



HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION & HISPANIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

City Hall, Municipal Court Room

Tuesday, July 26, 2011

3:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Human Relations Commissioners present: Kim Whitley; Nancy Greenman; Julie Jones; Tina Dodge Vera; Linda Hart; Michael Thomson; and Margaret Martinez

Human Relations Commissioners absent: None

Hispanic Advisory Councilors present: May Daly-Piehl; Mary Mayfield; Tammy Skubinna; Heath Medina Saucedo; Emily McNulty; Larry Bardell, InReach Psychiatrist Nurse Practitioner; Miao Zhao, InReach Clinic Coordinator; Dania Samudio; Ana Lucia Fonseca; Rebecca Farrin; Aaron Clingerman; Leonor Rodriguez; and Tina Dodge Vera

Hispanic Advisory Councilors absent: None

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

Others present: Herocia Badger

CALL TO ORDER

Human Relations Commission (HRC) Vice Chair Nancy Greenman called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

Introductions

Greenman welcomed the Hispanic Advisory Council (HAC) to this joint meeting with the HRC. The HAC and HRC members introduced themselves.

Discussion with Hispanic Advisory Council

Greenman said that she is excited to have this opportunity to talk about what each organization does and to look for ways to help each other. She is excited to have some guests in the audience who will address both organizations.

Tina Dodge Vera is a member of the HRC and the HAC. Dodge Vera said that the HRC invites folks to Albany. The HAC goes to other counties and other organizations and they happen to be visiting Albany this month. They want to see what is going on and how they can help.

Greenman said the goal of HRC is to make Albany more welcoming. Their mission is to promote harmonious relations in the community by making recommendations to the Albany City Council on how to make Albany more welcoming. She said that the HRC is delighted to have this meeting to focus on the Latino Hispanic community. She said that the HRC welcomes your suggestions.

HRC Chair Kim Whitley said they have had several outreach activities with the goal of getting feedback where improvements might be made. Their most recent efforts to reach the goal has been to have a presence at River Rhythms. They have attended two concerts and plan to attend the Latino Festival. They met with young adults a few weeks ago and two years ago a community meeting was held at Ray's. Each meeting was reported back to the City

Council. Whitley thinks they have had a positive effect on community relations. She asked the HAC what they think could be done in the city.

Dodge Vera said that since she is a member of both, she shares what the HAC discusses with HRC. The two groups have very similar goals, to make Linn and Benton Counties more welcoming and inclusive and to educate other agencies on how to better serve the community. For example, the HAC met two years ago with the Albany Police Department (APD), the Corvallis Police Department, and the Linn County Sheriff to have a conversation about cultural competency. They learned that there are areas where rules are being interpreted differently. If they pull someone over, they may ask for their Social Security Number (SSN); but for a person with English as a Second Language (ESL), that would be threatening because it could be an indirect question as to their legal status. There are other identifiers that can be used instead of asking for a SSN. Dodge Vera said that APD is very open and the HAC has a good relationship with them.

HAC Cochair Tammy Skubinna said that they help with two events each year: soccer in Corvallis and the Festival Latino in Albany. They provide oversight and organization for information tables but soon will have a bigger role.

Dodge Vera said that the HAC used to do separate events, but in the last five years, have decided to work alongside the City of Albany Parks & Recreation Department. Also, the HAC is now taking the lead for Festival Latino. The City didn't have the financial ability to take it on, but they remain very active in the event.

Whitley asked the HAC members what their impressions are of the City of Albany and if there are things that would be helpful for the HRC to know.

HAC Member Heath Medina Saucedo asked if the City does something for people who are new to Albany. City Manager Wes Hare said that he is unaware of anyone doing that.

Greenman described City events such as River Rhythms and Monday's @ Monteith. She asked if the events are perceived as welcoming to the Hispanic community. Saucedo said yes. HAC Member Ana Lucia Fonseca asked if the events are advertised in Spanish. Hare said that they do some, but he is not sure if they do it for all the events. Greenman said that she noticed that most ads for the events that are posted in the downtown area are in English. She wondered if those who are ESL can find the information they need. Public Information Officer/ Management Assistant Marilyn Smith said that there are Spanish signs to direct folks throughout City Hall. Hare added that there are Library programs offered in Spanish.

HAC Member Leonor Rodriguez noticed there is no Spanish speaker at the Utility Billing counter at City Hall. Hare said that they have them available to translate but they do not have a full-time person at that desk. He listed the Spanish-speaking employees at City Hall, including the Information Technology Director. Rodriguez suggested making a sign in Spanish that says that there are translators available. Hare said that is a good idea. Greenman agreed that having such a sign would show that "we are thinking of you and want to do our best to help you."

Miao Zhao is the InReach Clinic Coordinator for low-income families. She asked if there is a team of bilingual volunteers in Albany, such as high school students. They use volunteers at her office, but there are few who speak Spanish. Smith said that the list of City employees who speak a second language include a wide range of languages. Greenman asked Smith if they are short Spanish speaking volunteers in that pool. Smith is not sure but will check.

Skubinna said that both high schools would be good connections to make. High school student volunteers make themselves marketable and can build resumes. It could be a valuable source of volunteers.

Dodge Vera cautioned that they have to be careful that Latino students do not get over tapped when their main focus should be education.

Skubinna described service-learning task force opportunities.

Zhao said that from January to June 2011, 30 percent of her clientele were Hispanic. The average household size is 4.03, and the most common size is five.

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Rodriguez said that transportation is an issue for Hispanic families. It is hard for them to grasp the concept of how to ride the bus; so they are not taking that opportunity due to the language barrier. To help them out, she often writes down the address for them to show to the bus driver so the driver knows where they need to go. Bus maps are not in Spanish.

HAC Member Mary Mayfield said that bus maps are a challenge to read even for English speakers. For those without solid skills, it would be difficult to learn. In Guatemala and Mexico, the buses are easy compared to here.

Greenman said that while everyone wishes that more could be done for the bus routes, she also acknowledges that City resources are limited.

HAC Member Mary Daly-Piehl said that there is a disparity in income between those who use the buses and those who make the decisions about public transportation. Hare said that actually, for a city our size, we do more than most. He explained that so far Albany has had to fund transit directly from the citizens. We have a Transit budget of \$1 million a year. On one hand it is not enough, but on the other hand it's a lot for a city our size. He explained what a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is and how, if or when Albany is designated a MPO, it will increase the federal funding we get for transportation activities.

Rodriguez asked if there are bus drivers who speak Spanish. Hare is not sure. He said that the Spanish population is about 9 percent and if that were representative, the City would have about 40 Latino employees. He thinks we may have about 20, and there are others that are bilingual. But to some extent, the hiring pool is limited by who applies for jobs. He said that we do try to reach out as best we can.

HAC Member Heath Medina Saucedo said HAC has access to a good listserv. The City could send the job openings to them and they could advertise on the listserv.

Dodge Vera said that if the Parks & Recreation Activity Guide had at least one page in Spanish, it would be helpful. She thinks the population in Albany is 10 percent Latino according to the census. She works with Oregon State University to translate registration forms and get them out to parents. They want to create more opportunity for families.

Skubinna said that A.J. Santana was at Southshore School and did a career day for the kids. Having the City of Albany staff there would be a good addition. It would also be good to have printed material available in Spanish for new folks in town at the River Rhythm events. Dodge Vera agreed and said that most often it's the kids who figure out how to get the information, rather than the parents. They want to change that.

Whitley asked if there is a compliance threshold tied to the Hispanic population. Hare said that the issue has not been raised in his experience, though in Municipal Court they must have materials and interpreters available. He is not aware of state laws that would apply.

Whitley asked if there is funding the City can get from a cultural diversity aspect. Hare said that he is not aware of any. With the MPO, we just hit a population of 50,000; but they might move the threshold to 100,000, which would disqualify us from those extra funds.

Dodge Vera said that she has seen a variety of ages at River Rhythms but not a lot of ethnic diversity. She asked, is it the cost of translation? Hare said that cost is an issue, but it is not prohibitive. The group discussed if language is really the barrier or if there is something else. They considered if the word is getting out to the Latino population. They often have Latin music at the event.

Saucedo said that there are many who don't read or get newspapers. It may be better to advertise in Spanish newspapers.

Dodge Vera said that the Parks & Recreation Activity Guide is great; but if a person doesn't read English, they won't use it.

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HAC Member Dania Samudio agreed that if information is only available in English, Spanish speakers won't try to read it. Community events need to have better outreach, and the information needs to be in a variety of places.

Zhao asked what the literacy level of the Spanish population is in Albany. Dodge Vera said that in the OSU program it is about sixth grade. She said that she would be happy to help with facilitating translation.

Greenman asked if there is any Spanish on the City's website. Hare doesn't think so. HAC Member Linda Hart described a "translation button" that can be added to websites. Smith said that the City's website does comply with American with Disabilities Act (ADA) rules which require certain types of access for those with limited vision or hearing loss. The rules are getting tighter and are tied to federal funding.

Sauceda said that the information about the Hispanic community in Albany can be found on the census website at www.census.gov.

Mayfield said that it would be a nice gesture to have event posters in Spanish; although what might be a bigger barrier to the Latino community is that if the folks who are heading to the park don't look like them, then they may not go. It would be good to have a radio spot or something in a Spanish paper talking about how much fun it is. Smith said that they have done that in the past, particularly with Latino acts. Discussion followed about the location of Spanish newspapers in Albany.

Whitley thanked the groups for meeting together.

The HAC will start to share their agendas with the HRC.

Greenman would like for the two groups to meet again in one year.

Business from the Public

There was no business from the public.

RECESS

There was no recess called.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 3:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Signature on file.

Mary Dibble, MMC
Deputy City Clerk

Reviewed by,

Signature on file.

Wes Hare
City Manager