

Meeting Minutes

City of Ypsilanti
Human Relations Commission
Regular Meeting
City Council Chambers - One South Huron St.
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Monday, February 5, 2018, 7:00 P.M.

I. CALL TO ORDER: 7:00

II. ROLL CALL

Commissioner Jones-Darling	Present
Commissioner Saunders	Present
Commissioner Shuler	Present
Commissioner Morton	Absent
Commissioner Fellows	Present
Commissioner Gaines	Present
Commissioner Hunter	Present
Commissioner Krupin-Carter	Present
Commissioner Devika Choudhuri	Present

III. AGENDA APPROVAL

Fellows (second Choudhuri) moved to approve the agenda as submitted. Unanimous approval. Motion carries.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. November 27, 2017

Fellows (second Hunter) moved to approve the minutes for November 27, 2017. Unanimous approval. Motion carries.

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION/COMMISSION RESPONSE

VI. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. 2018 Goal Setting

Fellows: Stated that in reviewing the minutes from November, things stated were discussion of public safety mileage funds, cultural competency training, better ways to inform public, bylaws, more special joint meetings, public transportation, and shaping the CBO/CBA.

Choudhuri: Stated that her two top goals are to foster more dialogue between EMU and the city, and to provide more opportunities for citizens to present their experiences and perspectives.

Fellows: Stated her goals are related to community participation and how the commission engages the audience during meetings. Thinks it is important to note that bylaws are a type of community record so citizens can know what is going on. Also interested in the work of the subcommittee and CBO, and improving communications between the commissions and the public.

Jones-Darling: Stated he wants to build on the meeting with other commissions and extend to commissions in Ann Arbor and how AA and Ypsi are interrelated. In regards to bias complaints, would like to make it easier for people to communicate in word to the city, specifically in regards to housing. Wants to draft an ordinance requiring landlords to supply voter registration forms upon signing leases. Wants to look at how the police-civilian relations ordinance is crafted and give it more teeth.

Saunders: Stated she wants to better engage the community and make sure the city asks before they act. The second thing is to define 'tolerance' and 'goodwill' and how the commission promotes it. The third thing is to immelierate discrimination in schools, business, housing, healthcare, and political engagement.

Gaines: Stated he wants to emphasize promotion of the HRC's work, getting the word out. Added that he wants to engage high school citizens more.

Hunter: Stated he wants to have 24/7 warming center in the city by Thanksgiving. Added that he wants to reach out to different wards, reaching out to the most housing insecure. Wants to repair the bridge going into Depot Town. Would like to have monthly ward town hall meetings in order to reach out to people in a more accessible way. Added that questions he has include: Do we officially view housing as a human right? Will we advocate on behalf of our homeless and housing insecure? How do we plan to ensure the ban and eradication of white supremacist policy that our city's infrastructure practices in hiring, law enforcement, outreach, and resource allocation. What county/state representatives do we have to call on for assistance and expertise in these areas? Added by sharing stats on the disparities between black and white residents in Washtenaw Co and that it is the job of the HRC to correct these disparities.

Krupin-Carter: Stated she also wants to create a warming center in Ypsi. Added getting free tampons and pads into city buildings. Would like to improve the HRC's image--which has been skewed by the actions of some commissioners--by coming up a with a way to return the original purpose and work of the commission.

Choudhuri: Asked about the background to Krupin-Carter's statements about commissioners' actions.

Krupin-Carter: Responded that last year some things happened that went against some things the HRC was trying to do in the first place.

Fellows: Asked Krupin-Carter about her interpretations of improving the HRC's image.

Krupin-Carter: Responded that she thinks such actions don't help the progress the HRC strives for. The HRC needs to remember what commissioners are supposed to do as voting members. Thinks we can work towards many of our goals.

Gaines: Asked about how to improve the image.

Krupin-Carter: Responded that she has drafts of HRC stickers that would improve image.

Fellows: Stated that in the November meeting the HRC discussed cultural competency training, which has been discussed a lot, but with little action thus far.

Choudhuri: Asked what Fellows means by cultural competency training.

Fellows: Responded that it is focused on bias training, and has not been done in at least five years for Ypsi city staff.

Jones-Darling: Stated he reached out to the county and has not received a response, and now Commissioner Dietrich will prod the county for a response from the county about cultural competency training.

Fellows: Asked for Choudhuri's help in this task.

Choudhuri: Responded she would be happy to help and this is the work she does in her day job, including for EMU and the library. Added that UM has \$65 million over five years towards these efforts. Addressing Hunter, asked him to expound on his stats on racial income gaps.

Hunter: Shared an article from New York magazine reporting on economic discrimination and disparity against African Americans. Concluded that we must understand what we are dealing with and that the disparity reported in this article and others is made to seem normal.

Choudhuri: Responded that training on cultural competency should focus on structural issues and making sure leaders know how to address discriminatory structures. Secondly, implicit bias training is also very important.

Fellows: Asked if anonymous resume systems are a number system.

Choudhuri: Responded yes, but even when one removes all cues that point to identity, hiring authorities still look for certain pieces that if they do not see they can reject.

Fellows: Added such as professionalism, which is associated with whiteness.

Hunter: Stated that we are reaching a better understanding of how deep this all goes. On a local level, feels that we need to understand the difference between symbolic and structural victories.

Jones-Darling: Stated that it seems cultural competency is a shared goal. Asked where in the city does the HRC want to start.

Hunter: Responded the library because we need to begin with learning where this comes from and why we are here.

Choudhuri: Added that we need a historical lense.

Gaines: Stated he met with Matt Siegfried, a local historian, and learned a lot about Ypsi's discriminatory history.

Hunter: Added that these issues and themes have been brought up and discussed for many generations, but the veil of progress often makes us believe that things have actually changed in significant ways.

Gaines: Added that holding local officials more accountable is necessary because we still sugar coat things a lot. Stated he feels that professional politicians and political scientists work to fit into the current system, while others work to change the system.

Fellows: Stated she knows librarians and how they order books and does not think they order with the residents of Ypsi in mind much of the time.

Jones-Darling: Reminded the commission that the HRC has no power in regards to the library. Added that he wants commissioners to share who, where, and what else they want in regards to how to implement cultural competency training.

Saunders: Stated that she would like a survey to be drafted to understand better what the challenges ahead look like.

Choudhuri: Asked Saunders if she wants the survey to ask specifically about bias.

Hunter: Added that people don't understand anti-black behavior because they've lived in it for so long.

Gaines: Stated he thinks it will be a harder task than the HRC thinks because it will raise a lot of questions at one time. Added that if one is not calling people out, one is supporting. We need to put pressure on people in seats of power in local government.

Krupin-Carter: Stated she knows nothing about the history of Ypsi. Asked commissioners how they think local history should be taught in schools and city hall.

Jones-Darling: Asked commissioners to focus their comments on where they have power and jurisdiction.

Saunders: Stated that at the Department of Education, they do one hour each month of African American history study, and it is very powerful. Something like this could be done for city staff, like a lunch time gathering.

Gaines: Asked if we should tap into Matt Siegfried and local historians.

Hunter: Responded that we should tap into all resources available, including local historians.

Gaines: Asked what the HRC thinks about a forum once more information is gathered.

Jones-Darling: Stated that he wants to focus on the question of who, as brought up by Saunders. Asked where is the most mission critical part, and where is the least, noting that the city staff, police, Council, and department heads have already been suggested.

Gaines: Responded that those four sectors are important and have potential to make change.

Fellows: Added people who hire--city manager, department heads. Added that staff and city officials are needed in order to get more thorough historical education to change, so implicit bias could be a good entryway into this deeper change.

Choudhuri: Stated she agrees, and that internalized oppression is key, but the residents who feel disempowered and disenfranchised may greatly benefit from taking part in learning about the history of this place.

Hunter: Added that the history of this place and the struggle by disenfranchised peoples is powerful and rewarding to learn about.

Choudhuri: Added that taking such presentations to places where people actually are is a good place to start.

Krupin-Carter: Added that this could then lead to other venues.

Jones-Darling: Stated that while this may empower citizens, if when the arm of government does not have the same understanding, nothing may change.

Choudhuri: Added that this is why an intermediary role is important.

Hunter: Added that it will be a work in progress for some time and may not look perfect because we'll be working against our institutional interests.

Shuler: Asked if we are discussing putting together something about the history of Ypsilanti.

Gaines: Responded that it isn't simply that, but looking at how the past has helped bring us to where we are today.

Hunter: Added that for someone to not understand structural racism is a disqualifier for public office in his opinion. In order to alter such structures, one must understand them in a historical context.

Shuler: Asked what type of history we're talking about.

Hunter: Responded that we are challenging European nationalism.

Shuler: Asked how Eurocentric history is tied into local Ypsi history.

Gaines: Responded with the example of how a previous Ypsi mayor of the Quirk family participated in black face parties.

Hunter: Read from a piece by Merlin Stone. Added that the most important part of the quote was, "The purpose of cultural racism is to cite unprovoked aggression in the extreme violence characteristic of the first state of economic racism. According to her, this stage lasts until the others are subdued and their land is now in the conquerors' name. This is the function of the European image of others. It is first to support the European self-image and to impose on the cultural others in such a way that they become what they think they have been imaged to be. One becomes a slave when one thinks as a slave, thus a reality is constructed. The most effective weapon against this imposed image is a strong national consciousness. Liberation is a question of consciousness." All these measures are being taken to reconstruct the consciousnesses of people who have been conditioned to believe their status of slaves.

Fellows: Recapped that Hunter shared some gallup poll data about racial wealth divides in the US. Added that this is such a huge problem and no one is talking about, so the first step is acknowledging and understanding the problem. Then one can move forward. One piece of an accountability process could be the implicit bias training for city staff. Another piece could be a way for citizens to issue complaints. A third place could be some sort of outreach presentation of some sort about these topics.

Jones-Darling: Stated that there are two approaches: city infrastructure and citizen outreach. Both must be addressed. Asked if there are any last comments about cultural competency training as a goal.

Shuler: Asked if cultural competency training is different than the city of Ypsi history project.

Jones-Darling: Stated they are part of the same thing.

Hunter: Stated that a history of voter suppression should be an aspect of the citizen education aspect of this goal.

Jones-Darling: Stated that the consensus of the HRC is that housing is a basic human right. Asked if commissioners would like to make the bias complaint form a 2018 goal.

Fellows: Stated that the Fair Housing Association looks into this topic, so we should not duplicate that. Added that some input form would be appropriate so citizens could reach commissioners.

Jones-Darling: Asked if a non-discrimination report form would be appropriate.

Fellows: Suggested that these goals may need to be broken down more individually in separate meetings.

Jones-Darling: Asked what specific elements of the bias complaint process they want to tackle.

Saunders: Responded that she thinks we need to look at the commission's charter.

Jones-Darling: Asked commissioners to rank the goals that have been suggested as to what their top priorities are.

Choudhuri: Asked if this commission deals with gender, sexuality and religion.

Fellows: Stated she is interested in the effective and achievable things the commission can do in the short term as well as the long term. This includes voter registration forms for renters upon leasing. Also bulletin boards with meeting dates and locations for the year.

Hunter: Asked who is the point person for the mileage.

Jones-Darling: Responded city council. Added that the county captures the money and hands it to the city.

Shuler: Asked if the mileage will show up in the summer taxes.

Huizenga: Responded it will show up in the 2018 summer taxes, then the council will decide what to do, so the commission should decide what how they want to be involved soon.

Choudhuri: Stated it seems we should prioritize how to spend the mileage funds first.

Jones-Darling: Stated that there is a role the county can play regarding the warming center. They have many more resources and money to help make that happen, so the city should work with the county to make that happen. Additionally, we have corporate partners in the area who would be willing to help make that happen.

Saunders: Stated that it is important to be careful when working with the county.

Fellows: Stated the warming center is already getting started so the HDC doesn't have to build it from scratch. The next step is how to get it sustainable, viable, and possibly funded.

Hunter: Asked if there could be a warming center in each ward.

Shuler: Suggested targeting geographically where the most need for a warming center would be.

Jones-Darling: Stated that EMU has significant infrastructure for a warming center or similar function.

Hunter: Asked if it is possible to talk with EMU about sharing some of their properties for these goals.

Fellows: Suggested that we need to move in those directions, at least be in dialogue with EMU.

Jones-Darling: Stated that EMU legally has the right to do whatever they want.

Choudhuri: Added that EMU can do that but won't because it would be a PR nightmare. Suggested reaching out to Engage EMU to begin such conversations.

Hunter: Added it would only benefit EMU.

Krupin-Carter: Also suggested asking churches.

Shuler: Asked for clarification that the public safety mileage was for mental health services.

Fellows: Responded yes, and it is often difficult to find mental health services in Ypsilanti. Added that this is why the warming center is a good use for the mileage because warming centers can connect people who need mental health services to those services.

Hunter: Asked if there is a working relationship between the city and DHS.

Choudhuri: Stated she is working on a grant to look at historical trauma in communities of color as a mental health issue that needs to be addressed.

Jones-Darling: Stated that the city has no jurisdiction in regards to DHS.

Hunter: Stated that those gaps in communication is a huge problem, and thinks we should create some means of dialogue with DHS to tackle these issues.

Choudhuri: Added that DHS is currently underfunded and understaffed.

Jones-Darling: Stated that from a state agency perspective, they are told who they need to work with, and if they are not included in that direction, it is likely they will not communicate with you. The HRC can communicate with the county health department.

Hunter: Asked what the county health department could do to hold DHS accountable.

Jones-Darling: Responded that he is not sure they could do anything.

Hunter: Stated he thinks DHS exacerbates public health issues.

Jones-Darling: Responded that that is a good conversation with representative Peterson and commissioner Jefferson. It's not a conversation that the city can broach, however.

Fellows: Stated that to make up for the failures of DHS, smaller agencies have picked up the slack. Thinks it is a remediation tactic, but looking at making a warming center is a step in the right direction.

Jones-Darling: Stated that governments have the ability to make non-profits. So the city of Ypsi along with other townships could establish a warming/cooling center with public funds. The best result would involve partnering with a variety of institutions, including schools and other public entities. Stated that he will put this topic on the next agenda and will move the bylaws to the next agenda, too.

Gaines: Asked how they should reach about getting information regarding the local history project. He can reach out to Matt Siegfried.

Fellows: Asked if we are establishing goals for 2018. Using mileage funds for the warming center seemed to be one.

Kurpin-Carter: Added that the history of Ypsi and cultural competency training is another goal.

Hunter: Added that addressing how to work with DHS could be another.

Jones-Darling: Responded to Hunter that working with DHS wasn't specified as a goal. Added that reporting to council is a necessary and he will draft it and share it with the other commissioners. Asked that if they have comments on the draft, email those comments directly to him (Jones-Darling) rather than to everyone else.

B. Bylaws Review and Adoption

VII. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION/COMMISSION RESPONSE

Amy Shrodes: Stated that it would be great to have a meeting to discuss what has been learned about the warming center. Doesn't think we need to recreate the wheel by making it a government non-profit. Most people coming to the Ypsi Gathering Space are not homeless, so the purpose isn't simply to keep people from freezing, but to create community, especially for those who are coming out of in-patient treatment and are in periods of recovery. Doesn't want this to be something that corporate entities jump on just to brand themselves and feel good. The more she digs into this, she thinks using the mileage funds is less and less of a good idea.

Fellows: Stated her appreciation for Amy's comments. Wants to include her in dialogues about the gathering space as much as possible.

Krupin-Carter: Asked if it is the goal to make the Ypsi Gathering Space a 24 hour warming center.

Fellows: Responded that that is not the current goal and is not the present need either. Is confident that if a disaster struck, they could make it happen, but it could not be sustained by only volunteers. If someone asked for a place to sleep on a given night, someone from the group would offer a place for them to stay. There is a couchsurfing network in Ypsi. She has talked to the Mission and Shelter Association, and they are willing to consider Ypsi Gathering Space as one of their projects, which could give us some employee time. Can say that the daytime warming center in Ann Arbor will reach out to churches in Ypsi to add to their rotation schedule.

Choudhuri: Asked if there are mental health services.

Amy: Responded there are mental health needs, but no services at the warming center.

Jones-Darling: Asked what is the age demographic at the warming center.

Amy: Responded that some high school students come from Ozone House, but most who hang out there all day are middle aged.

Hunter: Asked if some are noticeably mentally ill.

Amy: Responded that she is noticing those with medical issues, so she is looking for alternative healing methods, like yoga, to bring to the Gathering Space. Added that volunteer training is on Wednesdays at 8, and open hours are Friday 3-10 pm and Thursday and Saturday 3-8 pm, at Riverside Arts Center.

VIII. PROPOSED BUSINESS

Jones-Darling: Stated it will be the AAATA presentation and bylaws.

IX. NEXT MEETING DATE: Monday, February 26, 2018

X. ADJOURNMENT

Fellows (Shuler) moved to adjourn the meeting. Unanimous approval. Motion carries.