

Topeka Human Relations Commission

Meeting Minutes
November 3, 2014

Commissioners met on November 3, 2014 at 5:30 p.m. for the November monthly meeting
Holliday Building – Conference Room
620 SE Madison Street
Topeka, KS 66603

To request an ADA accommodation, please contact 368-3606 between the hours of 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. no later than 3 working days in advance of this meeting.

Mission Statement:

The mission of the Human Relations Commission is to conduct outreach and educational activities that promote justice and cultural understanding, and improve relationships among all citizens of the City of Topeka.

Commissioners present:

Ms. Lorean Williams
Ms. Stephanie Mott
Ms. Amy Cohen
Mr. Mike Padilla
Ms. Joyce Grigsby
Mr. Bill Beachy
Mr. Anthony Fadale
Ms. Darcella Goodman

Commissioners absent: Ms. Margo Rangel

City Present: Ms. Shawn Maisberger

I. Call to order – Commissioner

Noting a quorum, Lorean Williams, Chair, called the meeting at order at 5:30 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance followed by a Moment of Silence

III. Approval of Agenda

Amy made a motion to amend the agenda by addition discussion under new business for the anti-discrimination enforcement; Bill seconded. No discussion. Motion carried

IV. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from October meeting were presented. Bill made a motion to adopt the minutes; Stephanie seconded. No discussion. Motion carried.

V. Staff Report

Shawn reported that she has taken another position in the city and that tonight is probably her last meeting. She is unsure who her replacement will be. Thanked the commission for their support over the years. The commission congratulated Shawn on her promotion.

VI. Committee Reports

- *Prejudice & Poverty Committee Update*

Stephanie reported that it has not been feasible putting something together prior to thanksgiving. Looking at what they can do to make sure they can hit the ground running in late February early March. Precious has been out of the country.

- *Troy Scroggins Award Committee Update*

Stephanie shared that Aly with the Topeka-Capital Journal wants to help but she has been tied up with the projects at the paper and she hasn't been feeling well. Stephanie would like to have Suzie review the proposed press release information that she put together from his obituary. She will send to Shawn electronically and then Suzie can modify as needed and sent back to Stephanie for approval. She is recommending extending the nominations to November 15 and then having recommendations to the Commission at the December 1st meeting. Plan to make the presentation at the council meeting on either December 9 or 16.

- *Town Hall Committee Meeting Update*

Lorean reported on behalf of Margo who was absent that the town hall meeting was planned for a get out to vote program. We will be planning a program in the early 2015. Shawn reported that Margo and she have spoken with League of Women Voters and Mark Stock with the Shawnee County Election office to collaborate for a get out and vote campaign. A planning meeting will be scheduled in January to make sure that it compliments all mission and meets the needs of the entire program.

VII. Old Business

Watched "Walking in Oak Creek, WI video provided by Mike Padilla. The video challenged communities on what can you do to reduce hate. "Be Awake" was the message to do the right thing and not be passive in your daily lives.

Mike talked about his views of the video and thought it was interesting that their focus was on peace building and their plan. Lorean mentioned her thoughts about Topeka and she believes that people do not know what events are going on and organizations that are not fully supported and are not getting to know each other. There are people that really don't know what is going on in the community. Commission needs to invite and make sure to get involved.

Bill stated that in Topeka even the hate and racism that has happened in Topeka over the years and the cooperation with the police department. The commission

meets and try's to provide a forum when necessary. It is too bad that sometimes it takes a crisis for people to come together. Lorean suggests that we need to get out and participate in everything possible.

We need to wake up and help other wake up. Anthony if there is a way for us to partner with Kansas City Kansas on the one year anniversary early next year - in reference to the shooting of three individuals? Is there anything we can do even though it is not in our community? Possibly could identify an event that the commission could be involved. There is hatred every day and Topeka is defined by that church and that cannot be the case. Anything that the commission can do to show supports. It may take some doing but could partner with the U.S. Attorney office or other agencies. Just an idea he got from the video.

Stephanie motion to extend meeting for 15 minutes Bill seconded - no discussion - motion carried.

Bill would like to know if the Mayor's office is sending out letters to the cities that Westboro Baptist Church visits. Shawn will check with his office.

Stephanie - Vigil: Rita Hester in 1998 a transgender woman was murdered and a vigil was held and since that time every year it is declared Transgender Day which is recognized on November 20 of each year hosted by Equality Kansas. Monday, November 17th at 7:00 pm at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Topeka, 4775 SW 21st St. is a citywide vigil and everyone is welcome to attend. There is only one response- it is kindness. Note that transgender is not on the federal hate crime statistics.

VIII. New Business

A - HRC and racism - Amy requested the commission discuss what role it could have in the larger sense regarding racial concerns in Topeka. Lorean asked for her ideas and clarification about her concerns. She clarified that while she is concerned about the injustice of Ferguson, it is a symptom of a larger picture of systemic racism in this Country and our community of Topeka since that is what we are charged with addressing. Lorean clarified her concern that she wants to look at race issues in Topeka and how the commission can address them. Amy stated that she did not have the answers but was looking to the Commission to discuss this. Lorean shared the idea that we could contact other agencies with similar visions and see what concerns people have shared with them.

Stephanie stated the reaction to the upcoming announcement regarding whether or not (most likely not) there would be charges filed against the officer who killed Mike Brown in Ferguson. She thinks the reaction will be more wide-spread than just in Ferguson.

It was suggested that the commission could hold a community meeting to share concerns to address "isms" including racism, homophobia, transphobia, religious and disability discrimination. Names of agencies were discussed to contact in the

future and Lorean asked Commissioners to email Amy the names and not to her. Mike, Stephanie, and Lorean suggested agencies to contact. Amy agreed to bring a draft of the letter to the December meeting.

Bill will help get information to Amy as well to identify groups for the letter.

B - Marriage equality - November 6 the Kansas Supreme Court will be hearing the case. Stephanie stated It is not necessarily getting involved in the case - but that the commission should be getting involved in civil rights issues no matter what the issue. We need to say NO under the law of what they believe is right. She believes it is their mission to speak up on civil rights. Joyce stated that she doesn't believe they have much power and does to understand why the commission is discussing the issue. Lorean stated that we know of the injustices of what people have experienced and we should not be saying that we should not be getting involved because we are human beings and have a right to be treated with respect then the commission needs to have a voice on the subject.

There maybe things we don't necessary believe in but we need to support that you can live and shop where you want to. As a human being treated wrongfully is not okay and these are the things that the commission needs to be a part of and not change their life styles and make sure they are treated fairly. Bill remembers that there was a time when he really didn't know what transgender was and he was informed and educated by Stephanie. Maybe the commission should discuss about marriage equality. The commission didn't really take on sexual orientation and maybe the commission should have some internal discussion. Statement made by the commission for the courts about being treated fairly and states cannot and should not make laws. Everyone should be treated fairly under the law.

It was recommended that Items B and C under new business be carried over for further discussion in December. Mike requested that next month the commission discuss how to communicate the message and the process as a discussion item.

IX. Public Comments

None.

X. Commissioner remarks

None.

XI. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned.

The next meeting will be December 1, 2014 at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Shawn Maisberger.