

Commission on Human Relations Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 8, 2024

Attendance: 9th Floor Conference Room, City County Bldg. and virtual meeting via Zoom.

Commissioners:

- Namikta Dwarkanath
- Tierra Collins
- Carleen King
- Alberto Benzaquen
- Rev. Liddy, Chair
- Genevieve Rosselot
- Wasi Mohamed
- Luz Blandon

Staff:

Rachel Shepherd Executive Director
Rita Turpin Porterfield, Acting Deputy Director
Shaneise Murray, Senior Investigator
Jeffrey Cameron, Senior Investigator
Lauren Law, Field Investigator
Kevin Carroll, Administrative Assistant
Courtney Smith

Guests: Pre-registered through Zoom

I. CALL TO ORDER - Chair Barlow Called the meeting to Order at 3:34p

II. ADOPTION OF MINUTES –

1. Corrections:
2. Motion to adopt minutes, including any corrections noted above, made by Commissioner Dwarkanath
3. Seconded by Commissioner King
4. Unanimous voice vote in favor

III. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Erie County Human Relations Commission, Director Kelly. History – founded in 1997; periods of inactivity. Two staff for the whole county, more recently activated in 2023. 20 board members including enforcement and advisory panels.

IV. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORT

A. Director's Report –

1. Personnel: hiring for deputy director position; candidates must be willing to relocate within City limits/maintain residency. This and salaries are non-negotiable.
2. Investigation:
 - a. 62 open cases
 - b. 10 pending intakes
 - c. 8 post-cause cases pending mandatory conciliation
 - d. 6 pending court cases
 - e. CRS to review 11 determinations including 1 conciliation; on track to meet annual closure goals after 1st quarter.
4. Outreach:
 - a. Community Commission meeting in March
 1. Beechview Library

2. Topics: Criminal history impact and language access
 - b. Fair Housing Landlord training:
<https://fairhousingpittsburgh.rsvpify.com>
 - c. Planning Fair Housing Month, commissioner participation welcome; Teams meeting at 12N every other Monday
 - d. Literature drop offs at various locations; most recent focus on survivors of domestic violence in housing.
 - e. Know Your Rights training is scheduled with Jewish Family and Community Services 1/18/2024 with career and refugee services stall. RentHelpPGH is the next partner for a Know Your Rights campaign
 4. Special Projects – Director Shepherd will be out of office for the next Commission meeting/first week of February; will put in acting paperwork for Acting Deputy Director, Rita Porterfield
- B. Committee Reports**
1. **Community Relations Committee** – has not met; need a meeting on the calendar to help plan community meeting and Housing Summit coming up this spring (March and April).
 2. **Justice & Equity Committee** – has not met
 3. **Finance Committee** –
 - a. Has not met since last meeting. Updates, however, include approval of 2024 budget. Rachel presented asks with amazing poise, but Council chose not to expand staff or grant additional position for an outreach person.
 - b. EORC requirement for solicitor bid to be presented at January meeting
 - c. Finalized contract with Studio for LGBTQIA+ work
 4. **Personnel Committee** – has not met since last Commission meeting; search for Deputy Director Continues
 5. **Public Hearing Section** – has not met; cases settled at this time
 6. **Executive Committee** – has not met

V. OLD BUSINESS – Championship Chase Black History Month segment. Interview via Zoom

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Strategic Planning Meeting 1/11/2024 at 12:05p via Zoom
- b. Racial Justice Summit → 1/19 and 1/20 at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
- c. Community Commission Meeting → March, in Beechview

VII. ADJOURNMENT –

- a. Motion made by Commissioner Rosselot
- b. Seconded by Commissioner Dwarkanath
- c. Unanimous vote in favor at 4:04 p.m.

EDWARD C. GAINES
MAYOR



RACHEL SHEPHERD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CITY OF PITTSBURGH
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS
CITY-COUNTY BUILDING

Monthly Commission Meeting Agenda

January 8, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. MEETING MINUTES
 - a. [12/4/2023](#)
3. PUBLIC COMMENTS
4. COMMITTEES
 - a. FINANCE COMMITTEE
 - b. PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
 - c. COMMUNITY RELATIONS
5. [DIRECTOR'S REPORT](#)
6. OLD BUSINESS
 - a. Championship Chase Black History Month segment
7. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. [Strategic Planning Meeting 1/11/2024 at 12:05pm](#)
 - b. [Racial Justice Summit](#)
 - c. Community Commission Meeting in March
 - i. Where: Beechview Library
 - ii. Topics for Community: criminal history impact and language access limitations
8. ADJOURNMENT

Commission on Human Relations Meeting Minutes
Monday, December 4, 2023

Attendance: Hybrid meeting via Zoom and in-person at 902 City-County Building.

Commissioners:

Rev. Liddy Barlow, Chair
Rabbi Jamie Gibson, 1st Vice Chair
Alberto Benzaquen, Secretary
Wasiullah Mohamed
Carleen King
Namita Dwarakanath
Genevieve Rosselot
Luz Blandon

Staff:

Rachel Shepherd, Executive Director
Rita Turpin Porterfield, Acting Deputy Director
Courtney Smith, Fiscal and Contract Coordinator
Shaneise Murray, Investigator
Jeffrey Cameron, Investigator
Lauren Law, Investigator
Kevin Carroll, Administrative Assistant

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Rev. Liddy Barlow Called the meeting to Order at 3:33 p.m.

II. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

1. Corrections: None
2. Motion to adopt minutes, including any corrections noted above, made by Commissioner Rosselot
3. Seconded by Commissioner Gibson
4. Unanimous voice vote in favor

III. PUBLIC COMMENT: Vincent Omar Johnson from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Law was present to observe the meeting. Thea Young was also present to remind Commissioners and staff of the Racial Justice Summit on January 19-20th.

IV. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORT

A. Director's Report

1. Personnel:

- 1.a. Orientation for our two newest commissioners was held in November. Mayor's office staff were invited however they did not attend.
 - 1.b. Final approval for our next general solicitor was obtained in November, and an award notice was sent to the firm. Courtney is working with Law to get the contract started however we cannot do a resolution to encumber the funding until January.
 - 1.c. Rita Porterfield, the Commission's most senior investigator, has accepted the role of Acting Deputy Director until the role has been filled. The job will be posted for four weeks, followed by telephone and in-person interviews. We anticipate a permanent placement around late January/early February based on past hiring timelines.
 - 1.d. Our budget hearing is scheduled for December 6, 2023 at 1:30pm. All are encouraged to participate in person if they are able. Again, we are trying to show Council that we are operating with a small staff and could use an extra set of hands to better support them in reaching their constituents.
2. Investigation:
 - 2.a. As of 11/27/2023 there are 70 open cases, 16 pending intakes, one open testing case, and nine post-cause cases pending mandatory conciliation/public hearing.
 - 2.b. We anticipate closing 11 cases at Compliance Review this month, in addition to the 9 cases from November that we were unable to close due to lack of quorum.
 - 2.c. On December 1, 2023 I am participating in a briefing with Councilperson Gross regarding the Residential Wholesale Homebuying legislation to review the changes for our part of City Code. On that day I am also participating in a review of zoning code with a number of city departments and community stakeholders, specifically to look at temporary housing options for the unhoused.
3. Outreach
 - 3.a. A landlord training will be conducted on January 31st in collaboration with the Fair Housing Partnership. This can be shared with any landlord who may be interested in fair housing information and is free. Registration link here: <https://fairhousingpittsburgh.rsvpify.com>
 - 3.b. We are up to 6 volunteer mediators that we work with to resolve cases, in addition to our five trained staff members. This proves especially useful in cases where a conflict of interest occurs.
 - 3.c. Community Development granted our request for \$60,000 for a three-year contract with Just Mediation Pittsburgh. These funds will be available in 2024 and the contract process will begin then. JMP will distribute information to landlords and tenants on fair housing rights and responsibilities in exchange for our financial support of their mediators.

- 3.d. We are beginning Fair Housing Month planning for 2024. The topics we are looking at are criminal history as it is used in rental criteria, our enhanced domestic violence protections, discrimination in the appraisal process, language access in housing, and predatory wholesale homebuying.
- 3.e. We have begun sending packets of our resources to various locations across Pittsburgh. We are continually building our list of folks to reach out to, so please make suggestions as you think of them. This month we sent information to local college groups, Latino community groups, Jewish Family and Community Services, Neighborhood Legal Services, First Muslim Mosque, and the Islamic Community Center. We are also sending packets to you all for sharing with your networks.
- 3.f. A Know Your Rights training is scheduled with Jewish Family and Community Services on January 18, 2024 to educate their career services and refugee services staff on civil rights protections and resources. A similar training is to be scheduled with RentHelpPGH as well.

4. Special Projects- N/A

B. Committee Reports

- 1. **Community Relations Committee** – N/A
- 2. **Finance Committee** – 2024 Budget meeting reminder for December 6th. Director Shepherd will ensure a link to attend virtually is sent to the commissioners.
- 3. **Personnel Committee** – Rita Porterfield is Acting Deputy Director and applications for the position are being accepted. The link to the job posting was provided in the chat.
- 4. **Public Hearing Section** - N/A
- 5. **Executive Committee** – N/A

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. N/A

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Commissioner attendance discussion
 - a.i. Director Shepherd will send calendar invitations for the 2024 meetings
- b. Strategic planning moving forward
 - b.i. Director Shepherd will send a Doodle Poll for availability for the next planning meeting in January

VII. ADJOURNMENT –

- a. Unanimous vote in favor at 4:06 p.m.



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

January 8, 2024

PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATION

- We received 16 applications for Deputy Director, which were redacted and are being reviewed to choose telephone interview candidates. Many applicants do not seem to understand the residency requirement so staff intends to make it very clear before there is even a telephone interview scheduled.
- We need to schedule a Community Relations Committee meeting very soon. We have a number of projects and legal developments that commissioners should have a greater hand in coordinating.

CASES AND ENFORCEMENT

- As of 1/5/2024 there are:
 - 62 open cases
 - 10 pending intakes
 - 8 post-cause cases pending mandatory conciliation
 - 6 pending court cases.
- Compliance Review will see 11 determinations this month, including one successful conciliation. We are on track to meet our case closure goals after the first quarter of the case processing year – thank you, investigators!

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

- A housing provider training will be conducted on January 31st in collaboration with the Fair Housing Partnership to facilitate compliance with the training portion of settlement agreements. This can be shared with any housing provider who may be interested in fair housing information and is free. Registration link here:
<https://fairhousingpittsburgh.rsvpify.com>
- We are continuing planning for Fair Housing Month 2024 and welcome Commissioner participation. We meet at noon every other Monday via Teams.
- We are continuing to send packets of our resources to various locations across Pittsburgh to improve our outreach. This month we sent information to service providers who see survivors of domestic violence to update them on the City Code enhancements. Some commissioners should have also seen resources come via mail. We are continually building our list of places to reach out to, so please make suggestions as you think of them.

EDWARD C. GAINES
MAYOR



RACHEL SHEPHERD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- A Know Your Rights training is scheduled with Jewish Family and Community Services on January 18, 2024 to educate their career services and refugee services staff on civil rights protections and resources. A similar training will be scheduled with RentHelpPGH as well.
- Courtney and I met with a representative of WESA/WYEP regarding running radio ads in April and June. We hope to reach people who are passionate about our work and can spread the word that our office is here to help.
- I will be out of the office at a leadership conference from February 2-8, 2024. I am unsure if I will be able to attend our February Commission meeting, but you will receive a Director's Report prior to the meeting and an acting director will be appointed to assist with running the meetings, etc.