APPROVED: May 26, 2015

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION (HRC)

City Hall, Municipal Court Room
Tuesday, April 28, 2015
MINUTES

Commissioners present: Kim Whitley, Graham Kislingbury, Javier Cervantes; Jay Sluiter; Tina Dodge Vera, Chris Equinoa, Debbie Berg

Commissioners absent: None

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

Others present: Tony Howell, Linn County Alcohol & Drug Program Manager; Todd Noble, Linn County Mental Health Program Manager; Jeff Blackford, CHANCE Executive Director

CALL TO ORDER

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

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

MOTION: Chris Equinoa made a motion to elect Javier Cervantes as Chair; Tina Dodge Vera seconded. Approved 7-0. Debbie Berg made a motion to elect Graham Kislingbury as Vice Chair; Equinoa seconded. Approved 7-0.

Cervantes requested that at the end of the year they revisit the Chair position. At that time, he can report how the position is working with his schedule; and, if need be, choose to step down and reopen the election. The group agreed. Cervantes thanked Whitley for her many years of service as Chair. The rest of the group added their appreciation for her dedication.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 24, 2015

Equinoa said that he would like to go on record that he compliments Administrative Assistant Gina Burrese for her summary of the action and discussion of the last couple of meetings. He said that, even though he had not been able to attend the meetings, he felt the minutes gave him a good tenor and synopsis of what transpired. Equinoa expressed his appreciation for her work as the Commission's recorder.

MOTION: Equinoa made a motion to approve the minutes; Whitley seconded. Approved 7-0.

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

Business from the Public

Leonor Rodriguez of the HAC asked to speak on behalf of two Hispanic families who assert they were evicted unjustly from the New Heritage Apartments where they have lived the last several years. Rodriguez reported that the families were not given appropriate notice and had to sell many of their processions to enable them to move in with relatives until they could find something more permanent. Also, one of the families is being charged for repairs made to the apartment that the family argues were due to normal wear and tear from living there for 11 years. Rodriguez shared that, at her direction, the families sought assistance form Legal Aid Services but were told that, because they had already moved out, Legal Aid could not help them.

Cervantes asked the families what they would like to see the Commission do for them. The families shared their shock, grief, and frustrations over the eviction and their fears to speak up about it. They shared how the experience negatively affected their children. The families communicated that they have always paid their rent on time and that they had requested an extension for the recent requirement of renters' insurance but were denied. They would appreciate anything the Commission could do and expressed their appreciation of Rodriguez for assisting them and helping them to see that they have rights as renters.

City Manager Wes Hare sympathized with the families and expressed his concern for their plight. He explained that the City does not have authority to help in renter disputes but assured them that he and City staff will take the initiative in connecting them with area agencies that could help them.

Questions and discussion followed on the rights of tenants with Debbie Berg offering some insights as a landlord herself. Equinoa shared that there are community forums in the Sunrise district regarding landlord/tenant relationships and procedures. Dodge Vera thanked the families for coming forward. She told them that change could not take place if they had remained silent. Dodge Vera expressed her fear that these situations happen more often than we know of.

Rodriguez shared that she is helping the one family settle their dispute over the repair charges through the Small Claims Department. Berg thanked Rodriguez for being there for the families. In turn, the families thanked the Commission for holding these meetings where their voices could be heard.

Data about minority-owned businesses in Albany

Hare recommended holding off the discussion until Will Summers could personally attend to explain the data from the chart included in the agenda packet. The group agreed, and Cervantes requested that the discussion be arranged for the next meeting.

Mental Health Month – May 2015

Tony Howell introduced himself, Todd Noble, and Jeff Blackford to the Commission. Noble explained that the Mental Health Advisory Board will have a presence at three significant area events in May: Health and Safety Fair, Tuesday, May 5; LBCC Diversity Day Fair, Wednesday, May 13; and HEART to Heart Resource Fair, Thursday, May 14. The Board has been working its way around to every city in Linn County and has partnered with KRKT to bring mental health awareness to the communities.

Blackford reported that part of their goal in May is to disburse table tents that can be displayed in malls, libraries, doctors' offices, and such to bring awareness that mental health can be viewed the same as physical health is. He passed around an example of the table tents (*see agenda file*). One side of the tent is written in English and the other side in Spanish. Howell explained that the tents build on the past training video that was so well received.

Cervantes asked if these resources were available to the area's veterans. Cervantes brought this up in light of the arson incident that recently took place at South Albany High School. Noble answered that they do provide services to veterans. They conduct trainings twice a month that encompass issues that would pertain to the veteran. Also, the Linn County Mental Health Program has a presence in almost every school in Linn County to bring about awareness of all aspects of mental health. Howell described that they held an event to aid veterans at the American Legion with mental health and drug councilors available, but it was not utilized very well. They are looking for an option that will be better received.

Noble reported that student members will be doing something every day of Memorial Day week to bring awareness of the normalcy of mental awareness to their schools. The resources are funded through the Mental Health Program and grants. Cervantes asked who to contact for those wanting to attend Mental Health Month events. Noble said that they can contact him at Linn County Mental Health.

Dodge Vera asked about the case load for mental health services and how long someone can expect to wait. Noble answered that people have access 24 hours a day for certain services. People in need of an assessment have open access. If there happens to be a lot of clients at once, clients could be told to come back the next day; but if it is a crisis, they will be helped right then and there. Dodge Vera asked what types of insurance they accept. Noble said that they work through the IHN-CCO. He said that they are paid to serve the population. They see some clients with Medicare and a few with private insurance, but they see many clients for whom they don't get paid.

Berg inquired if the Mental Health Program has Spanish speakers. Noble said that they have two or three for the children services and two for the adult services. He added that they have a number of support staff who speak Spanish. Whitley asked if they had special training in understanding Hispanic culture. Nobel answered that they have some cultural competency and have hired their first translator whose language is Spanish and has the cultural background. Berg asked Blackford how many Spanish-speaking people utilize their services. Blackford answered that CHANCE has had about three Spanish-speaking clients. He said they could do a better job in that area.

Noble concluded his report by saying that the program has partnered well with area medical homes, connections are being made, and there are ongoing conversations. He said that many people do not go to Mental Health to receive care because of the fear of being stigmatized, but they would go to a primary care doctor. So, it is all about the partnerships. Cervantes thanked the guests for their input and asked them to keep the Commission updated and let them know if they can be of any help.

Discussion regarding changing starting time of HRC meetings

Javier opened the discussion by saying that the polling results showed the majority wanted to keep the meeting at 7:00 p.m. Dodge Vera explained that she would have chosen a meeting time during the daytime hours but feels it's the duty of the Commission to be available during a time frame that works for the majority of the public. Equinoa agreed, saying that 7:00 p.m. gives families enough time to come home from work and feed their children dinner before coming to a meeting. The group decided to keep the meeting time at 7:00 p.m.

History of Human Relations Commission

Smith explained the documents included in the agenda packet. She said that the drafted introduction could be posted on the website with links to the documents that provide the background for the beginnings of the HRC. The group approved of posting the introduction with links to the documents that reveal the HRC's history. Equinoa conveyed that he appreciated being able to read the work session minutes that gave the background leading up to the formation of the HRC. Cervantes thanked Kislingbury for the documents of history he provided.

Human Relations Award categories

Smith reported that Executive Assistant to the City Manager Laura Hyde made the change to the award application to include businesses. The news release template was also changed. The group approved of the changes.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Cervantes said that the Commission will have a table to staff at the event. LBCC will provide the table, but the HRC will need to provide a covering for the table. Whitely announced that she will not be available to attend the event. The HRC banner will be used at the event, but Smith pointed out that it will need to be available to use the next day at the HEART to Heart Resource Fair. Kislingbury, who will be at the Diversity Day event, will return the banner to Smith for the next day's use.

HEART to Heart Resource Fair, Thursday, May 14, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Whitley listed many of the organizations that will be participating. She is impressed with the event's presence and wanted the group to be aware of how important the event is. The Fair is a real resource for people in transitional housing. Smith said that the event will have a special focus on veterans. Berg volunteered to attend the event along with Whitley.

UPDATES

Outward displays of hate

Whitley announced that she and Kislingbury, at the invitation of past HRC Commissioner Nancy Greenman, attended a Rural Organizing Project Conversation on Monday, April 27: The Road to Ferguson with speaker Suzanne Pharr. Kislingbury explained that the conversation was to highlight the history of injustices up to Ferguson and then discuss how to do things differently. He conveyed that he did not like the direction the conversation took and shared that he spoke up during the discussion to say that it is going to take both sides, right and left, doing things across the aisle to bring about change. Whitley said that she went to the presentation to represent the Commission. She was looking for preventative options but found the presentation to be narrowly focused. Kislingbury described the presentation as old, not dealing with what we deal with today. Cervantes said that when there is not enough diversity in attendance to balance the conversation, it just limits it. Dodge Vera noted that the hard part is patiently waiting for people to evolve. Cervantes added that change requires everybody to be willing to speak out unpopular opinions.

Other volunteer opportunities

None.

Hispanic Advisory Committee (HAC)

Dodge Vera reported that the Linn County Sheriff, both Cities' Police Chiefs, and the District Attorney attended the last HAC meeting with a focus being on immigration. The Benton County Sheriff could not attend but sent a representative. Dodge Vera said that she felt some bridge building occurred. Dodge Vera expressed that the HAC understands that law enforcement has to do their job in regards to immigration, but their hope is that it is performed with empathy. Cervantes shared that the guests seemed to be surprised at hearing what fears the Hispanics have. He explained that the Hispanics have a respect for authority but are fearful unless treated sympathetically.

Dodge Vera said that during the meeting they also talked about where law enforcement could find bilingual employees.

Calendar of Events: 2015

Cervantes noted the LBCC One Vibe Diversity Day event for the calendar.

BUSINESS FROM THE COMMISSION

None.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

Tuesday, May 26, 2015

ADJOURNMENT

Cervantes adjourned the meeting at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Signature on file

Gina Burrese
Administrative Assistant

Reviewed by,

Signature on file

Wes Hare
City Manager