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Providence Human Relations Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes
September 26, 2016

This open session of the Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC) was held at Roger Williams University, 1 Empire Street, Room 232, Providence, RI.

Commissioners present: Chace Baptista, John Gaffney, Patricia LaSalle (arrived 6:06pm), Maria Monteiro, Lucy Rose, Cesar Teo, Raymond Watson, Matthieu Yangambi

Absent: none

PHRC Candidates present: Kai LoMuscio, Celeste Terry-Lo

Staff present: Director Jen Stevens, Asst. City Solicitor Natasha Buckler, Deputy Chief of Staff Marisa O’Gara

1. Call to Order/Introductions/Determination of Quorum:

Commissioner Watson called the meeting to order at 5:39pm. A quorum was established, as 7 of 8 commissioners were present. Chair Watson welcomed commissioners, staff, and guests.

2. Discussion relative to Community and Police relations:

Deputy Chief of Staff Marisa O’Gara gave an overview on the status of the Community Safety Act (CSA). The Step-Up Coalition (PrYSM, DARE, Olneyville Neighborhood Association, and American Friends Service Committee) has met regularly with Mayor Elorza and Providence Police. Eliminating racial and other profiling among law enforcement is a shared goal. The Rhode Island Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act, that the Mayor and Providence Police strongly supported, became law last year and includes most of

the provisions of the CSA. Two points of contention between the City and Step-Up Coalition are the use of canines and the function of the Providence External Review Authority.

Commissioners Gaffney and Baptista requested that the Administration provide a summary of CSA points it supports and disagrees with. Chair Watson suggests we invite a representative of the CSA to attend a PHRC meeting to explain their point of view.

Commissioner LaSalle asked what the City's plan is, if it will not support the CSA. Marisa replied that she believes that an agreement will be reached, and that the City Council is still considering an older version of the CSA. The PHRC is considering endorsing the CSA.

Commissioners with ideas on how to improve Community and Police relations are free to send ideas to Jen. Commissioner Gaffney wondered if federal diversity funding is available through the Department of Justice.

3. Review of September 12, 2016 minutes and vote to accept/amend:

Commissioner Monteiro moved to accept the minutes. Commissioner Rose seconded. All eight commissioners voted in favor. The motion passed.

4. Mayor's Response to ADA Letter:

Chair Watson read aloud Mayor Elorza's response to the PHRC's letter (advising that ADA improvements in City buildings be prioritized should the bond initiative pass). Because the Mayor's letter lacked specific commitments to future ADA improvements, the commissioners would like to hear from ADA Coordinator Kevin Olasanoye and/or Director of Public Property Alan Sepe regarding a time line for the City Hall wheelchair lift being fixed. Commissioner Gaffney also inquired about the status of accessibility signage at 444 Westminster Street. Natasha will reach out to Kevin and Alan to find what their priorities are for ADA improvements. Jen will email a copy of the Mayor's letter to commissioners.

5. Director's Report:

Jen received one phone call with a complaint of housing discrimination based on gender. A mother claimed her daughter was evicted and her security deposit withheld after the landlord said the daughter could not share the apartment with a woman (after her male roommate moved out) because the landlord wanted opposite sex tenants. Jen followed up with the mother, who ultimately

reached an agreement with the landlord. A complaint was not officially filed with the RI HRC.

Last year's MLK Awards were held on Tuesday, February 17 in the Council Chambers. The location and the day of the week worked well, but commissioners would like to hold the event in January, closer to MLK Day. January 31 was suggested and Jen will aim to book the Council Chamber, though the location will be contingent upon the wheelchair lift properly working.

The Providence Arts, Culture, and Tourism Department reached out to the PHRC for support of their *One Minute Plays: Every 28 Hours* play festival. We will end our 10/17 meeting at 6:45pm to attend it together at Trinity Repertory Co. Jen will email details to commissioners.

Deputy Chief of Staff Theresa Agonia submitted paperwork to appoint Kai LoMuscio, Nittaya Saenbut, and Linda Fitzgerald to the three open seats on the PHRC. Those candidates still need to go before the City Council finance committee. Theresa corresponded with candidates via email about the process. Theresa sent a report with Jen to this meeting saying that because vacancies are filled when terms are up, the two remaining vacancies should not be filled before December so that the people filling the vacancies are able to start with a full three-year term, rather than a two-month term.

Chair Watson called for a motion to approve the Director's report. Commissioner Rose motioned. Commissioner Monteiro seconded. All eight commissioners voted in favor. The motion passed.

Commissioner Teo left, 6:30pm.

6. Discussion relative to the 9/12 RI HRC training:

General feedback was that it was a good training. This discussion was kept short in the interest of time. Specific feedback can be emailed to Jen.

7. Election of PHRC Executive Committee:

Previous nominations were for Chair Watson to remain Chair; Commissioner LaSalle to serve as Vice Chair; and Commissioner Gaffney to serve as Secretary (with Jen continuing to take minutes). Terms last two years and technically began on July 1, 2016.

Commissioner Baptista moved to elect Chair Watson as Chair. Commissioner Monteiro seconded. All voted in favor. The motion passed.

Chair Watson moved to elect Commissioner LaSalle as Vice Chair. Commissioner Yangambi seconded. All voted in favor. The motion passed.

Commissioner Yangambi moved to elect Commissioner Gaffney as Vice Chair. Commissioner Yangambi seconded. All voted in favor. The motion passed.

8. Discussion relative to access to education:

Commissioner Yangambi led a discussion regarding access to quality education in Providence Public Schools. He noted that in his opinion, the professional climate is hostile to teachers of color, citing poor practices regarding hiring, graduation criteria, fiscal management, and conflict resolution among faculty. Celeste concurred with Commissioner Yangambi's assessment; both work/have worked in Providence Schools. Commissioner Yangambi questioned whether the PHRC could be a resource to teachers seeking mediation. Natasha advised against the PHRC serving as mediator; a majority of commissioners agreed. Commissioner Baptista suggested that the PHRC could hold a forum to discuss the issue, and Commissioner Monteiro advised that it be held outside of the school environment. Commissioner Monteiro suggested that we all think on this and bring suggestions as to how the PHRC can be helpful to the School District. Commissioner Yangambi had emailed Jen with his thoughts on the topic, and Jen will share his note with the PHRC.

9. Upcoming meetings: Mon. 10/17 regular meeting.

10. Adjournment:

Vice Chair LaSalle motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Yangambi seconded. All voted in favor. The motioned passed. The meeting adjourned at 7:10pm.