

PITTSBURGH COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

Minutes of Meeting July 11, 2011

Attendance: Leah Williams-Duncan, *Chair*

Winford Craig
Lynette Drawn-Williamson
Mary K. McDonald
Neil Parham

Gerald S. Robinson, III
Lorraine Eberhardt
Curtis A. Smith
Adelaide Smith

Called/Unable to Attend:

Elizabeth Pittinger
Lee Fogarty
Kevin Trower (Solicitor)

Amanda Rubio

Absent:

Rev. Timothy L. Smith, Sr

Eric Horwith

Staff: Charles Morrison, *Director*

Connie Miskis Zatek
Sarah DeCesaris

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Leah Williams-Duncan called the meeting to order at 3:40 p.m.

II. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the June 6, 2011, Commission meeting were unanimously adopted as mailed upon motion of Commissioner Winford Craig and second by Commissioner Adelaide Smith.

III. COMMITTEE & STAFF REPORTS

A. Compliance Update

The EEOC contract ends on September 30, 2011. As of June 20, 57 cases have been submitted toward the contract goal of 73. Director Morrison estimated with the cases closed today, approximately 14-15 more cases are needed to fulfill the contract. There is no meeting in August; therefore, the should the September agenda be a little heavier with cases, the Director suggested starting the Compliance Review meeting about a half hour earlier.

B. Director's Report

Staffing

- Commission Representative Sheron Clark has been out on short term disability leave since March 3. She is not expected to return until mid-August or later.
- Robert Fulton, part-time Commission Representative, resigned at the end of May. Director Morrison reported he is in the process of interviewing for a part-time Commission Representative to assume the responsibilities for intake services.
- Mary Lynn Foster, part-time clerical assistant, left in May due to illness and has indicated that she will not be returning.
- The Budget office has approved the hiring of a full time clerical specialist.
- Leanne Davis will be joining the Commission staff on August 1, 2011, as a full time Commission Representative. She is a practicing attorney who is admitted to the bar in Ohio and New York and is currently doing legal research in New York. The Director said that Ms Davis will be someone who should be able to jump right in to the work of the Commission.
- The Director acknowledged that it has been a challenge keeping the office in operation during the last few months, particularly with regard to the EEOC and HUD contracts.

Community Outreach

The July billing cycle for PWSA water and sewer bills will include a double-sided leaflet providing information about fair housing practices and the contact information for the Commission. More than 103,000 leaflets will be mailed throughout the city during the month. The Dept. of City Planning has agreed to underwrite the cost of printing and inserting the leaflet in this mailing to affirmatively further fair housing.

Housing

Director Morrison briefly explained the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice Study and the City's Fair Housing Plan, which are required of recipients of CDBG funds. He also explained that the Commission may receive CDBG funds in the form of reimbursement of staff expense.

Commissioner Adelaide Smith inquired about Section 8 vouchers, which she noted appear to be very scarce. She speculated that persons may be having trouble getting the voucher and/or finding suitable units for housing, and stated that it is upsetting to know that there is not direct service for the people who actually need the assistance.

Director Morrison stated that the City's Section 8 program is presently closed. The County's program is still open, but may soon close. There may be other options with the Housing Authority and project-based housing. The question that needs to be examined is that there are people on a waiting list for Section 8 and yet there are Section 8 vouchers that are not being used and expire. In theory, the voucher is the same as cash.

Commissioner Adelaide Smith asked if there is something the Commission might be able to do to generate a change. The Director noted studies have shown that the utilization factor is about 70 percent; approximately 30 percent of the vouchers expire due to the fact the recipients cannot find housing, a part of which is due to landlords that turn down the vouchers.

Commissioner Smith acknowledged there is no longer an incentive, stating that it used to be the voucher could help the landlord receive slightly above market rate for the unit – allowing them to “make a bundle.” Commissioner Williams-Duncan noted that landlords still set the rental rate but Section 8 only pays a portion and the tenant pays the difference. Some tenants don't have the money to pay. If an individual cannot pay the difference, they may not get the grant or the unit. Commissioner Williams-Duncan also noted that there are requirements to be met by the landlord and many do not want to be bothered with it. Director Morrison agreed, noting that one requirement is a housing inspection, as well as other administrative burdens.

Commissioner Parham interjected that that if a landlord has a unit in a hard-to-rent area they may take advantage of Section 8 rentals. The Director noted that the theory was to reduce levels of residential segregation to take some of the public housing responsibilities and move them into the private sector. The concern is did it, in fact, reduce residential segregation?

Commissioner Williams-Duncan also noted that people in certain areas who don't want to relocate simply do not accept Section 8.

The Director reported that most of the Commission's housing cases of late are handicap/disability cases; the next are race cases. He stated last year the Commission accepted 26 housing cases. If it continues at the current pace, we will exceed that number by the end of this year.

Director Morrison explained that the Commission receives a large reimbursement for processing housing cases – four times more than what is received for processing employment cases. However, HUD's requirements are more labor intensive for the investigators.

Commissioner Craig suggested that the director of the Housing Authority be invited to make a presentation to the Commission at some future meeting. The Director responded that this could be a potential problem in that the Housing Authority is almost always a respondent before the Commission. He went on to remind the Commissioners of last year's Commission meeting which was held in the Northview neighborhood. Prior to that meeting, many residents had raised specific concerns and the Commission tried to have someone from the Housing Authority present at the meeting to address these concerns, but that did not happen. Afterward, Director Morrison attempted to meet with the executive director of the Housing Authority but was first contacted by the HA legal counsel who wanted to know specifically what the meeting would be about. Director Morrison said he had to explain in detail, in writing, and then he was only permitted access to meet with the HA's "#2 person."

Director Morrison speculated that the administration of the Housing Authority may be "leery of this group. You have power and they know it." He went on to state that if the Commission comes across a situation related to fairness, this Commission has the authority to take action against the Housing Authority to correct it.

The Director briefly mentioned the Section 3 program which dates back to 1968, but it was rarely enforced. Under this program, the Housing Authority contractors are required to hire laborers and other qualified people from the community to fill vacancies on the job site. These persons are paid a prevailing wage, not a minimum wage, with the idea they will gain experience and motivation to pick up a trade. He said that little was heard about the Section 3 program over the last ten years -- until the HUD conference last year. Now HUD is all about its enforcement.

PrideFest

Director Morrison reported that the recent PrideFest was very well attended; the news reports estimated more than 60,000 persons attended the events throughout the course of Pride Week. Liberty Avenue was closed from Stanwix to Grant Street on Sunday for PrideFest activities.

Chairperson Williams-Duncan inquired if the City's LGBT Advisory Council distributed their leaflet with the mistakes that were discussed at the last Commission meeting. Director Morrison responded that they dumped the entire leaflet. He met with them immediately following the June Commission meeting to make the changes and they decided to ditch that flier and start over again.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

The Chairperson announced that Commission Representative Sarah DeCesaris is looking for community events to which the Commission might have a presence. She asked Commissioners to keep Sarah informed of events scheduled in their communities.

Director Morrison explained that Sarah's job responsibilities focus on community outreach, particularly in the area of housing. He asked Commissioners to recall the Commission meeting held in Greenfield in the Spring of 2009 where they heard from the Latino community. Those persons attending that meeting spoke of problems they were having among the Latino community. Later, a proposal was submitted to HUD for a one-time grant to assist the growing Latino community. This led to hiring Diana Marin in January 2010, who worked exclusively among the Latino community, helping them to become aware of their rights and the services available through the Commission. Ms Marin resigned in January 2011. HUD determined that undocumented citizens do not have standing to file a complaint. And, based on feedback received, the Commission decided that it did not want to limit its outreach to a particular ethnic group but rather, to concentrate on the entire city.

Commissioner Parham commented that the Commission insert in the water bill is a great idea but thought it unlikely to target tenants. The Director agreed, but stated that it is still educating the provider community. He noted that the first call received as a result of the water bill insert was from a landlord.

The Director went on to speak about other awareness campaigns targeting city residents, including Port Authority's ban on accepting advertisements from non-profit groups. This was circumvented a few years ago by having the Fair Housing Partnership place the ad. Recent attempts to do this failed when Port Authority again rejected the Commission's interest in bus ads due to their advertisement policy.

Director Morrison informed Commissioners that he testified as a witness in a court case against the Port Authority regarding this. He noted that they have spent more than \$100,000 in legal fees defending this policy.

The Director also relayed that five years ago the Commission purchased 90 spots on local TV at prime time at a cost of \$20,000, which resulted in only two phone calls. He stated that the best responses come from word of mouth based on personal experience with the Commission.

Chairperson Williams-Duncan reminded the Director that he can also advertise on Facebook via pop-up ads. Director Morrison responded that the Commission has a profile on Facebook and Sarah DeCesaris has been updating the information. She is also working on spotlighting Commissioners and the Director encouraged Commissioners to share their thoughts with Sarah regarding this.

Commissioner McDonald suggested having Commission literature available at the offices of district magistrates. Commissioner Craig suggested holding periodic training and re-training with agencies such as ACTION Housing, North Hills Outreach, and other similar organizations. He said if they are correctly trained as to what discrimination is and how the Commission can help, they can refer cases to the Commission. The Chair suggested Pittsburgh Community Services, Inc. and the possibility of partnering with the NAACP, too. Commissioner Parham also suggested North Side Coalition on Fair Housing.

Chairperson Williams-Duncan reminded Commissioners that she will make committee appointments at the September Commission meeting. She encouraged the Commissioners to think about the committee on which they would like to serve, as well as communities they might like to visit during the next year.

With no other business to be addressed by the Commission, Commissioner Craig moved to adjourn at 4:30 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Adelaide Smith and the vote unanimously carried.

/cmz

Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations

Director's Report

June 30, 2011

- May 26, 2011 Director Morrison conducted a fair housing program for the property management section of Coldwell Banker Real Estate. The program included an overview of the work of the Commission and the process used in the investigation of a complaint of housing discrimination. The program covered discrimination based on handicap/disability, race, LGBT status, familial status and other protected classes. The findings of the studies involving deaf testing and source of income discrimination were also discussed.
- June 12, 2011 Director Morrison, along with Commissioners Fogarty, Horwith, Parham, Robinson and Rubio, participated in the Pittsburgh Pride Fest exhibit. Numerous vendors took advantage of the opportunity to reach thousands of citizens attending the festival. The Commission also welcomed our partners to join us from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (Steve Glassman current Commission member and chair emeritus) and the Allegheny County Human Relations Commission (Chair, Hugh McGough).
- June 20, 2011 Director Morrison attended the City of Pittsburgh/Allegheny County Task Force on Disability meeting. Items discussed included a presentation by the Urban Redevelopment Authority regarding accessibility in URA developments and programs. Also discussed were accessibility issues at Pittsburgh International Airport.



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Neil Parham

Gerald S. Robinson, III

Curtis Smith

Rev. Timothy L. Smith, Sr.

MEMORANDUM

To: All Commissioners

FROM: Connie Miskis Zatek
Secretary to Director

DATE: July 1, 2011

SUBJECT: **MEETING NOTICE –**

Due to the July 4 holiday, the next Commission meeting is delayed one week, and is scheduled for Monday, **July 11, 2011**, in the Commission offices as follows:

2:30 p.m. Compliance Review Section

3:30 p.m. Full Commission meeting

The Public Hearing Section to meet briefly immediately following the full Commission meeting

Enclosed for your review are:

1. **Minutes** of the June 6, 2011, Commission meeting
2. **Director's Report** for June 2011
3. **Case Summary Package** (for Compliance Review Section Members Only)
4. **One case summary** (for Public Hearing Section)

If you are unable to attend the July 11th meeting(s), please call 412-255-2600 to let us know so that we can be assured of a quorum.

Have a safe and enjoyable holiday weekend!

/cmz

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