

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2023
7:00 p.m., City Hall
301 King Street, Room 2000
The Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Justin Beland
Lisl Brunner, Chair
Marc Bendick, Jr.
Michelle Cho
Susan Kellom
Katherine O'Connell
William Tom Reeder, Jr.
David Rigsby, Vice Chair
Scott Schwartz, Vice Chair
Jon Thompson

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher, Director
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Members Excused

Danielle Beach
Matt Harris
Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson
Conrad Sylvanus

Commissioner Beland and Commissioner Kellom participated remotely by teleconference.

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Brunner

Chair Brunner called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes of December Meeting

Upon a motion by Vice Chair Rigsby, seconded by Commissioner Bendick, Jr., the Commission approved the minutes of the December meeting as amended. All Commissioners present voted aye.

3. Executive Committee Report

Director Kelleher shared that she and Commissioner Harris had talked about the agenda. She shared that Sheriff Sean Casey is confirmed to meet with the Commission on March 21, 2023; he will give an overview of the Department and will also give a report on immigration. Director Kelleher pointed out that Sheriff Casey, being an elected official, is not required to report to the Commission.

Commissioner Harris suggested scheduling a tour of the Detention Center.

Director Kelleher suggested talking about ensuring equitable access to inmate services for all individuals who are at the Detention Center.

Director Kelleher stated that in the past in February the Commission conducted a Black History Month meeting at the Black History Museum.

The Black History Museum has been closed to the public for renovations and installation of a new exhibit, but it may open in time for our meeting.

Commissioners suggested inviting the following possible guests for the February meeting:

- A representative from the Freedom House Museum. (Action item for Jean Kelleher)
- A representative from the NAACP in Alexandria.
- Someone from the Virginia Poverty Law Center

- A Professor from Howard who deals with Civil Rights Law. (Action item for Commissioner Thomson)
- The Police Department to talk about training dealing with cultural differences within the African American community.

Commissioner Bendick suggested holding the Commission meetings at different locations such as the DCHS new building in the West End. Commissioner Thompson suggested the Charles Houston Recreation Center.

The Commission discussed the SRO's topic and Director Kelleher suggested inviting School Board representatives to come in April and talk about SROs, safety for students, and/or other related issues. Commissioner O'Connell suggested inviting the Tenants and Workers United organization, because they have been involved with a group of students on this issue.

Chair Brunner talked about African Communities Together (ACT), and housing issues.

African Communities Together organizes tenants in certain locations around the city, usually places where working class and low-wage workers reside. It is estimated that in some of the properties, 60% of the tenants are immigrants, mostly from Africa.

There were concerns about discrimination.

African Communities Together is going to put together some data and is interested in coming back to the Commission with the compiled data and see whether individuals come forward to present complaints and whether the data will be something that the Commission can look into.

Chair Brunner asked the Commission about how they would like to invite the African Communities Together organizer: should it in the form of a hearing, guest appearance, presentation of data or just encourage them to file complaints?

Director Kelleher stated that the Housing Department is concerned about these issues as well and that they reassured her that they are working on a lot of these issues along with Code Enforcement and other departments in the City.

Commissioner O'Connell stated that this issue should be referred to the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board and we should ask *African Communities Together* to come to talk to the Human Rights Commission.

Director Kelleher reported that Legal Services of Northern Virginia is looking into these issues too.

Director Kelleher suggested that the Commission also invite the Fire Chief for a future meeting. Vice Chair Rigsby suggested having a meeting at a Fire House.

4. Legislative Update

Director Kelleher gave a legislative update on what is happening in the General Assembly.

She reported that the bill that will remove the word "Handicap" from the Virginia Code was voted out of committee unanimously with bipartisan support.

Director Kelleher reported that what Sarah Taylor has done is highlighted principles for the elected officials and the delegation that are serving on both sides in the Senate and the House in Virginia.

Director Kelleher went through the categories high comment what is happening with respect to those principals and said that she received 90 bills to comment on. These are the bills:

Access to voting—The City will support anything that expands access to voting and oppose anything that will constrict voting.

Common sense gun safety— one bill will assume that a law enforcement official could carry a concealed weapon without a permit.

Marriage Equality – There are bills to repeal the constitutional provision that prohibited a marriage between two people of the same sex.

Reproductive Rights and Transgender Rights— The focus is on rights that arguably begin at conception or not.

Community Policing bill—a couple of these bills have to do with the community policing Act that was passed before and making some changes.

Marijuana Legislation—there is a move to establish a framework for the creation of a retail market for selling Cannabis.

Land use – A lot of the focus is on zoning; a lot of more progressive areas in Virginia are talking about zoning for housing based on equity, so there are some bills that are pushing that.

Housing Security and Tenant Protection—Security deposits under the Virginia residential and Tenant Rights. The City is opposing bills like that, but they are supporting anything that will increase the period of time on an eviction, but not permit lengthening the time for landlords to hold the person's deposit.

Local Authority bill—to support anything that expands local authority but opposed anything that would mandate what the city needs to do.

Tax Exemptions and Credit bill—it is for disabled veterans and survival spouses of veterans that would provide State subsidy for property tax exemption.

Workers compensation – There is a bill that will provide workers compensation for City employees who are working in the dispatching of public safety cases.

Traffic offenses bill –issuing citation for certain traffic offenses, and whether the equity considerations outweigh the safety considerations.

Civilian dead in custody—Requiring law enforcement agencies and correctional facilities to report to the department of criminal justice services certain information regarding the death of any person, who was detained, under arrest or in the process of being arrested and in route to be incarcerated.

Housing opportunities for local enforcement—It will give localities more authority to enforce health and safety standards against landlords. Making changes in a proposal for study on affordable housing regulations.

Director Kelleher also reported that the bill that permits local Boards and Commissions to meet virtually twice a year is being tweaked.

5. Old & New Business

Director Kelleher reported that she is still working on acquiring a case management system, which is pending ITS approval due to security concerns.

Chair Brunner suggested that the Commission arrange outreach at ALIVE Food Hubs. These food hubs are held at 510-F South Van Dorn, and the hours are Tuesday-Thursday 12pm-6:30p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays 10am-1p.m. Commissioner O'Connell volunteered to attend Tuesdays and Thursdays. Vice Chair Schwartz also volunteered and said that he can attend any day.

Vice Chair Schwartz reported that it will be easier to go with the City's preference for the rainbow crosswalk and said that he would like to go to the site with someone and see the other available sites and make a recommendation. Vice Chair Rigsby volunteered to accompany Vice Chair Schwartz.

6. Liaison Reports

Commissioner O'Connell reported that Landlord and Tenants Board has worked on a couple of different things recently; one is a recommendation to the Mayor and City Council regarding breed restrictions and weight restrictions in public apartments, because those could be barriers to people finding affordable housing. The other recommendation to the City is regarding having an Advisory Board for Tenants.

Commissioner Reeder reported that the Commission on Aging has been working on the City Budget process and the State budget process. The City of Alexandria is losing money from the office on aging because of the allocation formula that the State has adopted. He also talked about the Virginia Public Access project, which is a service that follows state news and people received a newsletter that has a digest of State oriented news across the State via email. He also reported that they talked about renaming streets in the city and said that there are 41 streets that need to be renamed. The plan is to name three to four streets a year.

Commissioner Beland reported that ACPD started working with the ECNV - ENDependence Center of Northern Virginia on their Old Town Alexandria business accessibility review, which started five months ago; one of the Commissioners put together a small team, which was going to conduct a survey of Alexandria business to see who are ensuring accessibility in their facilities. The Commission will be creating recognition for businesses who are accessible. He reported that Don Buyer reintroduced the Keeping All Students Safe Act, legislation to protect students from dangerous seclusion and restraint discipline practices in school. He also mentioned an issue with restriction on parking in Old Town for people who have a disability placard on their cars; this was brought by a resident of Old Town.

7. Announcements /Adjournment

Director Kelleher announced the City Manager just appointed her as an interim Deputy City Manager as of last Thursday, and she will be serving in this capacity for six to nine months.

MOTION: adjourn the meeting.
Schwartz/Cho **PASSED** unanimously.
The meeting was adjourned at 8:33 p.m.