

# HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION MINUTES

January 21, 2021 4:00 p.m.  
City Council Chambers

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

**ABSENT:** COMMISSIONERS Marty Watkins and Richard Zaker  
ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY Sherry Beasley

**ALSO, PRESENT:** ACTING HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER Penny Rogers  
DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES, French Wilson

## **I. Call to Order**

Chair Thaxton called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

### **A. Roll Call**

Five 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 December 17, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Motion was made by Commissioner Johnson to approve the minutes, seconded by Vice Chair Garry. Upon roll call, Commissioners Francie Johnson, Byron Hansbro, Joyce Keller, 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 provided a monthly status report of cases. (Exhibit A)

## **V. Unfinished Business**

### **A. Protecting Places of Worship – Part II**

Commission Chair Thaxton reported that he spoke with Mr. Bergeron who said when individuals are in places of worship, they should be aware and keep their guard up for suspicious activity which is more prevalent now that people are wearing masks due to Covid-19.

### **B. MLK 2021**

#### **1. Update on participation in Juneteenth**

Chair Thaxton stated that he talked to the African-American Genealogical Society. The March is in the planning stages and will start at the Decatur Civic Center, head west on North Street to Martin Luther King, then south to Prairie Street and westbound to Central Park where the Juneteenth program will take place. The March would take place on a Saturday. There is no cost to the Commission to participate and we can carry the Martin Luther King banner. Commission Chair

Thaxton would like to buy t-shirts to give away that say Juneteenth on the front and Decatur Human Relations Commission on the back. The Commission's only cost would be the cost of the t-shirts. Chair Thaxton said he does not have the price, but would like to meet with Ms. Wilson and Ms. Rogers to discuss in more detail. Chair Thaxton said he would like to give away 25 or 50 t-shirts depending on the cost. Ms. Wilson suggested the Commission have a game similar to Jeopardy at the Commission's booth in Central Park and the winner would get a t-shirt. Commission Chair Thaxton will check to see if there is a cost to have a booth.

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

Ms. Rogers stated Ms. Beasley should be sending information to the schools this month and that the contest will be in conjunction with Black History Month.

3. Update on the MLK scholarship contest.

Ms. Rogers reported that Maria from the Decatur Public School District shared feedback that she received from teachers as to why the Commission did not receive any scholarship submissions. One of the teachers shared that the students felt overwhelmed because the Commission asked for three letters of recommendation. Discussion followed. The Commission believes that while it might be difficult to obtain three letters of recommendation, the students should still be challenged, expected to take initiative and be held accountable. It was decided that requiring two letters of recommendation would be a good compromise. Another teacher shared that timing was an issue. For example, many students do not receive their letters of acceptance from colleges until sometime later in the spring semester. Vice Chair Garry stated a lot of scholarships ask students where they intend to go to college. The Commission could then perhaps, send the funds to the college instead of the student. Ms. Rogers stated the check is normally sent to the student rather than the college. Ms. Wilson said the students might need the funds prior to the semester to purchase supplies or other items. Discussion followed. A decision was not made on how to handle the scholarship contest in the future; however, it was stated that logistics will need to be considered.

4. Recap on article in newspaper

Although he was not at this meeting, Ms. Rogers thanked Commissioner Zaker for writing the article that was published in the Herald & Review on January 9, and stated it was an excellent article. Commissioner Zaker had asked the Herald and Review to publish the article in the January 16 edition of the Herald and Review because that was Martin Luther King weekend; however, they published it a week early. Commissioner Johnson said she saw the article in the January 16 edition. Commissioner Keller said she thought it was good the article was published in the January 9 edition because there were also submissions about Martin Luther King from Eisenhower High School students in that edition of the

paper. Commissioner Garry said she thought Commissioner Zaker's article was well written and represented the Commission well.

## **VI. New Business**

### **A. Virtual town hall with speaker for Black History Month**

Ms. Rogers stated that someone from Millikin University asked Sherry Beasley if the Commission could present a virtual program during Black History Month. Chair Thaxton has envisioned a town hall Zoom meeting with a speaker who would be located at the Civic Center for 30-40 minutes. Chair Thaxton recommended Commissioner Hansbro who said he would be more than happy to be the speaker. Chair Thaxton will work on the particulars with Ms. Wilson and Ms. Rogers. We will try to schedule this event for mid or late February. Commissioner Hansbro suggested having the event at 6:00 p.m. Someone could sing the Negro National Anthem at another location such as a church. Someone else could be at another location doing the invocation. This way more people will be involved and it will be more community focused. Vice Chair Garry asked if we need an ad-hoc committee since we don't have a lot of time to plan this event. Commission Chair Thaxton, Vice Chair Garry and Commissioner Keller volunteered to work on this event. Vice Chair Garry asked that a flyer be created and put on the Commission's Facebook page. Commissioner Garry will check to see who is over diversity and inclusion at Millikin University.

### **B. Acts of Kindness campaign**

Vice Chair Garry said this event is a piggy back from the article Commissioner Zaker wrote in the newspaper for Martin Luther King weekend. Ms. Garry said she and Commissioner Zaker talked about this at a very high level and did not discuss details. They would like to start an initiative or trend throughout the community. Commissioner Hansbro said the Commission can highlight people in the community on their acts of kindness on the Commission's Facebook page. The Commission can ask the community to nominate people for their acts of kindness. Commissioner Hansbro suggested organizations such as CASA and the work they are doing could be highlighted. Commissioner Keller suggested that Valerie Wells from the Herald and Review could write an article about this initiative. Commissioner Keller said she would be willing to contact Ms. Wells. We will discuss more with Commissioner Zaker. Commissioner Johnson asked if the Commissioners should send nominations to Sherry. Chair Thaxton said nominations should be sent to Ms. Beasley, Ms. Rogers and to him.

## **VII. Other Business**

There was none.

**VIII. Adjournment**

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

Upon roll call, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.