



APPROVED: January 22, 2008

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
City Hall Willamette Room
Tuesday, December 18, 2007
7:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Commissioners present: C. Jeffery Evans, Jodi Nelson, Marian Anderson, Anna Anderson, and Rick Hammel, Jr.

Commissioners absent: Blanca Ruckert, Delia Guillen

Staff present: Wes Hare, City Manager; Marilyn Smith, Management Assistant/Public Information Officer

Others present: Jim Delapoer, City Attorney

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Evans called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

November 27, 2007

MOTION: Marian Anderson moved to approve as submitted; Rick Hammel, Jr., seconded. Approved 5-0.

Jodi Nelson noted that she would prefer to receive Commission correspondence by e-mail

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

Business from the Public

None.

City Attorney Opinion on Bylaws (agenda item moved up by Chair Evans)

City Attorney Delapoer explained that he had been asked to review proposed Commission bylaws which had been distributed at the November 27, 2007, meeting. In brief, he said that the Commission cannot expand its power and authority by adopting bylaws; those flow from the City Council. He said that when creating the Commission, the Council agonized over what they wanted the Commission to do and had settled on having the Commission recommend things the city as a whole should do. Anything beyond that would be granting authority that they don't have.

He further said that the Commission may adopt rules for their duties and may define the processes they use to reach an outcome. He recommends freewheeling discussions with the goal of coming up with recommendation. If they feel that the structure is wrong somehow, however, he said that they may propose changes but urged them not to do so until they've had some experience. He said that to go back to the Council and ask for a lot of changes now could reignite the controversy that created the Commission.

In brief, Delapoer said that the Commission has the authority to make recommendations but not to expand their duties.

Evans asked for clarification on how often and when officers are elected since the ordinance is silent to that. Delapoer said that those details have been delegated to the Commission so they may establish whatever terms they want for the chair, vice chair, and how those positions would be changed.

Evans asked about the role of subcommittees. Delapoer said that depends on what they want the subcommittees to do. Some subcommittee assignments could be beyond the Commission's authority such as investigating complaints. A subcommittee cannot have more authority than the Commission as a whole. Delapoer suggested that the Commission find ways to come up with good programs and good recommendations, be mindful of how hard they push the Council, and be careful of subcommittee authority.

Evans asked how the Commission could reach out to groups in the community to get input. Such groups would include the growing Hispanic and Russian communities and people with disabilities. Delapoer said that he sees no problem with forming a group to work on a celebration for MLK Day. He pointed to language in the ordinance that calls for the Commission to "focus on recommending community activities." He said that it's less important how they do that than that they keep within the mandate of the ordinance. Nelson said that it makes a lot of sense to gather information; they need to talk to people to know what to recommend. Delapoer said that it is a great idea to have liaisons to other groups to carry forward their suggestions and recommendations.

Evans said that he has been reviewing the ordinance's very specific language and has been reworking it. He asked if it would be possible to send a reworked draft to the Commissioners and to Delapoer. Delapoer said that he and City Manager Hare would be happy to help in anyway, but what the Council really wants to see is recommendations for things the community can do. The Commission should not let structure get in the way. Hare said that he doesn't view the Commission's role as all that limited; he sees a lot of opportunities. Council has heard concerns about groups who feel underrepresented or threatened, and he thinks there's an open mandate for the Commission to take on that challenge. Delapoer added that he had heard complete Council support for being an inclusive community.

Discussion of activities for Martin Luther King, Jr., Week

Nelson reported that she had decided on Jacopetti's as the caterer. She will set up so people can move through quickly. The City will take care of coffee and will have an invitation created and find out about any dietary restrictions. Each commissioner will invite up to five people as guests.

Start time will be 7:00 a.m., and Larry Roper will talk at about 7:15 a.m. Topic is "Building an Inclusive Community." Space is available for 58 City employees. Hare said that he will write his weekly column about it to encourage attendance. Hare added that he would find someone to open the session with a few words about the Commission. Evans asked if Council President Sharon Konopa would be available due to Mayor Killin's health. PIO Smith suggested that each Commissioner invite the Councilor who appointed them. The deadline for a firm headcount is Tuesday, January 8, 2008. Diana Eilers in the City Manager's Office will collect RSVPs.

Marian Anderson asked which Councilor had appointed her. Smith said that staff would provide the Commissioners with the names of those who had appointed each of them. Nelson said that she would stay in touch with Human Resources Director David Shaw with details of the event. Hare noted that City staff is promoting diversity internally with HR leading that effort.

Marian Anderson asked if the Linn County Sheriff's Office would be involved because Sheriff Tim Mueller is a good friend of her son-in-law who works at the jail. Hare suggested that she invite Sheriff Mueller as one of her five invitees.

Discussion regarding Community Survey

Smith explained the status of the survey process. She distributed the list of questions from the 2003 survey with a few additions that had been suggested by the City Council and David Shaw. Commissioners will review the questions and discuss new ones at the January meeting.

Nelson suggested adding “transgender” to the gender choices in the demographic questions section and possibly reviewing other surveys for additional gender selections. It would give a better picture of who is in the community. Hare noted that it is information that we don’t currently have.

BUSINESS FROM THE COMMISSION

Evans said that he felt that the Commission has consensus that they need to gather information. A place to start would be to find out who people talk to in City departments regarding these issues. He asked if the Commission wants to begin inviting people from each City department to come talk to them about the kinds of issues they see in talking with their staff. The Commission can start identifying issues from the perspective of people who deal with the public a lot, or departments that they refer people to.

Nelson said that they could start inviting people in to get an idea of what’s happening. Evans asked if it was appropriate for them to start inviting City representatives to ask what do you see, how have you addressed it, what do you see that could be done differently, how can the Commission help with that. That could be the start of that knowledge base.

Hare said that he likes the suggestion very much, and it would be especially helpful to hear from Police and Fire. He said that he receives complaints occasionally but not a lot. Most people call the departments directly. Marian Anderson said that when she talks to people about the Commission, right away they think it is investigating. They can’t understand why the Albany Commission can’t do like other human-rights groups do. She said that she wishes more people from the public were here. She said that she had done investigation of complaints on other boards and wanted to be on this board because she was burned out on the investigation side. She said that it would be nice if they had a brochure of some sort, telling people who they can talk to.

Hare said that people can always refer complaints or questions to him. He described a complaint about the Police Department that had occurred a few months ago and how that was handled. He was satisfied with the results. He said that we don’t try to turn into hedgehogs but, instead, want to open ourselves up and determine the facts.

Evans said that we don’t seem to have a handle on where people can go. When he is upset, for example, the last thing he wants is to be referred from here to here to here to here. Nelson said that the Commission could invite two or three people at once and let them know what we are interested in what they might want to say to us. Anna Anderson said that her school does an annual survey, and she will talk to the principal about including some questions about diversity. Evans asked if the Commission wanted to hear from school district representatives as well.

He suggested setting 15-minute limits and have two City representatives attend next month’s meeting. Hare said that the Commission should listen to them and hear what they deal with. He recommends doing a ride along with police. He believes the Commissioners will just have fun talking with people and that the discussion will be interesting. Smith will put it on the agenda for this week’s staff meeting.

Nelson said that the Commission should keep its agenda flexible so that if a community of color wants to come to talk to them they are available. Evans asked if they should invite somebody from the hospital and other public service-oriented institutions. Nelson said to look at City information first, then see where they want to go.

Evans also noted that he likes to move meetings along. He asked if he was moving things too quickly or cutting off discussion. He sees his role as chair as facilitating. If Commissioners want to see things handled differently, please let him know.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Tuesday, January 22, 2008, 7:00 p.m. in the Willamette Room.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Signature on File

Marilyn Smith
Management Assistant/Public Information Officer

Reviewed by,

Signature on File

Wes Hare
City Manager