

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, JULY 19, 2022
7:00 p.m., City Hall
301 King Street, Room 2000
The Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Danielle Beach
Justin Beland
Marc Bendick, Jr.
Lisl Brunner, Vice Chair
Matt Harris, Chair
Katherine O'Connell
Elizabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson
William Tom Reeder, Jr.
Scott Schwartz

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher, Director
Anna McClure, Investigator II
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Members Excused

Michelle Cho
Susan Kellom
David Rigsby

Members Unexcused

Janeka Cogdell

Guest

Sarah G. Taylor, Assistant City Manager & Legislative Director

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Harris

Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of June Minutes

Upon a motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Beland, the Commission approved the minutes of the June meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye.

3. Guest

Director Kelleher introduced special guest Sarah Taylor and said that she is the Legislative Director, Assistant City Manager, and is now the Acting Director of Communications and Public Information.

Director Kelleher also added that Investigator Anna McClure was here, because she is our co-lead on the equity initiative and, because our office's proposal is engagement of communities that are typically underserved, we would like to hear directly from Ms. Taylor. She also mentioned that there is an interest from one of our new Commissioners Marc Bendick on the Equity Initiative. Director Kelleher stated that what she was hoping for is to get Commissioners to assist the office on the outreach initiatives.

Ms. Taylor stated that she is the City's Lobbyist and oversees the Public Information Office and said that public information office is in a process of a revitalization, a revisioning of what communication public information and community engagement mean for the City.

Ms. Taylor stated talked about how important it is to have a more proactively engaged public information communication office, and really focus, attentive and where public engagement is really an everyday day thing, not a project or an emergency base thing.

Ms. Taylor reported that in the last budget there was \$400,000 put in for dedicated community engagement staff; she said that it will live in the Communication and Public Information Office and said that it will probably require a name change. Community engagement should be what we are hearing from the community, what we need to know, what we need to be responding to, what questions people have, and what problems people are having. That advice, the strategies, the planning, the products and the outputs, and then this cycles back in the engagement.

Ms. Taylor stated that our communications has been a one-way communication; it has been about putting press releases out. It has not been about creating a two-way communication with the community. Most of what they do is press releases and a little bit of social media, and that does not touch a lot of people, especially hard to reach, marginalized communities, especially communities that do not speak English, and specially communities that do not read in their native language.

Ms. Taylor stated that she is thinking on hiring four people: a Manager; a Coordinator; and organizers. The organizers are people who are of the community, people who speak the language, people who are culturally competent. She is thinking of having somebody in Arlandria, somebody in the Westend with African language experience and cultural competency and one other person who can cover the usual customary areas. Part of putting this organization together will be engaging the community and asking them what they need. Another piece that they are doing in the office is hiring a director and they are in the mix of that. She stated that what she is looking for is for somebody who has new ideas, new fresh eyes on how they can be creating that two-way communication with the community. She added that they did panel interviews last week and narrowed down to eight folks and she is going to narrow it down to four to do another smaller panel and then have them go to her and the City Manager for the final. She stated that she is hoping to have it done in the next three weeks.

Ms. Taylor also reported that they are adding a language access coordinator, someone whose sole job is how can we be doing language access City wide and added that they have an open position for an Editorial Manager, who is going to be doing 20% editorial and really focus on proactive media pitching; telling our story of the all the good work that is being done in the City, all the good work that is being done in the Departments; proactively telling our story and using the best media for doing that. She added that they are focusing on hiring people with language skills and cultural competence.

Chair Brunner asked if they are receiving input as to how their message is being delivered, are they seeing broader input as to like the advocacy of the city programs or things that the City should be doing and is not doing? How are they saying that feedback, do they feel that they are well-situated to convene that message? Ms. Taylor stated that right now they are not at that point yet, but that is their goal.

Ms. Taylor stated that they should get a report from 311 every two weeks of what they are getting calls about. She also stated that she thinks that we need to go back of having Citizens Assistance Office. She said that she is super excited about their hiring; it is really focusing people on the idea that communications, community engagement and public information is not just about doing press releases;

it is about engaging people and figuring out the best way to communicate with people; to meet people where they are.

Ms. Taylor also talked about legislation and said that at this past session they spend a lot of time playing defense; and said that she feels that they are going to spend another couple of years playing defense. She added that there is election next year in Virginia and a lot of new districts, redistricting. Commissioner Schwartz asked what happened with the lawsuit challenging because the district had not been put in place yet. Ms. Taylor stated that in the Paul Goldman lawsuit, the Court said he did not have standing.

She said that she would like to focus on good government stuff and delivery of services, the things that are truly pro-life such as Affordable Housing, access to Childcare, access to Health Care, so this is a session where we are going to play a lot of defenses. She asked the Commission to identify things that they are concerned about, specifically if there are things that were incremental changes that can be made. She said that in the past, the City has based the Legislative Package around the City's Strategic Plan, but this this year they might change that, and base it around Council's priorities or All Alexandria Resolution or a combination of the two. This is one of the things that she will be working on.

Chair Brunner stated that the Commission has spoken about voting rights in the past and asked what Ms. Taylor's is take on it. Ms. Taylor stated that she thinks that is one the things that the House wants to do, but the Senate is not going to let it happen. Commissioner Harris asked if ex-felons are in any danger of not being able to vote. Ms. Taylor stated that she does not think so, and Director Kelleher stated that she does not see it being undone. Ms. Taylor stated that this is going to be another tough session.

Ms. Taylor stated that there is something new on the form, which is if someone on the board that has a particular affinity for an issue and would like to testify, put your name on the list, so if the bill comes, she can give them heads up, something is coming. It is much more compelling coming from real people than just coming from her.

Chair Brunner thanked Ms. Sarah Taylor for her presentation.

4. Executive Committee /Upcoming Meetings

Director Kelleher stated that the Executive Committee had talked about having her prepared and present an overview of the office and the Commission base on the code but said that the Commission has Sarah Taylor as a guest and needs to spend time on the goals for next year and she does not want the meeting to go too late.

Chair Brunner stated that the Executive Committee met last Monday and spoke about priorities for the upcoming year. She also mentioned that members of the Commission have heard that there is a concern about potential discriminatory practices in housing in Alexandria. She said that it was suggested that the renewal of leases can be arbitrary, leases can be cut off. People can have difficulty finding housing for different reasons; particularly maintenance of property, unsanitary living conditions for people who might be at a more vulnerable and at-risk situation of not forth coming.

Chair Brunner state that they also talked about the possibility of holding meetings at different location in the community, for example if Southern Towers is having a meeting with representatives or tenants on a

regular basis. Having Commissioners be able to go to those meetings and present on what the Commission and the Office does. She said that they talked about coordinating this effort with the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board and it sounds that there is interest from the landlord tenant board in doing some outreach as well. Commissioner O'Connell stated that other outreach they have been doing was individually to landlords, especially corporate landlords and doing trainings for them around mental health.

Investigator McClure stated that Christ Church through their outreach ministries has been working with the housing department on an emergency triage; how can they help as many people as possible now that the housing moratorium has been lifted.

Chair Brunner stated that there was interest after gathering information devoting one of the Commission's monthly meetings to housing and invite different speakers from the community to come. She also added that Executive Committee talked about the office website and the capacity of the Commission on issuing resolutions or the role of the Commission.

Director Kelleher explained that the Commission cannot take a position unless City Council has already taken position. The Commission can take a position as individuals, but not as a Commission, unless they out in front of it; arguably City Council was out in front on the reproductive rights issue. She said that typically City Council would ask the Commission for a draft resolution to be presented to them or they would send a draft and ask for comments for a certain day. Director Kelleher explained the difference between a Resolution and a Proclamation and said that proclamations are used to commemorate or to honor something or someone.

Director Kelleher stated that what was discussed at the Executive Committee meeting was the fact that the Commission can have a statement on their webpage that has to do with reproductive rights, and they can comment on the City Council's resolution and the position that they have taken. She added that it will be a great idea as we move forward with this fiscal year to feature something on their webpage every month.

Director Kelleher also reported that the Commission is going to get a new statement that is going to say something to the effect that Commissions may have two virtual meeting, two out of the ten required meetings.

Commissioner Bendick, Jr. asked to what extent are they as individual Commissioners allow to or constrained from identifying themselves as Commissioners if they go out in public such as writing a letter to the editor. Director Kelleher stated that it is him as a person, but among the items in his bio, he can say that he is a member of the Human Rights Commission.

Chair Brunner stated that they briefly discussed the question about Boards and Commissions diversity and said that Director Kelleher is expecting to receive a report from the City Clerk's Office. Director Kelleher stated that what she receives is just data and said that there is non-discrimination data form that is voluntary. This form is separated from the heart of the application, and this is for statistical purposes. The City Clerk now has a software that will keep track of the appointments but have not been able to get the data yet. Commissioner Palmer Johnson asked Director to share the data once she gets it, because she can write a program, so the Commission can analyze that data.

5. Goals for City Fiscal Year & Legislative Proposals

Commissioner O'Connell stated that she is interest in what the Alexandria Public Schools are doing for trans children, and what can we do to better support trans children. Director Kelleher stated that the Super indent has typically come, but it is not a City Department, the Commission can invite them, but it is not same where the Commission will have the expectation that there will be a report. Chair Brunner also mentioned the School Resources Officers and said that the Tenants and Workers are interested in data of who are the students that are being discipline and kind of creating files on.

Commissioner Schwartz informed that there is a community group that is formed to address student violence at the Alexandria City High School. He will forward the information about the group to Director Kelleher, so that she can send it to the Commission.

Commissioner Palmer Johnson stated that she would like to invite the Citizen Climate Group to come talk about environmental issues.

Commissioner Reeder asked if the Commission regularly hears from public safety agencies. Director Kelleher stated that the Commission hears annually from the Police Chief and Fire Chief.

Outreach & Community Engagement

Commissioner Schwartz suggested doing community outreach by holding the Commission's meeting at different locations. Commissioner Beach suggested picking one or two venues where the Commission would speak to those communities about benefits that they can get. Director Kelleher suggested to target meetings that are already in existence and make a presentation with an existing group.

Chair Brunner informed that Tenants and Workers is holding their bi-annual meetings on Saturday, August 20, 2022, from 5:00-6:30 p.m., at 3801 Mt. Vernon Avenue and said they can put her on the agenda for 2 minutes. Commissioner Harris suggested proving bilingual flyers.

Commissioner Bendick, Jr. stated that he is interested in the All Alexandria Resolution for equity in the City. It struck him that it is a very broadly ranging and fundamental statement about discrimination, and it goes over to pattern and practice of things of which you are not consciously discriminatory but have a discriminatory effect. It seems like it clearly felt within the Boards jurisdiction, what struck him about the resolution that it has a lot of very specific roles in it and specific mandates and the question for him was; is anyone auditing the extent to which any of things that are potentially effective, and noble are being implemented. He stated that he would like to see the Commission take it on themselves to asked to be reported to on what exactly is happening to all those measurable goals.

Director Kelleher stated that the Race and Social Equity initiative is huge and the City has been working on it for four years and every departments is involved; each department has core teams and a core lead. The Human Rights Office project is the community engagement. She also stated that City is a member of The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and has adopted a lot of those models and Jacqueline Tucker used to work for GARE. She added that the City is embarking on training everyone and have only train 1,000 of the City employees and there are probably close to 2,000 that need to be train. She added that right now there has been work done on the racial equity tool, which is being designed and very specifically tailored for the City of Alexandria, there has been focus groups and

community input; it is in the drafting stage still, but it is going to be implanted by all City Departments. Investigator McClure stated that some departments are further along, because there were test departments, so for example DCHS, which is a large department and so they are further along in some of their process; it looks different for every department.

Commissioner Schwartz suggested inviting Jacqueline Tucker to come talk to the Commission about the Race and Social Equity initiative. Chair Brunner asked to invite Jacqueline Tucker for the November or October meeting.

6. Announcements /Adjournment

Commissioner Harris recognized the passing of former Mayor Kerry J. Donley and said that he was great support of the Human Rights Commission and was great public server. He added that former Mayor Donley was just a phenomenal pillar of this community. Director Kelleher recognized the passing of former Chair Nancy Jenkins.

MOTION: adjourn the meeting.

Schwartz/Palmer Johnson **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.