

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION (HRC)

City Hall, Willamette Room

Tuesday, March 24, 2015

MINUTES



Commissioners present: Kim Whitley, Graham Kislingbury, Javier Cervantes; Jay Sluiter

Commissioners absent: Tina Dodge Vera (excused), Chris Equinoa (excused), Debbie Berg (unexcused)

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

Others present: Rich Kellum, 4085 East Commercial Way SE, Albany, Oregon 97322

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Kim Whitley called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. after enough members arrived to have a quorum.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Jay Sluiter suggested postponing the elections until the next meeting since three of the Commissioners were absent. The group agreed. Whitley, at City Manager Wes Hare's suggestion, requested that an e-mail be sent polling members as to whether they can attend the next meeting, so they can move forward with the elections. Graham Kislingbury asked the Commissioners present whether they were interested in serving as Chair. Sluiter said that he was not, and Javier Cervantes said that he would consider it. Kislingbury shared that he would be willing to serve as Vice Chair.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 24, 2015

**MOTION:** Sluiter made a motion to approve the minutes; Kislingbury seconded. Approved 4-0.

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

Business from the Public

Rich Kellum addressed the Commission as a citizen of Albany and as an Albany City Councilor with a couple of his concerns. His first concern was with the Commission limiting its HRC Award to only individuals and nonprofit organizations. Kellum voiced that not including for-profit businesses was rejecting a big percentage of organizations that do really good things. He expressed that it could be looked upon as discrimination and that the Commission's reason of not wanting to compete against the Albany Area Chamber of Commerce's Business Award is not valid. Whitley responded that the Commission was in no way intending to discriminate against anyone. She explained that the Commission set their criteria by the award intentions first presented to them by Mayor Sharon Konopa.

Cervantes asked if businesses couldn't be represented through the award's individual category. Kellum disagreed, saying that companies such as Wah Chang and Selmet work as a team with their employees to do good for the community and should be recognized as a team. Kislingbury said that he has no problem with awarding businesses if they are providing a service to the community that fits the goal of the Commission, but he wouldn't think the Commission would want to duplicate what the Albany Chamber already does.

Hare noted that in the past the Commission has not received many nominations. He explained that the group could create another category and just not issue an award if they don't receive nominations for that category. Whitley commented that she appreciated Hare's suggestion because she hadn't considered the addition of a category, only making the existing category more inclusive. Cervantes advised that, to avoid any conflict, they widen the existing category rather than add one. Kellum shared that he asked Chamber President Janet Steele how the Chamber would feel about the HRC awarding businesses, and she told Kellum that it would not be a problem for the Chamber. Cervantes noted that the Commission would want to protect against any perception that they were in competition with the Chamber. Hare said that by making the existing category more inclusive the pool of nominees would widen.

Sluiter expressed his acceptance of widening the criteria to include businesses only if it would not give them an unfair advantage as they would have paid staff to contribute toward a service. Kislingbury responded that it would be the Commission's job to sort through that when deciding who receives the award. Hare commented that the goal is to award those who are exemplars. The group agreed.

**MOTION:** Sluiter made a motion that the Human Relations Award have two categories: Individuals and Organizations, including businesses; Cervantes seconded. Approved 4-0.

Whitley requested that as a follow-up agenda item that the HRC review the award application at the April 28 meeting.

Kellum stated his second concern regarding the presentation at the City Council meeting against the offensive flyers left on parked vehicles during the most recent Veterans' Day Parade. He said he was offended by the implication presented that Albany has a big problem, and considering its racist history, needs to do something about it right away. Kellum said that it has been his perception that these offensive incidents are few and, when they occur, are handled swiftly and appropriately. He emphasized that Albany does the right thing, and the very existence of this Commission shows that. Kellum expressed that he did not have adequate time to process the information. He asked the Commission why they had not brought the issue to the Council ahead of time. Cervantes commented that the presenting group, CARE, had the right to express themselves and asked when the Council was given the meeting agenda packet information. Hare answered that it was sent out the Friday before the Wednesday meeting, which is typical. Kellum said that he read the resolution ahead of the meeting, but did not have time to process how the resolution was delivered. He expressed that he would have liked to have known the background leading up to the resolution.

Whitley, seeking clarification, asked Kellum if his desire was for the HRC to bring resolutions they support to the Council prior to the meeting with their explanation of why they support it. Kellum answered that he would like to see divisive items brought to City Council work session meetings for discussion prior to a regular Council meeting. Cervantes interjected that he did not know that was standard procedure. Hare apologized that he had not made the Commission aware of that avenue, but explained that the resolution wasn't originated by the HRC but by another group. Hare offered to make sure any future controversial issues are presented at a work session meeting first. Cervantes countered that almost anything could be considered controversial.

Cervantes went on to say that there are differences within communities; some not good and some to be celebrated, but to say that we don't have differences is not helpful to the community. He stressed that these types of incidents can escalate when a community does not acknowledge its history and educate from it. Kellum responded that he himself, as a Vietnam veteran, has been the victim of hate speech and is aware that discrimination exists, but feels the way the issue was presented to the Council can turn people off.

Whitley thanked Kellum for coming and sharing his opinion both as a Councilor and as a citizen. She also thanked Cervantes for sharing his viewpoint. Whitley recounted that what she understood Kellum to be saying is that he wants to be supportive of the work the Commission is doing, but asks that they be careful in how they go about doing it, making sure the public understands the what and why of what they are doing. Kellum responded that he wants the Commission to understand that they are appointed by the City Council to assist them in their service to the public. Whitley said that the Commission will do that to the best of their ability and that they will rely on City staff to help them understand when an issue needs to go through a City Council work session.

Cervantes commented that this Commission exists because there was a group of citizens who were concerned with what was happening in this community. He sees this Commission as responsible to rectify those concerns.

Presentation from Will Summers, Labor Economist at Oregon Employment Department

Will Summers notified City staff that he was not able to attend, so this item was postponed.

Discussion regarding changing starting time of HRC meetings

Sluiter told the Commission that he would like them to consider holding their meetings earlier. He comes straight from work and doesn't have dinner until after the meeting is over. He suggested moving it up one hour. Whitley reminded the group of Dodge Vera's opinion from the last meeting that the current time worked well for her in regards to the care of her children. Kinslingbury said that an earlier time did not matter to him. He has other meetings, but he could work around them. Since there were still absent members from the last meeting, Whitley requested that an e-mail be sent to the group to poll their opinions. She suggested giving choices on earlier times of 5:30 p.m., 6:00 p.m., or 6:30 p.m. and the choice to express that an earlier time would not work.

Reading of document from nine years ago

Kislingbury read a February 15, 2006, meeting agenda with a list of objectives (*see agenda file*) from a group who called themselves Concerned Albany Citizens. The group met in 2006 to plan a presentation before the City Council on how to better promote diversity in Albany. Their goal was to help the community better understand itself and celebrate its diversity by building relationships between the greater Albany community and its diverse populations such as the Latino community. Some of their objectives included conveying information on the demographics of the neighborhoods, breakdown assumptions and stereotypes, identify the economic contributions from diversity, and provide ideas the City could do to promote diversity.

Kislingbury explained that the presentation led to the formation of the Human Rights Commission which, by the direction of the City Council, changed its name to the Human Relations Commission. Whitley thanked Kislingbury for providing the group with this piece of its history. Cervantes requested that the document Kislingbury read be provided as a link on the Commission's website page. Hare suggested including the minutes from the March 20, 2006, City Council Work Session meeting when the Concerned Albany Citizens presented their objectives. The group approved of having both documents as a link on the HRC's web page.

Hare shared that he sent Cervantes a link to an article in *The Register-Guard* featuring a book written by his friend who was City Manager of University City, Missouri from 1959 to 1975. The book detailed steps the city took to deal with issues the HRC is talking about right now. The author's desire, along with other leaders at the time, was to make sure the segregation that was happening in other cities wouldn't happen in their town. The policies the leaders made set the stage for what happened down the road. University City is very well integrated and a stark contrast to its neighboring community of Ferguson. Cervantes commented that the article was fascinating.

Whitley requested that the Work Session minutes from the March 20, 2006, City Council meeting be included on the next agenda for discussion.

LBCC One Vibe Diversity Day event, Wednesday, May 13, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The group decided that they would like to host a table at the event and identify it with their banner. Whitley and Kislingbury committed to attending. Whitley requested that the event be included on the next agenda in order to arrange additional attendance by other Commissioners.

2014 HRC Annual Report to the City Council

**MOTION:** Whitley made a motion to approve the 2014 HRC Annual Report; Cervantes seconded. Approved 4-0.

The members in attendance signed the report. Whitley requested that an e-mail be sent to the absent Commission members asking for them to provide their signatures.

Management Assistant/Public Information Officer Marilyn Smith recommended presenting the report at either the April 8 or May 13 City Council meeting. Whitley said that she could present the report at the April 8 City Council meeting. The group agreed that the report would be presented by Whitley at the April 8 meeting. Kislingbury volunteered to support Whitley at the meeting.

## DEBRIEFS

### 2014 Human Relations Award presentations at March 11 City Council

Whitley reported that Chris Equinoa, Debbie Berg, Cervantes, and she attended the Council meeting and that Equinoa and Berg performed the presentations. Whitley said that she was impressed with the format Equinoa and Berg used to present the award. They delivered a foundational introduction that set the stage for public understanding of the award's purpose. Whitley recommended taking note of this format and using it for future award presentations. She expressed her appreciation to City staff for the City's role in sponsoring the award.

## UPDATES

### Outward displays of hate

Smith relayed that she had e-mailed the Albany Police Department (APD) asking them about the outcome of their investigation of last month's swastika incident as a follow-up from the February meeting. She read Police Lieutenant Casey Dorland's response (*see agenda file*) to the group. Dorland reported that the CSO checked the area for other similar graffiti applications, and photos of the swastika mark were downloaded into a graffiti data base that allows them to trace related crimes by styles and implements used. Patrol was alerted to provide extra coverage and to identify other similar cases elsewhere, but no additional leads were developed. At this time there are no suspects, and the investigation is inactive. Dorland addressed the Commission's question on whether the incident was gang related by saying that there is no reason to believe that this occurrence is indicative of a systemic problem, be it gang related or otherwise. He also gave direction on how best to handle these types of incidents:

Have the victim notify the APD as soon as possible, encourage the victim not to remove the graffiti until appropriate photos are taken (The graffiti can be covered with cardboard or something similar.), and then, once the police report is taken, remove the graffiti promptly so as not to give the artist any public recognition.

Dorland ended the e-mail by saying that the APD takes these investigations seriously and will investigate any leads that will help identify a suspect and minimize the impact to a victim of any hate crime, including application of hate crime related graffiti.

Smith then read an e-mail to the City from a resident (*see agenda file*) who was inquiring as to where she could report racist incidents. She describes that her family is an adoptive family with a child of color who has been the target of racial comments. Smith responded to the e-mail and informed the resident of the HRC.

Kellum asked the Commission what the City could have done better about the swastika incident. Kislingbury answered that the right thing was done. Kellum asserted that this was the point he was trying to make earlier.

Hare noted that this group worked well for the woman who suffered from the swastika incident. After Kislingbury's invitation, this woman attended the last HRC meeting where she was able to express her feelings and concerns and receive support. Cervantes surmised that there are things that could be done better, but the symbolic gestures, such as adopting resolutions, carries a lot of weight for those who suffer. He emphasized that, beyond the symbolic gestures, there needs to be education.

### Other volunteer opportunities

Kislingbury commended Cervantes for LBCC's hosting of the "Black-Jew Dialogues". He said that the comedy was well done in its handling of the misconceptions of minorities.

March 24, 2015

Hispanic Advisory Committee (HAC)

Cervantes reported that the Committee did not meet this month. The Committee will be meeting next month and has invited Albany and Corvallis Police Chiefs, both Counties' Sheriffs, and both Counties' District Attorneys. The Committee is pleased that Sheriff Bruce Riley has accepted their invitation. The Albany Police Department will host the meeting with Police Chief Mario Lattanzio providing translation. Whitley shared that she had once attended a meeting that was conducted all in Spanish. She expressed that it was a good experience in that it helped her know what it feels like to be a minority in a meeting. Whitley stated that she would like to see something similar done in Albany.

Calendar of Events: 2015

Whitley informed the group that she has invited the Linn County Mental Health Department to the April meeting in order to discuss plans for Mental Health Month in May. She is waiting to hear back on who will represent the County for the discussion.

BUSINESS FROM THE COMMISSION

Whitley passed around a card from the HAC (*see agenda file*) that thanked the HRC for awarding them with the Non-Profit of the Year Award. In the card, the HAC relayed that they graciously receive the award and will strive to live up to the honor.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

Tuesday, April 28, 2015

ADJOURNMENT

Whitley adjourned the meeting at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Signature on file*

Gina Burrese  
Administrative Assistant

Reviewed by,

*Signature on file*

Wes Hare  
City Manager