towe invited the Commissioners to join them and further addressed prevention and education issues for the youth of LGBT community.

Chief Acevedo invited the Commissioners and the public to march on Saturday April 30, 2011, at 17100 Dixie Drive at 1:00 pm to support and stand united against hate.

Commissioner Cortez finalized the presentation saying that this is a senseless crime guided by hate. The killing of human beings is wrong and as the Human Rights Commission we will not tolerate this act of violence.

- c. Update and discussion of proposed resolution to City Council in support of the victims of Japan.

Commissioner Rhea updated that the city council passed the resolution on April 21, 2011.

- d. Discussion on Emergency Election for Vice Chair and a possible action.

Commissioner Cortez recommended Commissioner Davis for the vice-chair position and she asked the Commissioners to make a recommendation. Commissioners recommended Commissioner Davis. Commissioner Brenner motion, Commissioner Lofton second on a 6 – 0 vote.

- e. Presentation, discussion and action of proposed resolution to City Council in opposition to the takeover by the State of Michigan of the City of Benton Harbor

Commissioner Davis read the resolution and asked the Commissioners to support it. Commissioner Cortez adopted the resolution, Commissioner Meyer motion, Commissioner Brenner second on a 5-0 vote. Commissioner Meyer abstained from voting.

4. OLD BUSINESS

- a. Update on working Committees, discussion on the Sheraton Hotel and LBJ Library Contracts, and other areas of responsibility for the 2011 International Association of Official Human Rights Agency (IAOHRA) - Conference in Austin.

Commissioner Cortez confirmed that the Sheraton Hotel has a contract signed for the conference but the LBJ Library does not have one. Mr. Robertson and Ms. Scales said that they will contact them to work on that contract.

Commissioner Cortez reviewed each committee and asked the Commissioners for updates:

Program and Planning Committee: Commissioner Cortez talked about the first meeting for April 26, 2011 at City Hall and reminded the Commissioners to assist. Mr. Robertson said he is putting an agenda together so everyone knows what to ask during the meeting.

Logistics and Transportation Committee: Commissioner Davis mentioned that they need to talk about the logistics, the VIP attendees and how to work with the volunteers. Commissioner Davis requested Mr. Robertson to write a letter to send to the IAOHRA speakers.

Volunteer committee: Commissioner Rhea said that they had a meeting two weeks ago and they talked about assigning roles, getting promo-bags - information, welcome gifts for attendees and updated the list by groups. He added he is working with different clubs in Austin and got information about volunteering. Ms. Scales said they have the support from the Human Resources community across the city.

Mr. Arron Pyle, a volunteer graduate student from University of Texas confirmed that last month he got a list of 34 volunteers from the U T graduate students.

Public Relations and Community Outreach Committee: Ms. Scales said that some one from the city will be part of this committee and she will have more information for the next meeting.

Registration committee: Commissioner Meyer inquired as to who will call who in reference to getting together for a meeting. Commissioner Cortez emphasized that they need directions in how to approach volunteers. Ms. Scales clarified to all Commissioners that each Commissioner chairing a committee are the ones responsible for setting up the meeting to call volunteers or staff.

Special Events and Entertainment: Commissioner Lofton also asked for guidelines for his committee. Ms. Scales mentioned that she will give him information on the point of contact so he can move on with updates. Mr. Arron Pyle told Commissioner Lofton that he has contacts and connections and can assist with Tejano music, Rock bands and others from the entertainment people in Austin.

Mr. Robertson talked about directions and he said he will bring contact names to next meeting for the committee leaders to make contact with those people who have done this kind of event before. Mr. Robertson explained to Commissioner Meyer that IAOHRA brings their own staff for the registration committee to assist the volunteers on a daily bases.

b. Discussion on the Annual Work Plan and its priority value.

Commissioner Cortez and Commissioner Lofton asked for clarification on this item. Mr. Robertson explained that during the past work session they agreed to work on the three goals they created for this year (2011). Mr. Robertson reviewed the goals: 1. Create a unique message to educate and inform the public of the purpose, vision, and commitment of the Human Rights Commission. 2. Create a marketing plan that educates and inform the public of the purpose and mission of the Human Rights Commission. 3. Plan, develop, track progress, implement and evaluate the IAOHRA conference of August 2011.

Ms. Scales added that the Human Resources Department–Equal Employment Fair Housing Office is working on informing the public that the Human Rights Commission exists and suggested that the Commission itself should work on their in put.

5. STAFF BRIEFINGS

- Mr. Robertson handed out the power point presentation to the Commissioners and reviewed some issues of the hearing process training.
- Mr. Robertson thanked Commissioner Cortez and Commissioner Davis for attending the Fair Housing conference at the Mexican American Cultural Center which it was a success.
- Commissioner Brenner thanked Mr. Robertson for the press release being a success. She asked what the process to do a press release was. Mr. Robertson explained that three Commissioners spoke together and agreed to talk on behalf of the other Commissioners, they spoke with Mr. Robertson and he spoke with the city clerk. Mr. Robertson said the City Clerk Office would work on reviewing the process.
- Commissioner Meyer and Commissioner Brenner talked about Mr. Krause's presentation and said that they would like to have information on the Equal Employment Fair Housing Office's response to his presentation and questions. Mr. Robertson said that a response to Mr. Krause's questions will be done soon.
- Commissioner Davis told Mr. Robertson that he feels very confident of how he is running this office.

6. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Commissioner Meyer suggested working on updating the brochure and to review the updates for the next meeting. All Commissioners's agreed to review and provide their review and input at the next HRC. Staff will provide copies of their current Brochure for HRC review and approval.

ADJOURN

Chair Judy Cortez adjourned the meeting at 7:40 pm without objection.