



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
Meeting Summary
February 7, 2024

PARTICIPANTS

Commission Members Present:

Kelsey Murray, Vice Chair; Laura Fouts; Joaquin Lara Midkiff, Lisa Novak, Cathy Ostrand-Ponsioen, Kaitlin Strathdee, Hope Strayer

Guests Present:

Marlee Baker; Dr. Brown; Elana Lynn; Lynelle Wilcox

Staff Present:

Gretchen Bennett, Acting DC Debra Aguilar, Acting LT Robert Dowd

1. Call to Order, Welcome and Review of Agenda

Vice Chair Murray welcomed the group and facilitated introductions. The You Tube channel transmission/recording was noted. Introductions were shared.

2. Public Comment

Commissioner Lara Midkiff noted outreach received by Marlee Baker, Fair Housing Council of Oregon. The outreach was to explore if the HRC would be open to collaborating on a Fair Housing Month recognition. It was discussed at the Community Engagement Task Force meeting, where they clarified it is not in conflict with nor redundant to the anticipated Homelessness Summit.

Marlee Baker introduced fair housing month and suggested something like the Salem Speaks Up! event held in December. It could be an open forum with a focus on housing discrimination. The purpose would be to identify gaps in enforcement , share information and increase connections. They and their Legal Director would attend. They would also invite Legal Aid. Gretchen will reach American Association of University Women to see if they are available to provide refreshments. April 10 is a proposed date. Commissioner Lara Midkiff offered the Community Engagement Task Force as a platform to plan details. He and Commissioner Strathdee volunteered to be point people for planning. The group voted unanimously to support the idea.

No other public comment was received.

3. Consent Calendar

Commissioner Lara Midkiff moved the approval of the consent calendar. Commissioner Novak seconded the motion. The motion to approve the consent calendar was unanimously approved.

4. Action and/or Discussion Items:

a. Bias Crime/Incident Update

Acting Deputy Chief Aguilar announced a recent promotion for her. She introduced Acting Lt. Robert Dowd, who will be filling the role until a new person is selected; promotional processes take a good deal of time. She reported about two incidents. She anticipates a statistics summary will be ready by next month. The DOJ statistics report for Salem is not yet ready. Appreciations were shared for the time Acting DC Aguilar was with HRC (since 2017!).

b. Complaints Report

Gretchen reported on one incident.

c. Conference with other HRC's

No new update.

d. Sanctuary policies

Gretchen Bennett shared context that this objective came about because in the belonging survey, a group that reported the least comfort with reporting hate or bias is indigenous migrant community and theory is it may relate to legal status. To date we heard from DC Aguilar with a presentation on the state and city procedures, and we clarified Eugene's law. Next the Commission indicated interest in inviting folks to talk with us about the experiences they are hearing. We were interested to talk to entities perhaps the Oregon Law Center, CAPACES, PCUN and Theresa Leon. However, Commissioner Lara Midkiff's early outreach suggested we get a bit clearer on what we are asking.

Discussion ensued and several questions were identified to ask potential speakers:

- When situations happen, and people do not report, do you have a sense of the related circumstances or influential factors?
- Are there things that the police department, HRC or DOJ hotline do to help be more welcoming or reduce barriers?
- How can we build trust?
- How can we talk with people who may be experiencing discrimination and reluctance to report?

Gretchen will reach possible speakers to schedule for future HRC meetings.

Marlee noted a recent experience where there was concern for discrimination amongst renters who were migrants and did not opt to report. She suggested a follow up to learn about that; Gretchen will reach out.

Discussion ensued about if citizenship is a protected class. Marlee noted that fair housing laws extend to all residents. Vice Chair Murray asked about an exploration of if citizenship status should be added to Chapter 97; Gretchen will begin an inquiry.

e. Reporting Hate and Bias

The group had asked how other cities do to help welcome in reports; so far, Gretchen has heard from only one city. She will follow up.

f. Welcoming Spaces

Upcoming outreach will help guide what could occur in this area. The overall objective is about seeking solutions to decrease acts of discrimination in places of public trust, such as parks, sidewalks, medical facilities, and restaurants.

g. Circle of Belonging

Per two public comments received recently, the Commission expressed interest in engaging with the Community Violence and Circle of Belonging conversations. As Gretchen learns of opportunities, she will share with Commissioner Strayer for the event calendar. Dr. Brown indicated he will reach out after the bias crime annual report is completed. Commissioner Lara Midkiff suggested reaching Levi Herrera Lopez.

5. Task Force and Project Updates:

- a. Community Engagement:** Commissioner Lara Midkiff shared updates on the recent Spanish Resource Fair. He shared about outreach from a professor and student at Willamette, working on an approach to increase preparations to welcome people in from other countries. Mayor Hoy sent a letter of support; there is nothing further to do at this time, until we learn more about the research that would come next.

He talked about the idea for a web-based dashboard of information. We have five years of community survey data, information on our engagements, reports received, and accomplishments achieved. The aim would be to telegraph visually and show the city at work, and catalogue what we are hearing and doing. He wants to consider privacy and equity; for example, he would not want to see a map so as not to contribute narratives that are negative about any part of Salem.

Commissioner Strathdee worked on talking points. She noted Lynelle Wilcox had suggested we have notes about accomplishments and invited people to suggest those to her or Gretchen for addition. She made it more conversational per her interpretation of the request. She also noted discussion at the task force about editing the complaint form to be clearer, such as welcoming reports from bystanders.

Commissioner Strathdee discussed the idea of conversation starters and encouraged suggestions for some to add.

- b. Homelessness Information Summit:** No update.
- c. LGBTQIA+ Intersectional Rights:** Vice Chair Murray reported the group is looking at qualitative and quantitative information from the belonging survey responses from

LGBTQIA+ communities. The group is considering possible partners to work with on training or additional awareness on the issue that discrimination is happening and how to promote reporting.

6. Staff Updates:

- Met with staff for State HRC. Premise is to safeguard and support the dignity and rights, for people with developmental disabilities. They have a complaints department.
- Councilor Stapleton anticipating attending next month.
- February 20 a City Council homelessness work session is planned.
- She proposes to edit the bylaws to create a process for selecting and renewing chairs for subcommittees; she will bring it as an information item at the next meeting.
- She shared the Equity Round Table provides input from perspectives of underserved communities in city work. Anticipated to meet every other month. Dr. Brown is a member and he shared he welcomes HRC to sit in.

7. Calendar:

Commissioner Strayer discussed upcoming events. Feedback was shared about doing a WorldBeat table again this year: a more accessible location is needed, and, it is not workable to have the general City tablecloth and materials but no one from the City generally there.

8. Member Remarks and Announcements:

It was clarified that there are two to three openings on the commission. The attendance expectation is to make 75% of meetings of the main Commission. There are not many replies of Yes to the March Saturday potluck. One idea would be to pair it with the March meeting. Lynelle Wilcox would be interested to attend.

Minutes respectfully presented by staff Gretchen Bennett.