**APPROVED:** July 28, 2015

# HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION (HRC)

City Hall, Municipal Court Room
Tuesday, May 26, 2015
**MINUTES**

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

Commissioners absent: Debbie Berg (excused)

Staff present: Wes Hare, City Manager

Others present: None

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

April 28, 2015

**MOTION:** Jay Sluiter made a motion to approve the minutes; Chris Equinoa seconded. Approved 6-0.

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

Business from the Public

None.

Data about minority-owned businesses in Albany

City Manager Wes Hare showed the PowerPoint slides provided by Will Summers, Labor Economist. The information was compiled from a 2007 Economic Census survey of business owners. The slides showed that there are a total 272 minority-owned firms with most of them designated "confidential." Tina Dodge Vera noted that the survey was before the economic downturn. There are 2,482 nonminority businesses in Albany, making the minority-owned businesses 9.1 percent of the total. Hare said that he could send the slides to the group for their further review. Cervantes said that he would appreciate that. The Commission members were disappointed that the survey didn't reveal the amount of employees for the minority business. Hare said that the Employment Department may have an impression of what that amount could be. Kim Whitley suggested getting the information from the Oregon Workers' Compensation Division. Hare said he will ask Summers for his recommendation on where the Commission could get additional information. Cervantes proposed passing on any information they collect to the Albany Area Chamber of Commerce.

Hare suggested talking to minority business owners to learn what is working for them and what is not. Whitley asked if there was a City board the business owners could go to for help. Hare responded that there is the CARA program, but it is targeted to one segment of the City. Hare offered the Community Development Block Grant Program or the Economic Development Department as a resource. Cervantes asked how the Commission could get the information they collect presented before the City Council. Hare answered that the information could easily be passed on to them. Cervantes stated that he doesn't think people understand the importance minority businesses have to the community. Hare added to the list of available resources by mentioning the Council of Governments and the County. He suggested finding out what problems or deficits there are for the businesses and whether the existing programs are meeting their needs and then go from there.

Dodge Vera asked about the CARA program. Hare explained that the program was created to bring revitalization to the once struggling downtown area. Whitley asked about incentives to engage minority businesses. Hare answered that there are some, such as the State Enterprise Zone Program. Discussion followed on taxes for businesses and how it impacts the City.

Cervantes thanked Hare for his input. Equinoa asked what type of outreach is done to communicate these programs to the minorities. Hare responded that a fair amount of money and time is spent to get information out to the public. The City Newsletter, *City Bridges*, is one example. Other examples are the local newspaper, mailings, and the public service station that broadcasts the City Council meetings. The information is put out there, but it is hard to get people to pay attention to it. Only a small fraction actually read *City Bridges*. Hare described the City of Albany as accessible. Cervantes pointed out that Albany has a growing population who doesn't have access to services because of language access ability. He suggested starting off by targeting the most predominate language other than English.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2015 River Rhythms Concert Series

In the absence of Management Assistant/Public Information Officer Marilyn Smith, Cervantes directed the group to refer to pages six and seven of the agenda packet. He explained the involvement choices and asked if the HRC would like to be involved in the event again this year. Equinoa expressed that he enjoyed participating last year. Hare commented that the opportunity provided good access for the group. The group agreed. Cervantes instructed the members to check their calendars and come to the next meeting with their availability. He requested that the topic be included on the next agenda.

Coffee with a Cop

About 50 residents participated in the event. Hare reported that he was there for about an hour and found it to be a good mix from different segments of the community. It is hard to determine who came specifically for the event or who would have been at the coffee shop anyway. Since the Albany Police Department (APD) will be hosting this event again, Graham Kislingbury suggested they use the skate park as a venue and provide cool beverages. Another suggestion was to hold it at the new coffee shop next to Yule's Bakery in the Carriage House Plaza. Dodge Vera shared that it is her desire to help organizations with their thought process. She expressed that Allann Bros was not a convenient location and that the flyer should have specified whether the coffee was free. Cervantes added that a Saturday morning might work better than a Thursday. Hare responded that he is sure the APD would be willing to go wherever. Dodge Vera recommended placing the names and direct phone lines of the Spanish speakers participating from the APD on the announcement. Kislingbury said that there were about five police officers in attendance including the Chief. He said that it was good.

Whitley offered to contact Police Lieutenant Casey Dorland about using Yule's Bakery as a venue for the next event. The group approved.

Juneteenth: The 150th Celebration of Freedom, Saturday, June 20, 1:30-4:00 p.m., Walnut Barn, Martin Luther King, Jr., Park, 4905 NW Walnut Boulevard, Corvallis

The invitation was explained to the group. Cervantes asked the group to put it on their calendars. Kislingbury said that he had other commitments that day but would try to squeeze it in. Cervantes and Equinoa both committed to attending. Dodge Vera said to mark her attendance as tentative for now.

DEBRIEFS

LBCC One Vibe Diversity Day event, Wednesday, May 13

Kislingbury reported that the HRC table did not draw many visitors. He expressed that the Commission may need to invest in more eye catching display items for such events. Kislingbury had someone come to the table with a development complaint, but there were not a lot of people who wanted to talk about the HRC.

Cervantes reported that it was a vibrant day for the campus with the event being well received. The event presented the true diversity of what Albany has to offer and engaged people in such a way that acknowledged their feelings. Cervantes thanked Kislingbury for his service of representing the HRC at the event.

HEART to Heart Resource Fair, Thursday, May 14

Whitley expressed her appreciation for Marilyn Smith at having everything all set up. She reported that it was a great opportunity, especially with the location of their table being right next to the event registration area. It provided great exposure for the HRC. Whitley received feedback that the concept of the HRC was heartwarming. She said that not all those visiting the fair were homeless but looking for resources. The turnout was close to that of last year.

Cervantes thanked Whitley for attending along with Debbie Berg and added his appreciation for Smith's work in setting up.

UPDATES

Fair housing issue from April meeting

Hare reported that Leonor Rodriguez and one of the families affected met with him and Planner III Anne Catlin to discuss the issue. Beforehand, he and Catlin did outreach to area agencies that might be of assistance: Fair Housing Council of Oregon and BOLI, which are both contractors of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Hare gave Rodriguez the contact information for both agencies and called ahead of time to ensure they could be of some help to Rodriguez. Rodriguez spoke with Elizabeth Gray, who is the Spanish-speaking person with the Fair Housing Council. It is Hare's understanding that they are in the process of taking some sort of action. Hare also contacted Legal Aid Services of Oregon. Legal Aid confirmed that they were not able to provide service to the family because the family had already left the home. The issue for the family right now is not that they get back into their home but making sure they don't have to pay for the alleged damages. Rodriguez contacted a person in Salem who has agreed to be an advocate for the family. Hare assisted Rodriguez with scanning documents to send to this advocate. Hare said that Rodriguez is the hero in this story. This is not her mission, but she feels very strongly about it and wants to help. Hare explained that Rodriguez has the advantage of the language skills and trust of the families. The City is here to support her.

Rodriguez had someone else approach her with a complaint about some serious plumbing issues at a local apartment complex where sewage was backing up into the resident's bathtubs and such. Hare was able to get a City Building Inspector out to get started on the problem. During this process, Hare learned that the residents were afraid to contact the City. In situations like these, it's important to have someone like Rodriguez, who has the trust of the victimized people in order for the City to act. Sluiter asked if the Health Department does inspections for situations like this. Hare replied that for building issues, he didn't know. Equinoa stated that he met with Catlin and learned that the Building Inspectors have a backlog because there are more cases than personnel. They discussed using money from the Block Grant to fund additional hours, but the funds available for such an action were minimal. Hare explained that for these types of health issues, the Building Inspectors make it their top priority, but the main part of the Building Inspectors' job is to inspect new construction, and there is more than enough of that work to keep them busy full-time. There is a code enforcement person budgeted to spend about half her time looking into building code violations.

Cervantes asked how strategically we would go about having a family advocate position within the city to do what Rodriguez does. Hare responded that Cervantes asked a good question and then said we would need to ask whether it would be a City or County responsibility. He explained that most human services function are through the County or State. Also, a nonprofit might be better able to serve the need. A discussion with the Community Development group could uncover which course of action would be most profitable.

Cervantes expressed his concern over the three abusive issues that have been recently brought before the Commission and whether it represents a pattern. He said that we bear the responsibility to assist those who contribute to the community. Hare acknowledged Cervantes' concern and responded that the community does have several agencies, some of which he mentioned earlier, that are charged with some of this responsibility: the Fair Housing Council, HUD, and the Civil Liberties Division of BOLI. Equinoa commented that we do not have a place for people to go to report these problems; and from his experience at Sunrise School, the concerning issues are pervasive.

Dodge Vera shared that she had a conversation with Catlin regarding the lack of resources to deal with these issues. She shared with the group that Benton County Health Department is doing something outside the box where they co-house employees between organizations. This would help to open pathways between minorities and the City like the one that was open due to Hare working with Rodriguez. Minorities would be more likely to seek help if there was an advocate scheduled at a set time and place to assist in connecting them with an agency in regards to their need. Hare pointed out that Rodriguez works at Linn County Public Health, and connections were made through her as residents were utilizing that service. The County has good employees with not only language competency but cultural competency. Hare said the question is how many places are we going to have and where are we going to place workers within the resources we have.

Whitley surmised that there is a culture of discrimination from landlords who not only victimizes minorities but also people with disabilities. She questioned whether there was incentive for landlords to change. Hare responded that one strategy they have had success with is to try to upgrade the quality of housing. He gave the example of how the CARA project of IHI housing facilitated an upgrade of the Woodland Square Trailer Park that is now managed by a reputable organization that will not victimize people. The Community Block Program helps with that strategy, as well.

Cervantes asked Hare to keep the group abreast of the situation with the families.

Hispanic Advisory Committee (HAC)

Dodge Vera reported that a Benton County-based organization, Casa Latinos Unidos, came to the HAC. They are an organization committed to facilitating the integration of Latinos into the broader community. Their purpose in coming was to reveal to the HAC that one third of the organization's clientele come from Albany. Casa Latinos Unidos and HAC started a conversation how to the meet the needs of Albany residents.

Cervantes pointed out that there is a need for a centralized location for a nonprofit to exist to fill the gaps for an emerging population. Casa Latinos Unidos uses the OSU Sunflower House. The University allows the organization to co-locate with their services. Cervantes raised the question as to whether the City has an available space to utilize at a reasonable rate. He brought this same question to leadership at LBCC, but there was nothing available. Hare replied that he did not know of any available City facility. Hare suggested checking with the County since they have finished their new facility and will have space that is vacated. Also, the purpose for utilizing the space fits in with their mission. Cervantes asked where to start the conversation. Hare answered to start with County Administrator Ralph Wyatt or with the County Commissioners.

Dodge Vera expressed her excitement that the Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC) is looking for property in Albany. OCDC provides early childhood care and education services.

Other volunteer opportunities

None.

Calendar of Events: 2015

Dodge Vera asked if the City was hosting another open house. Hare answered that the City did not have one last year because they did not have good participation the year before. He didn't know if it was due to the time of year. Dodge Vera suggested inviting the City Councilors, along with translators, to this year's Festival Latino as representatives for the City. The group liked the idea, and Hare responded that he thought the Councilors would love to do that.

BUSINESS FROM THE COMMISSION

None.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

Tuesday, June 23, 2015

Equinoa stated that he will not be able to attend the June meeting and will need to be excused. He indicated that he will be available to volunteer at the July 30 and August 6 River Rhythm concerts.

ADJOURNMENT

Cervantes adjourned the meeting at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Signature on file*

Gina Burrese
Administrative Assistant

Reviewed by,

*Signature on file*

Wes Hare
City Manager