

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION MINUTES

October 15, 2020 4:00 p.m.
City Council Chambers

PRESENT: COMMISSION CHAIR Derrick Thaxton
VICE CHAIR Nikki Garry
COMMISSIONERS Joyce Keller, Byron Hansbro, Richard Zaker, and Francie Johnson

ABSENT: COMMISSIONERS Marty Watkins

ALSO, PRESENT: ACTING HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER Penny Rogers
ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY Sherry Beasley

I. Call to Order

Chair Thaxton called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m.

A. Roll Call

Six out of seven Commissioners were present at the time of roll call. Chair Thaxton declared a quorum does exist to conduct and approve business.

II. Concerns, Comments or Questions from the Audience

There were none.

III. Approval of the September 17, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Motion was made by Commissioner Johnson to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Zaker. Upon roll call, Commissioners Byron Hansbro, Joyce Keller, Richard Zaker, Francie Johnson, Vice Chair Nikki Garry and Chair Derrick Thaxton, voted aye. Commission Chair Thaxton declared the motion carried.

IV. Monthly Activity Report & Summary of Cases

Acting Human Resources Manager Rogers presented the monthly status report of cases for Human Rights Investigator, Fred Spannaus (Exhibit A). Discussion followed. Acting Human Resources Manager Rogers stated a date will need to be set for a Public Hearing on Case #190725 and Chair Thaxton will need to appoint one or two Commissioners to serve as Hearing Officers. Commissioners Byron Hansbro and Francie Johnson volunteered and were appointed to be the Hearing Officers by Chair Thaxton. Ms. Rogers said there is a window in which the hearing needs to occur, and that is between December 7, 2020 and January 21, 2021. Ms. Rogers will work with Assistant Corporation Counsel Amy Waks in scheduling a date for the hearing. Commission Chair Thaxton asked that he and Vice Chair Garry be informed of the dates in case they may need to step in as alternates.

V. Unfinished Business

A. Protecting Places of Worship – Part II

Commission Chair Thaxton reported that he spoke with Mr. Bergeron who said he will be presenting a Protecting Places of Worship forum to a group in Indiana very soon. The topic will be about what people should look for when masks are worn in places of worship. Commissioner Hansbro asked Chair Thaxton if he can check with Mr. Bergeron to see if others can participate in a Protecting Places of Worship forum by reservation via Zoom due to Covid-19.

B. MLK 2021

1. Motion to move MLK March from January 2021 to June 2021 in conjunction with Juneteenth

Commission Chair Thaxton said he spoke with Evelyn Hood and another board member from the African-American Genealogical Society. The group is in the planning stages for the 2021 Juneteenth celebration. They are planning on having a banquet Friday night and are trying to get the Lieutenant Governor of Illinois to be the speaker. They are also planning on having a parade and program in Central Park on Saturday. Commission Chair Thaxton asked Ms. Hood how the Human Relations Commission could assist. Ms. Hood asked if she has Juneteenth t-shirts made, would the Commission be willing to pay for them. The shirts would have MLK and Human Relations Commission on them and would be given away to people who attend the event in Central Park on Saturday. Commissioner Zaker said he thinks this is a good idea and asked if we have reason to believe this would not be in our budget. Chair Thaxton replied it should be within our budget. Commissioner Zaker asked if the Commission would be able to set up an information table at Central Park as well as a display of the poetry, drawings and essays from the MLK contest, and Commission Chair Thaxton said we would. Commission Chair Thaxton also said we would be able to carry our Martin Luther King, Jr. banner in the parade. Chair Thaxton stated he will need to talk to the Decatur Police Department about rerouting the parade to start at the Civic Center and go to Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, then to Prairie Avenue then to Central Park. Discussion Followed. Chair Thaxton asked for a motion to move the MLK March from January 2021 to June 2021 (one time only due to Covid-19) in conjunction with Juneteenth. Commissioner Johnson made the motion and seconded by Commissioner Keller. Upon roll call, Commissioners Byron Hansbro, Joyce Keller, Francie Johnson, Richard Zaker, Vice Chair Garry and Chair Thaxton, voted aye. Commission Chair Thaxton declared the motion carried.

2. Update on MLK essay, poetry & drawing contest.

Commissioner Zaker stated that he and Commissioner Keller talked with Valarie Wells from Herald & Review about the changes for 2021 MLK events. Ms. Wells would like for Administrative Secretary Beasley to email her the particulars of the MLK events.

3. Update on the MLK scholarship contest.

Administrative Secretary Beasley stated she will email Maria Robertson from Decatur Public School District 61 to see if she will help get the information to the teachers and/or counselors. Vice Chair Garry volunteered to help if needed.

C. Update on Election of Human Relations Commission Officers

Acting Human Resources Manager Rogers stated she checked the by-laws and found out the elections of officers are supposed to take place every May. She reported there are discrepancies between the by-laws and Chapter 28 of the City Code. For example, the by-laws state the Commission should consist of 13 members, while Chapter 28 states that the Commission should consist of 9 members. The by-laws state “each officer shall serve a term of one year; no individual shall hold the same office for more than two successive years and no individual shall be elected to an office unless he or she has served a minimum of one year as a Commissioner.” Chapter 28 does not say how long the term of an officer is or if there is a limit as to how many successive terms an officer may serve. Chapter 28 says the terms of the Commissioners shall be three years and “no member shall serve more than two complete successive terms.” Ms. Rogers stated she believes the terms for office and the terms to be a Commissioner should be expanded because it is difficult to find individuals willing to serve on the Commission and when we have good Commissioners, we want to keep them. Commissioner Johnson and Commissioner Zaker said they did not think one year was long enough for a person to hold an office because it takes a while to learn and become comfortable in an office. Vice Chair Garry asked if there is a list of Commissioners and how long they have been on the Commission and in office. Ms. Rogers said she will see if she can get this information and send it to the Commission. Ms. Rogers also asked the Commissioners if they had any objection sharing their telephone number with the other Commissioners so that we can have a phone tree. Ms. Rogers emphasized the phone tree would not be public and would only be shared within the Commission. There were no objections. Acting Human Resources Manager Rogers stated she will talk to City Legal regarding the By-laws.

VI. New Business

Commissioner Johnson said she knows of two individuals who would like to apply to join the Commission, but they cannot find the link on the City’s website to join. Ms. Rogers said she will send Commissioner Johnson the link.

VII. Other Business

Commissioner Garry congratulated Commissioner Johnson on her recent retirement.

Commissioner Zaker asked how the Human Relations Commission hearing process works. Ms. Rogers replied the hearing officers hear the case and then make a recommendation which the entire Commission votes on.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice Chair Garry made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Keller.

Upon roll call, the meeting was adjourned at 4:39 p.m.