



APPROVED: August 26, 2008

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
City Hall Willamette Room
Tuesday, May 27, 2008
7:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Commissioners present: C. Jeffery Evans, Blanca Ruckert, Marian Anderson, Jodi Nelson

Commissioners absent: Anna Anderson, Rick Hammel, Jr., Delia Guillen

Staff present: Diane Taniguchi-Dennis, Public Works Director; Don Donovan, Planning Manager; Melanie Adams, Assistant Building Official; Jeff Christman, City Councilor

Others present: Shawn Wells, Melinda Rowell

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Evans called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 26, 2008

MOTION: Nelson moved to approve the February 26, 2008, minutes; seconded by M. Anderson. Approved 4-0.

April 22, 2008

MOTION: M. Anderson approved the April 22, 2008, with one amendment; seconded by Nelson. Approved 4-0.

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

Evans tabled item e, accessibility concerns, for the June meeting and tabled item d, discussion of racial profiling, for the July 2008 meeting. Evans asked if everyone was okay with the first item of discussion being item c, continued discussion of how the public perceives mental illness. Everyone agreed that would be okay.

Business from the Public

None.

Continued Discussion of How the Public Perceives the Mentally Ill

Shawn Wells introduced herself and mentioned that she and Delia both work at Lafayette Elementary. She works part-time teaching art classes. Shawn talked about her mental illness and what can be done as a community to address the issue.

People don't understand mental illness, and she has done a lot of research on her own to better understand it. Many people with mental illnesses don't have insurance coverage. It is important to educate the public about mental illness and also those suffering from it. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is a good resource to turn to for education and support. Shawn said she has noticed there are not many resources available to teachers to help them recognize what is and isn't mental illness in children. There is a lot to be done, but there are a lot of good things going on as well. Evans asked how long it took her to get the right diagnosis. Shawn said that it took five years to be diagnosed with bipolar disorder, which happened after she had a major manic episode. Evans asked how her employers have treated her. Shawn said that her first employer was worried about the children getting hurt; so she left that job, and she has been with Lafayette School for the past 14 years. Nelson thanked Shawn for coming to the meeting. Shawn suggested the group attend a NAMI meeting; there is a Corvallis chapter. There was an Albany chapter, but it dissolved due to lack of interest.

Department Director Feedback about Diversity Issues

Diane Taniguchi-Dennis introduced herself. She began employment with the City of Albany in 1999 as the City Engineer. In 2003 she became the Public Works Director. Diane discussed the different aspects of Public Works. There are 105 employees in the Public Works Department. Of the 105 employees, 16 are women. It is a goal to better match the demographics of Public Works with that of the City population. Five employees are bilingual; three speak Spanish, one speaks Thai, one speaks Danish. Public Works conducts programs with the schools to provide outreach and education to children including the Adopt-a-Stream program. Public Works has service learning projects with Memorial Middle School which includes planting trees, stenciling near drains, etc. Public Works makes sure that signs throughout the city meet the current ADA requirements. There is a program to help low-income households pay for water costs. Transit, Paratransit, and Call-A-Ride provide transportation to a spectrum of individuals and is supported by state and federal grants. Nelson asked how often people are being recruited for job openings. Diane said that right now there are not many openings, but over the next five years there will be a number of retirements. Evans asked how do you recruit minorities and women into these positions. Diane said that they depend on Human Resources to use a diverse advertising plan when there is an open position. Evans asked if there are funds for interns. Diane said that yes, some interns are hired in the summer. Nelson asked where the funding comes from for the interns. Diane said that water and sewer funds are used as well as the gas tax funds.

Don Donovan is the Community Development Planning Manager. He has been with the City since 1992. Community Development provides people with information that they need, discuss the future of the community, and provide current and long-range planning. Public involvement is key to the success of Community Development. There are nine employees in Planning, four men and five women. Diversity training is available and the supervisors are required to attend. Nelson asked if there is any type of outreach to minorities. Don said that there is a list of employees who have bilingual skills that can be contacted if needed to help someone who speaks a different language. Nelson said that it is important to have documents available in other languages to assist minorities. Evans asked if Spanish speakers attend public meetings. Don said not really and that, in general, there is not a lot of participation. Evans said that Community Development could offer public meetings to alert people of the rules and standards of the codes.

Melanie Adams is the Community Development Assistant Building Official. She has been with the City since 2004. The Building Division's main job is to protect the built environment. There are 14 employees, and nine are women. The compliance division is all women. There are few building officials that are women, and it is usually a male dominated profession; and Melanie is proud of the balance. She spends a lot of time discussing accessibility issues. If there is an accessibility problem, the business is sent a letter and a list of things they need to fix. Most people have been fixing the problems. They also handle ADA issues that have to do with City Hall. The Building Division cannot enforce ADA guidelines but does act as an advisory board. They check for accessibility in new construction. New construction has to comply with the state of Oregon Building Codes. Existing buildings don't fall under

the same requirements. There are basic customer service materials available in Spanish. They frequently use the translation Web sites. Evans asked if information is given to building owners about the tax incentives available if they make ADA compliance upgrades. Melanie said yes.

BUSINESS FROM THE COMMISSION

Nelson suggested discussing some ideas to help with mental illness issues at the next meeting.

Nelson said she would like to take one meeting to catch up with all of the information they have been given. Evans agreed and suggested July or August. Evans said that it is important for the Commission to have a quorum. If you will be absent from a meeting, please call Evans to let him know. The mental illness discussion will be continued at the June 24 meeting.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Tuesday, June 24, 2008, 7:00 p.m., in the Willamette Room.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Signature on file

Diana Eilers
Administrative Assistant I

Reviewed by,

Signature on file

Wes Hare
City Manager