

PITTSBURGH COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

MINUTES

July 7, 1997

Attendance: Harry Kunselman, Chair
Curtis Smith
Elizabeth Pittinger
Charles Honse, Jr.
Father Lou Vallone
Barbara Burstin
Robert McClenahan
B. J. Samson
John B. Grice
Rev. William Morgan
Pamela Golden
Dr. George Board

Staff: Charles Morrison, Director
Connie Miskis Zatek
Yancy Miles
Kevin Trower, Legal Counsel

Guests: Dave Goldberg, Controller's Office
Jeff Van Doren, Respondent Attorney
Number of representatives of the media

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:40 p.m. by Harry Kunselman, Chair.

Summer interns, Latreea Polk and Dinelle Martin, were introduced.

The Chair noted that Friday's Post Gazette had erroneously reported that today's meeting would be a "public hearing" on the recent pepper spray incident. He stated that this meeting is the regularly scheduled business meeting of the Commission, which is open to the public pursuant to law. While the pepper spray incident may be discussed in the course of the Commission's business, today's meeting is not a public hearing into that issue.

II. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

It was properly noted that the names of Commissioners Morgan and Golden were inadvertently omitted from the attendance roster on the June 2 minutes. With the above correction noted, the Minutes of the June 2, 1997 Commission meeting were unanimously approved.

III. STAFF REPORTS

A. Compliance Update

The Director noted that as of June 30, 1997, the Commission had met the EEOC contract and qualifies for an upgrade. He complimented staff on their excellent productivity and is hopeful that the 1998 contract with EEOC will be substantially increased. If so, additional staff may be added.

B. Director's Report

The Director met with representatives of the Police Department regarding the Community Oriented Policing Program. In the past, human relations training was limited to officers who served in the COP Program. However, training will now be expanded to include all employees of the Police Department.

The Summer Human Relations Programs has begun at City playgrounds and recreation centers, with the cooperation of CitiParks.

- June 3-6 Director attended EEOC Conference in Washington, DC.
- June 21 Commission participated in a housing conference which was targeted for buyers and renters for the purpose of education. This was the second part of a series, which earlier addressed lenders, realtors, etc.
- June 25 Director met with the Curfew Advisory Committee. The Committee is preparing a report on its findings for the first six months of the program, which will ultimately be submitted to City Council. As part of the report, a survey was conducted among various community/youth organizations and the police, which elicited 441 responses. The survey was designed with multiple-choice questions and space was allowed for comments at the end. This data is being compiled into narrative form and is expected to be in final draft form by the end of the week. A copy of the draft will be forwarded to Commissioners before being submitted to City Council.
- In response to inquiries, the Director reminded Commissioners that they do not have a direct role in the Curfew Advisory Committee or in formulating a report to City Council. The committee, which is comprised of 12 persons (one adult and one youth representative from each police zone) have met monthly since March 1997.
- Commissioner Golden asked the Director to contact the necessary authorities to remind them to exercise sensitivity with regard to the Juvenile Curfew during the week of the NAACP National Convention, in order to promote a feeling of welcome. It was also suggested that the Convention organizers also be apprised of the current law with regard to juvenile curfews in planning activities which may run late into the night.

July 3 A community meeting was held in Homewood Brushton wherein considerable concern has been raised around the police training incident of June 26 involving use of pepper spray in North Point Breeze. The Director met with residents of this area and explained the Commission procedures in community and inter-group relations. To date, no individuals or groups have come forward to file a formal complaint.

Commissioner Grice related concerns of the community questioning the validity of the police to conduct such training in a residential area. He hoped that serious consideration would be given in the future by the police and that this type of training would not take place within a residential area.

The Director reported that City Council plans to discuss the issue in further detail at their Wednesday meeting. He noted also that the community is clearly not satisfied with the follow-up response of the Public Safety Department officials.

Commissioner Honse moved that the Director be authorized to investigate this incident, under Chapter 658.05(e) of the City Charter. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Samson.

The Director reported that he had already requested a copy of the transcript of City Council's last meeting, which received a lot of public attention. Given the limited resources of Commission staff, he stated the Commission staff would pursue the most cost-effective means for conducting the investigation, without duplicating efforts of other City departments.

Commissioner Kunselman suggested that the Commission's investigation focus on issues relating to inter-group relations and community tension. Commissioner Honse stated that he had intended his motion to be specifically "open-ended" in order to allow the Director latitude in the investigation.

Commissioner Grice raised concern at other arms of the City conducting investigations, stating that it may end up being "the police investigating the police." He stated that the Commission must be knowledgeable about what is going on and be able to act on that information.

Concern was also voiced regarding the possibility of the Commission investigating this matter and then later investigating an individual, formal charge which may arise. The Director shared this concern and cautioned Commissioners serving on the Community Relations Committee or Compliance Review Section who may be responsible for hearing the facts of an individual complaint at a later date.

Commissioner Vallone suggested that fulfillment of the motion be sought through the Community Relations Committee in order to limit the number of Commissioners exposed to the initial facts of the investigation. Associate Solicitor Trower agreed that the investigation be conducted by staff, under the auspices of the Community Relations Committee, with a report to the Commission for further action. He stated that persons involved on that Committee cannot be later involved with any individual complaint which may be filed with the Commission.

It was agreed that the scope of the Commission's investigation would determine why the incident occurred, who was responsible and the way in which events unfolded. It was also agreed that the purpose of the investigation would be to bring key people together in an attempt to bridge gaps and build better relationships. The Chair noted that the mere fact that the Commission is conducting an investigation does not automatically call for subsequent formal action by the Commission; this would be dependent upon what facts are revealed.

The motion carried by unanimous vote of the Commissioners.

B. Budget & Finance Committee

Commissioner Pittinger reported that the Committee will meet with budget officials on July 15 to review the current situation. She asked that any comments, suggestions or ideas be relayed to the Director as soon as possible.

Commissioner Pittinger also noted that the Commission may be competing with the developing Civilian Review Board for the same pool of funds, but the Finance Committee refuses to be intimidated by that fact. Apparently, \$300,000 is being discussed to offset the Civil Review Board. Ms Pittinger noted that the Commission's budget is far less, yet it is enforcing many more components of the law. The Civilian Review Board is only advisory. She expressed confidence in the Director's work on the budget to date.

Director Morrison reported that the HUD contract has been signed and funds should be received soon. He also noted that the City Budget Office has projected a reduction in the City budget of approximately 2%. This is not an automatic, across-the-board cut, but special review will be given to essential core functions and programs.

Commissioner Pittinger reminded the Commissioners that the Commission budget was gutted last year by \$185,000 -- a 66% reduction. Fortunately, a significant amount of this was recouped, and the Commission was able to follow through on executing and implementing a number of its goals.

Ms Pittinger stated that the City is obligated to insure that the Commission is adequately funded. And, although it can attempt to remove legislative requirements, she did not believe that the Commission could be eliminated completely. On the other hand, however, if sufficient resources are not available to do the job, it is effective elimination.

Director Morrison stated that he plans to approach the budget process with optimism. He agreed that the Commission has done everything it promised to do last year in meeting its goals. Given the fact that the Commission has upheld its obligations, he stated that he is hopeful that the City will meet their end.

III. OLD BUSINESS

None.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

The Director reported that the Compliance Review Section is ahead of its workload in terms of the EEOC contract, which has been completed. The Public Hearing Section has several cases still pending.

Commissioner Burstin, chair of the Compliance Review Section, suggested postponing the July 14 meeting of the Section for one week and canceling the August meeting altogether in order to avoid potential conflicts with summer vacation schedules. Section members were in agreement. Therefore, the next meeting of the Compliance Review Section will be July 21, 1997. Notices will be forwarded to absent Commissioners.

Commissioner Kunselman felt that the August meeting of the Commission be held as scheduled if there is sufficient work to report. He referred in particular to any information which may develop with regard to the pepper spray incident. He did not rule out cancellation at a later date.

The meeting was properly adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

/cmz