

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2021  
7:00 p.m.  
VIRTUAL (Zoom)

Members Present

Danielle Beach  
Janeka Cogdell  
Lynette Foster  
Chris Harris  
Matt Harris, Chair  
Susan Kellom  
Katherine Lloyd  
Elizabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson  
David Rigsby  
Scott Schwartz

Staff Present

Jean Keller, Director  
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez

Members Excused

Lisl Brunner, Vice Chair  
Michelle Cho  
Kevin Edwards, Vice Chair

Guests

Sarah Taylor, Assistant City Manager  
& Legislative Director  
Fiona Lassiter

**1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Harris**

Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 7:04p.m. Introductions were made. Chair Harris welcomed special guest Legislative Director/Assistant City Manager, Sarah Taylor.

**2. Approval of November Minutes**

Upon a motion by Commissioner Schwartz, seconded by Commissioner Foster, the Commission approved the minutes of the November meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye with one abstention.

**3. Guest: Sarah Taylor, Assistant City Manager & Legislative Director**

Chair Harris welcome and introduced City Legislative Director and Assistant City Manager Sarah Taylor. Ms. Taylor thanked the Commission for having her and said that it is always a pleasure to come to talk to the Commission. She said that it is post-election, pre-general assembly session and she is fairly certain that this is going to be a very interesting session. She added that she will be bringing a lot of masks, a lot of hand sanitizers, and rapid tests before she comes home on Fridays, because there is no expectation that there is going to be any real significant public health set for General Assembly this session.

Ms. Taylor said that this is going to be a different session; the balance of power in the General Assembly with the House being held by the Republicans and the Senate being held by the Democrats with a very narrow margin. She stated that this is a session where there is not a lot of clarity as to what to expect. The Senate democratic leadership has said that they plan to be a brick wall for the nonsense that comes over from the House. She added that she has a feeling that they will get a little bit of legislation and a budget, and that will be it. She stated that the Governor, at this point, has only named two cabinet secretaries. He has named the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Commerce Labor.

She stated that she does not think that they are going to roll back all the advances that have been made in the last couple of years for the most part when it comes to a lot of the issue around voter access, equity, and equality. She stated that she has a feeling that it will be pretty much status quo, and there will not be a giant number of mega changes that are going to happen. Ms. Taylor stated that a couple of other things that are on the horizons right now that could impact the way things get done this session are when they finalized the redistricting maps, there is a chance a lot of people are suddenly in primaries with other people in the General Assembly, there is a chance that people are making decision not only base on the way the caucus operates, or the way things are going, and the choices that people make are that there is chance that the House has elections in 2022, it is still up for debate whether or not they are required to run at the first available election on the new district lines. She reported that there is a lawsuit right now that states that they should run the first available election, which will be 2022, verse waiting to 2023. The other one is whether or not there is a brand-new Congressional District in Prince William County and who runs for it, and whether it is several members of General Assembly and whether or not they will use this session as an opportunity to lay a foundation for their congressional run.

She stated that this is all to say that who knows what is going to happen in January. Ms. Taylor stated that all that she is going to do, is to go with the City Legislative Package that Council approved this past week and will go in with our delegation and do their best.

Ms. Taylor addressed questions by Commissioners, such as what her perception is on prioritizing the minimum wage. She stated that there is a general principal that cover these areas and that support policies and workers and said that last year they did an increase of the minimum wage over-time to \$15.00. She added that one of the things to keep an eye on is whether there is any effort to roll back that scaling up to \$15.00. The minimum wage in Virginia will go to \$11.00 on January 1, 2022, and it will increase every year until it gets to \$15.000. She also addressed a question about any roll backs on basic human rights protection and basic housing protections, and said that there were Republicans who voted on those issues. She stated that she thinks there is a chance that some of the abortion stuff can get rolled back.

Ms. Taylor also addressed a question about the status of Virginia's law under contributory negligence and said that there is an item in the legislative package, which is in the principal section where it talks about contributory negligence specially when it is related to vulnerable road users. She said that this an issue that Scott Surovell has been on for the last couple of years, but will check with him and see if she can find out whether he is planning on doing anything. Ms. Taylor will figure out if anybody has pre-filed a bill on this issue and she suggested putting together something to express the Commission's support on this issue. Commissioner Palmer Johnson suggested inviting Scott Surovell to come before the Commission to address the Commission concerning contributory negligence.

Commissioner Palmer Johnson talked about bill 659 which was presented by Scott Surovell and the bill was very limited. Ms. Taylor said that she is going to watch the video from that committee and see if she can unpack it and follow up with Director Kelleher to let her know what the conversation was in that committee and then let her know what Scott Surovell will do and then what is out there for the Commission to get engage with and go from there.

Chair Harris thanked Ms. Taylor for her presentation.

#### **4. Executive Committee /Upcoming Meetings**

Chair Harris stated that the Executive Committee met last week and said that they are trying to schedule a guest for the January meeting.

Chair Harris stated that the Commission is looking to team up with the NAACP for the Commission's February meeting with Acting Police Chief Don Hayes. This meeting will be held at the Black History Museum.

Chair Harris stated that Vice Chair Brunner spearheading the pre-trial risk assessment instrument issue and she will continue to work on getting a guest from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services to come to speak to the Commission on this issue.

Chair Harris stated that the Executive Committee has requested an update from the Alexandria Health Department related to the outreach that they did last year to reach underserved communities that might be resistant on getting the Covid vaccine. He said that they just want to see what the stats were, they want an update to see if the outreach worked, and to see what the vaccination rates are.

Director Kelleher stated that the Health Department is not doing large PODs because they don't need to them now, but they are doing a lot of smaller venues and smaller dispensing site. There is a huge push to respond to omicron. She also stated that all of the VDAH and UVA models are now showing a significant peak in January and February. Commissioner Foster praised the Alexandria Health Department because she was able to get an appointment for her booster shot faster than through her primary care.

Chair Harris stated that there are currently two vacancies on the Commission: one is a liaison from Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities and the other one is a liaison from the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board.

#### **5. Old and New Business**

##### Alexandria's Community Remembrance Project

Chair Harris stated that Director Kelleher has sent out a PowerPoint presentation about the Community Remembrance Project. Director Kelleher stated that the steering committee met with representative from EJI and the representatives are very pleased with Alexandria's programming and they actually approved Alexandria for the plan going forward for the next couple of years, and ultimately leading to claiming a replica of the pillar that is there.

##### Rainbow Crosswalk letter

Chair Harris stated that the rainbow crosswalk letter is an issue that continues to move on slowly and said that last week he met with Kirk McPike, incoming City Council member. He said that his sense is that this is tied up in the Administrative process. Director Kelleher suggested that after the first of the year the Commission should try to push this a little bit with the City Manager's Office.

Chair Harris stated that they were handed the Proclamation for Human Rights last week.

Chair Harris also mentioned the issue of the 3G phased out and the affordability issue that it poses for people. Director Kelleher stated that poor and elderly people are going to be impacted with the 3G phasing out, because they are not going to be able to use their old phones anymore.

## **6. Liaison Reports**

Commissioner Palmer Johnson reported that the Commission for Women met on Tuesday, December 14<sup>th</sup> and discussed the electronic participation Policy. The Commissioners who serve as liaison to other commission were asked to survey their respective Commissions to ask if they have concern with the policy and or if they will be willing to join with the Commission for Women to register their reservations about the policy. Commissioner Palmer Johnson asked the Commission how they are feeling about the electronic participation policy. Chair Harris stated that they need to set aside some time to get a consensus of the members. She said that the Commission for Women have serious reservation about the certain parts of the policy, so they will be writing to the City to express those reservations. Chair Harris asked Director Kelleher to distribute the electronic participation policy to the Commissioners and said that he will be happy to compile the views of the Commission.

Commissioner Palmer Johnson stated that the Domestic Violence Department and the Sexual Assault Center had their Christmas Party for the children on December 16<sup>th</sup>, there were approximately 150 children who received gifts.

Commissioner Cogdell reported that the Economic Opportunities Commission had three guest speakers for childcare and a lot of the discussion was subsidy programs, medical waivers for the parents, social skills, social matters and also discussed a skills program dealing with childcare.

Commissioner Lloyd reported that the Alexandria Commission on Person with Disabilities did not have a meeting this month.

Commissioner Foster reported that the Commission on Aging met on December 9<sup>th</sup> and they began with an update of Commissioners that were leaving and said that Debbie Ludington is retiring after 35 year with the City and Terri Lynch, the Director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services is also leaving. Pamela Guerrero is the new Director for the Charles Houston Center and Pamela Austin is taking Debbie's place on the Commission on Aging. Victoria Almquist gave an update on Covid-19 and said that Alexandria was a double digit every day and positivity rates increased from 3% to 4.8%. Councilwoman Del Pepper was their guest speaker and gave a look back over her 36 years of services with the City.

## **7. Announcements /Adjournment**

Director Kelleher announced that she will be preparing a December Human Rights Proclamation.

**MOTION:** adjourn the meeting.

Palmer Johnson/Foster **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:22p.m.