

Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations

Minutes of Meeting May 4 1998

Attendance: Charles Honse, Jr., *Chair Pro-temp*

Robert McClenahan	Johnnie B. Grice	Rev. Lou Vallone
Dr. George Board	B J Samson	Elizabeth Pittinger
Reverend William Morgan	Dr. Barbara Burstin	

Staff: Charles F. Morrison, *Director*
George Monroe Yancy Miles Connie Miskis Zatek
Kevin Trower, Solicitor

Guest: David Greenberg, Controller's Office

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 3:32 p.m. by Commissioner Charles Honse, who served as acting chair in the absence of Harry Kunselman.

II. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the April 6, 1998 meeting of the full Commission were adopted as mailed upon motion by Dr. George Board and second by Reverend William Morgan.

III. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

A. Lincoln Place Cross-Burning/Update

Three individuals were arrested and came to trial before Judge McGregor on April 21, 1998. Due to plea bargaining, many of the major charges (ethnic intimidation, institutional vandalism, arson, risking a catastrophe, etc.) were dropped, with the exception of criminal mischief. Each must perform 30 hours of community service, as well as paying the costs for property damage, which amounts to approximately \$1,000. Director Morrison reported that a related article in the **Pittsburgh Tribune Review** said the prosecution was over zealous and misdirected, to which he had prepared a written response. The Director plans to continue to work with the community in the hope that the result would be development of more positive activities.

B. Distribution of KKK Literature

As a result of the recent distribution of KKK literature in the Mt. Washington area, the local community group held a meeting on April 16, 1998 that was very well attended. Overall, the residents were outraged that had occurred in their neighborhood, which is racially mixed. In response, area ministers are planning a series of programs dealing with racism. Ministers will speak at churches other than their own. Father Vallone stated that he will speak at Haven Heights Methodist Church on May 20, 1998. His topic is entitled, "*Lancing the Boil of Hate: A Christian Response to Hate Groups.*" Reverend Morgan offered his assistance in the program, too.

Commissioner Pittinger, a member of the Mt. Washington community, stated that she had attended the meeting and was pleased with the overall positive feedback. She felt that the residents had a real interest in what they could do to improve race relations.

Dr. Burstin expressed an interest in seeing the literature distributed. Director Morrison stated that he does have copies available for Commissioners upon request. He also noted that Pennsylvania now ranks second or third as fertile grounds for hate group activities. In response to Reverend Morgan's query, Director Morrison stated that the Commission did not immediately issue a press release believing that a community response would be more valuable.

The Director noted that similar literature was widely distributed in Carrick, Allentown and Beltzhoover, and is believed to have occurred between 1:00 and 7:00 a.m. The persons involved have not been identified as yet. The Commission is working with the Coalition to Counter Hate Groups with regard to collection and review of data and materials. In addition, periodic review is conducted of the media, including community newspapers, and its response to hate incidents, etc.

C. Unity Celebration

The second annual Unity Celebration will take place in Market Square, Sunday, May 17, 1998 from 2 – 5 p.m. Commissioner Pittinger noted that she had called to inquire why people with disabilities are not being included in the programming. She stated that the Department of Justice has been collecting relevant data with regard to hate activities directed to this group since 1994.

D. Reappointment of Commissioners

Four Commissioners are being considered for reappointment by City Council: Commissioners Samson, Fox and Pittinger will be interviewed on May 6; Commissioner Board's interview is scheduled for May 20. The Director reported that the Mayor's Office has accepted the resolution passed by the Commission in March, which sets up a rotating schedule for expiration of Commissioner terms. Those other Commissioners whose terms were originally to expire in April 1998 have been postponed one year in order to set the rotation in place. From this point forward, no more than four Commissioners will be replaced/reappointed in any given year.

All currently seated Commissioners have agreed to continue to serve until the new date for the expiration of their terms.

E. Youth Crime Prevention Conference

The Youth Crime Prevention Conference, sponsored by the City, is scheduled for May 18 and 19 at the Double Tree Hotel. More information can be obtained from Director Morrison.

F. Annual EEOC Conference

Director Morrison will be attending the annual EEOC/FEPA Conference in Washington, DC from May 11-13, 1998.

G. Freedom Corner

This 80 x 80-foot piece of property at Crawford and Centre Avenue will be the site of a memorial to the many freedom marches that had their beginning at this Corner. Designs are now being solicited and fundraising has begun. The goal is to raise a half million dollars for the development of the site/monument.

H. Disparity Studies Commission

This Commission has finished work in designing a "Request for Proposal," which is scheduled to be sent out/posted for bid very soon.

I. Summer Program

Director Morrison reported that the Department of Parks and Recreation has once again expressed interest in joining with the Commission on this project. It is agreed that a new, different idea is needed, as well as a plan for follow-up monitoring or data collection in the community, schools, families, etc.

Director Morrison also met with the Assistant Director, Duane Ashley, who has asked that the Commission once again conduct a portion of the training for lifeguards.

J. Compliance Update

George Monroe reported that 124 cases have been closed and submitted to EEOC during this contract period. No word has been received as to whether any of these cases may have been rejected for some reason. June is generally the month in which mid-year reviews are done by EEOC, and this may result in a modification of the contract for additional case processing, which in turn, would result in more money received under the contract.

IV. REPORT OF THE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Father Vallone, chair of the Nominations Committee, reported that the committee members had met to discuss a slate of candidates for the 1998/99 term. (See report memo on same subject.) Father Vallone noted that in the past, it was difficult to identify persons to fill these positions, but that this year, the committee is able to offer a choice for some offices. The recommended slate is set forth below:

Chair	Charles Honse, Jr. Elizabeth Pittinger
Vice Chairs	Pamela Golden Robert McClenahan Father Lou Vallone
Secretary	Rev. William Morgan
Treasurer	Christine Williams

According to the By-Laws, these recommendations may be supplemented by petition bearing the name acceptance signature of the nominee and the signatures of two nominating Commissioners. Petition forms will be mailed to all Commissioners tomorrow, and must be returned by Tuesday, May 12 in order to be valid. A final slate of candidates will be prepared and mailed to Commissioners on May 20, 1998. Election will take place by secret ballot at the June 1st Commission meeting.

V. Guest Speaker: Alex Matthews
President, Pittsburgh School Board

Mr. Matthews stated that the School Board has established its own Human Relations Council, of which Dr. Burstin is co-chair. He acknowledged that the school environment does have problems in some relationships, and that it will take a strong person to deal with it. His goal as president of the School Board is to provide a school system geared more toward the children, and supported Superintendent Dale Frederick's position that children should not be adversely affected by any deficit.

The School Board is trying to establish policies to assure that its people interact appropriately and fairly. He felt this was particularly important in light of the growing popularity of neighborhood schools. These, Mr. Matthews said, tend to contribute to racial imbalance. He stressed the need to focus on effective education and small class size. Mr. Matthews stated that feeder patterns are currently being reviewed to determine how neighborhood schools can be established to help ALL students. He thought this may be difficult to do, particularly in dealing with parents who grew up in the neighborhood schools of the past. Mr. Matthews stated in today's global economy, schools must be racially mixed because segregation only threatens that more incidents like cross-burning may occur.

Mr. Matthews noted that violence is steadily coming closer to Pittsburgh. As a result, the Pittsburgh School Board has adopted a "O" tolerance policy with regard to weapons. In fact, parents will be asked to sign a contract for their child Agreeing to face the consequences if their child brings a weapon into the school. This is only one attempt to begin to fix the system for the long-term. He stated that short-term fixes have proven to create other problems and long-term policy needs.

Mr. Matthews stated that another problem is the unions. He agreed that teachers deserve the pay they receive, but felt the School Board (and parents) are also due a high rate of return on this investment. According to Mr. Matthews, focus must be placed on accountability. He stated that there are no bad teachers, only those not challenged or burned out by the system.

Mr. Matthews stated that certain Board members believe that every child deserves an education and that suspension for a year impedes that child's progress. Currently, State policy stipulates that if a weapon is brought into school, that child is suspended for one year. However, the superintendent may grant clemency, which can be influenced by the community, parents, groups, etc. Mr. Matthews stated that he is opposed to clemency as being unfair to the other students and teachers.

The Commissioners inquired if School security had increased recently in light of recent occurrences of school violence in other school districts across the nation. Mr. Matthews stated that it has not.

Reverend Morgan asked if the principal has the responsibility to advise teachers if they are doing a poor job. Mr. Matthews responded yes, noting that better documentation must also be kept.

Reverend Morgan also questioned the disparity of test scores of black and white students at Peabody High School. Mr. Matthews stated that he is not a firm believer in test results. He noted that in the recent ACT, Pittsburgh scored very high, but in actuality, only 17 Pittsburgh School District students took the test. In other school districts, entire schools take the test. Information gathering is currently being conducted with regard to grades, suspensions, diversity, etc. At times, this information represented a time lag of more than six months. However, with new technology, more and more of this information can be accessed immediately, and as a result, can be implemented immediately to develop better curriculum, etc.

Mr. Matthews also stated that research now shows the middle school teachers are not being adequately trained to teach. This adversely impacts the students as they move through high school with regard to grades, behavior, etc. He stated that principals must be held accountable to make sure that teachers teach. Mr. Matthews wants principals visible in the building and the classrooms.

Mr. Matthews stated that last year's deficit was nearly \$35 million. He estimated that this year the deficit would be between \$10-15 million. He did not know how this deficit would be handled, although he felt certain that athletics should not be cut. Mr. Matthews stated that the School Board may require teachers to go back to a seven-period day: six teaching periods and one preparation period. (Today, some teachers are currently only teaching four periods.) He also noted that the State has offered an early retirement package that may affect the loss of good teachers.

Mr. Matthews stated that the primary educator must be the parent, and parents must accept the responsibility for their child's education, behavior, etc. Conversely, many parents believe that the school can and should fix the problems associated with their children.

Commissioner Pittinger stated that she hoped the burden of working through a deficit budget will not fall upon the children with disabilities or their support staff.

Concern was also raised with regard to the hiring procedures of the School's personnel office. Apparently, teacher candidates are placed on the eligibility list in ranking order (best at top), and called as vacancies occur. In a case before this Commission, School personnel stated that "a phone call" is made to the individual at the top of the list and if that person is not "not available or not a home," the School District moves down the list until someone is home and able to take the call. Apparently, no written information is provided, or even a period for a person to make a call back on a message. It was noted that the top ranking candidates can be lost almost immediately if this procedure is, in fact, utilized. Mr. Matthews stated that he was not aware of this procedure and agreed to check into it further.

Concern was also raised that the Pittsburgh School District appears to be making offers of employment late in the year – as late as the middle of September for employment during the current school term. By making offers so late, potentially good candidates are drawn off by offers of employment with other school districts. Mr. Matthews agreed that this particular hiring practice is flawed, and is compounded by internal procedures that do not require a returning/retiring teacher to make a commitment until late in August. Mr. Matthews agreed that these notification dates must be pushed up.

Mr. Matthews agreed that more African-American teachers are needed, and that many are lost amid the current timetables and overall system.

Dr. Burstin commented that she is struggling as co-chair of the School Board's Human Relations Council. The group made valuable contributions in the development and implementation of policies, but now there appears to be nothing on the agenda. She questioned what may be next.

Mr. Matthews was thanked for his cooperation and time in meeting with the Commission. Director Morrison announced that the speaker for the June Commission meeting will be the new director of the Civilian Review Board.

The meeting was properly adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

/cmz

PITTSBURGH COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS
A G E N D A
May 4, 1998

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

III. GUEST SPEAKER:

ALEX MATTHEWS, President
Pittsburgh Board of Public Education

IV. STAFF & COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Compliance Update

B. Director's Report

* Reappointment/review of Commissioners by City Council: May 6

* Update: Cross-burning at Lincoln Place/Trial

C. Report of Nominations Committee

/cmz

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Commission

FROM: Father Lou Vallone, Chair
Nominating Committee

DATE: May 19, 1998

SUBJECT: 1998/9 ELECTION OF OFFICERS

No petitions were received to place additional names on the ballot.
Therefore, the final slate will be as follows:

You will vote for one:

Chair	Chuck Honse, Jr. Elizabeth Pittinger
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You will vote for two:

Vice chair	Pamela Golden Robert McClenahan Father Lou Vallone
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You will vote for one:

Secretary	Reverend William Morgan
Treasurer	Christine Williams

Election of officers will take place at the June 1st meeting.

/cmz