

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, JUNE 21, 2022  
7:00 p.m., City Hall  
301 King Street, Room 2000  
The Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Mark Bendick, Jr.  
Justin Beland  
Lisl Brunner, Vice Chair  
Michelle Cho  
Matt Harris, Chair  
Katherine O'Connell  
William Tom Reeder, Jr.  
David Rigsby  
Scott Schwartz

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher, Director  
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Members Excused

Danielle Beach  
Janeka Cogdell  
Susan Kellom  
Elizabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson

Guest

Diane Ruggiero, Deputy Director, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

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

Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Introductions were made. Chair Harris welcomed new Commissioner Mark Bendick, Jr. Commissioner Bendick, Jr. stated that he is an Economist and has lived in Alexandria for six years, and in the Washington area for fifty years. His specialization is poverty and discrimination and has served as an expert witness for the civil rights community in court cases that have gone all the way up to the Supreme Court covering race, gender, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and source of income.

**2. Approval of May Minutes/Review of April Meeting Notes**

Upon a motion by Commissioner Rigsby, seconded by Vice Chair Brunner the Commission approved the minutes of the May meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye with one abstention.

**3. Guest**

Diane Ruggiero, Deputy Director of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities was here to help the commission understand more about public arts creation within the city. Chair Harris mentioned the challenges that the Commission has had with the rainbow crosswalk idea that the Commission originally put forth before City Council about a year-and-a-half ago. Ms. Ruggiero stated that she is the Deputy Director for the City Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities Department and she leads the City's Arts Office. She explained that they do all different types of art, so they do the City's Public Art program; their office manages City's produced events, as well as the permitting of everyone else's events for the city and they also oversee the Torpedo Factory Art Center. She stated that she has been working for the City for ten years. She stated that she was happy to talk about crosswalks and public arts and how to make public art happen.

Chair Harris mentioned a news article about street art on in the Washington Post, which came up with a thesis that concluded that public crosswalk adds to pedestrians' safety. Ms. Ruggiero stated that she got that letter long before the Commission did, because she had been asking for painted crosswalks for a long time. She said that so many cities do them and she had asked for them during the complete streets project. She stated that even in the earlier days, crosswalks had shown as way to slow down traffic and to draw attention to crosswalks, it makes people use the crosswalks. She stated that she has run into the same legislative challenges that the Commission has encountered. She stated that one of the things that her office tries to do is help folks find another way to do what they want to do. She added that her great push to try and get something on the street has been on the 100 block of King Street, since that is closed, but the denial for that was that the closure was thought to be temporary, and so the concern was that if we painted it, we have to undo it.

She also suggested that instead of an intersection that has four crosswalks, maybe proposing something like a midblock crosswalk, such as the one on Eisenhower behind the Patent and Trade office. She also said that she was working with T&ES before covid to try to do some murals in the parking garages and suggested that as an option. She also suggested finding a crosswalk in a neighborhood where the residents will also support it. She stated that when they get the green light to go, she is right there with the Commission to help undertake this type of initiative, but the legislation seems to be what it is, and her strategies have been to try to find other types of compromises and so we can eventually get what we want.

Commissioner Schwartz stated that he is the one that draft the letter asking for the City to consider the crosswalk and it was sent a year ago, and explained that the crosswalks are explicitly not a pride month thing, it would have been nice, if they had been approved during pride month or install during pride month. He also explained that it is not just LGBTQ+ communities they were seeking what it is called the pride plus message, which includes people of color, transgender, and all communities. He also added that there is no legislation on this issue; it is a federal highway administration guidance. A 2009, 869-page manual with three paragraphs that talks about crosswalk painting, and arguably it only requires that the colors not interfere with the bright white lines of the crosswalk. He also stated that he has spoken to people in multiple cities across the country when he was working on the letter and only 2 or 3 had received any kind of comment from the highway administration, which was a letter saying that the guidance stated that they shouldn't do this, and they ignored it and there were no consequences. Commissioner Schwartz stated that it will be really great if we could get the City to acknowledge and reconsider the initial request that the Commission made last March, to put the crosswalk at a permanent intersection on King Street.

Ms. Ruggiero stated that the only thing is that is not up to her, because she does not manage the Streets and it is something that she has been trying to initiate as well, but maybe it is time to try again, now with the new Bloomberg study out. She stated that she is here to promote the arts, but it is somebody other than her that needs to say, "Yes you can do that in a City Street". Ms. Ruggiero suggested approaching it like larger initiative with more support and said that the Arts Commission will be supportive and said that the timing is good now because they are doing their public art plan for the next three years. She is happy to work with the Human Rights Commission on getting something like that done.

Commissioner Schwartz will work with Ms. Ruggiero on an outline about the artwork will be install, what type of materials will be use and how it will maintain going forward; using the new Bloomberg information that came out about that.

Director Kelleher asked what else is coming to waterfront park. Ms. Ruggiero stated that the "I Love You" installation is there now, they are hoping to set up some photo session in the fall that folks can sign up with professional photographer sometime in September. She added that Nina Cooke John is the artist for next year's installation and will have a draft design around September or October; it has to be created and install by March next year. She encouraged Commissioners to be part of the Public Art Task Force Committee to participate in selectin the projects coming up. She will be sending the link to the form to be completed to Director Kelleher.

Commissioner Schwartz mentioned that he has posted a petition on Change.org asking that the Alexandria City Council reconsider the rejection of the Alexandria Human Rights Commission request for a PRIDE Plus crosswalk "at a prominent intersection on King Street."

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

Chair Harris stated that the Executive Committee met last week and discussed many topics including celebrating pride month. He added that the Committee also talked about the new leadership that is coming up.

#### **Proactive efforts to promote the Office of Human Rights' and the Commission's roles in addressing discriminatory practices in housing**

Vice Chair Brunner stated that in the past couple of years the Commission has been constrain about the kinds of thing that they can do. She added that they have not seem much in the way of complaints regarding discrimination. She added that a lot of that is probably because of covid and some of that is due to the fact that the people who are most vulnerable are not aware or afraid of retaliation. She stated that the Commission has the authority to conduct studies and hearings to kind of look into matters dealing with discrimination in Health and Social Services, discrimination in Public Education and Housing, and asked could the Commission have a meeting at the condo association or at a landlord association meeting other ways to get the word how about the Commission does. Director Kelleher stated that the Human Rights office does not have a HUD contract, but works closely with the Office of Housing, but she believes that there are more complaints out there that we are not seeing and said that she welcomes the opportunity of doing more outreach.

Director Kelleher stated that Sarah Taylor will be the guest for the next month meeting and said that Ms. Taylor has been task by the City Manager to oversee the Office of Communications and Public Information. Ms. Taylor will be implementing the City Manager's vision for a new way to engage Alexandria, a new communication kind of outreach plan, so she will be talking about that to the Commission next month. Director Kelleher stated that the Office of Human Rights has also an equity initiative to try to work with other Department to have some office hours on the West End.

Vice Chair Brunner mentioned that there has been a concern expressed particularly at some of the housing communities, especially where largely immigrant populations live. There are things that may not rise to a complaint, such as being charge an extra fee to have a stroller on the balcony; issues with parking, people are being denied parking and have to park on the street.

## **5. Elections**

Commissioner Schwartz presented the slate as follow: Vice Chair Brunner is interested in the Chair position, Commissioner Rigsby is interested in the first Vice Chair position and Commissioner Schwartz are interested in the second Vice Chairs position. Chair Harris closed the slate and asked for additional nominations from the floor, there were none, nominations were closed. By acclamation the slate was accepted as presented, which is Vice Chair Brunner as Chair, Commissioner Rigsby as first Vice Chair and Commissioner Schwartz as second Vice Chair. All Commissioners present voted aye.

## **6. Old and New Business**

### Naturalization Ceremony

Chair Harris announced that the Naturalization Ceremony with USCIS will be held on September 13, at 1:00 p.m. in Market Square and encourage Commissioners to attend.

### ACPD Awards

Director Kelleher announced that the Alexandria Commission on Person with Disabilities' award ceremony will be held on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, at the American Physical Therapy Association, at 5:30 p.m.

## **7. Liaison Report**

Commissioner O'Connell reported that Landlord and Tenant Relations Board did not meet this month.

Commissioner Beland invited everyone to the ACPD awards and stated that the Gerry Bertier scholarship winner is Katherine Waters a student at the Alexandria High School. He stated that one of the topics at the ACPD meeting last month was a lot of issues that they have been having with scooters. The other thing that they are working on is on forming a committee that will review businesses in Old Town Alexandria with regard to accessibility.

Commissioner Reeder reported that Commission on Aging meeting was virtual and that they also had discussed the scooter policy too. He also added that they had a presentation from Mike Doyle from Family for Safe Streets; this is group that is trying to implement vision zero now. There main activity is setting up a system of close call reports; they have a heat map, and you can download this map and if you see a close call, you can report it. The Commission also elected their new officers this month and said that they are also working hard on finishing up their Age Friendly Plan, they are going to have focus groups to evaluate how well they have done with their Age Friendly Plan.

## **8. Announcements /Adjournment**

Commissioner Schwartz stated that he works with the City of Alexandria LGBTQ+ Task Force and said that Casey Pick is the Senior Fellow for Advocacy & Government Affairs at The Trevor Project. The Trevor Project is an organization that helps LGBT kids find support and it is suicide prevention organization. Casey Pick is a member of the Commonwealth Baptist Church, and the Commonwealth Baptist Church on Sunday June 26<sup>th</sup>., at 4:00 p.m., is hosting "We Say Gay" A Community Forum on Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation & What We Can Do About It.

Director Kelleher announced that she met with the new person who works for the Office of Historic Alexandria, and he is going to be in charge of Oral History. He is interested in the Office of Human

Rights and the Commission and the history and whether what he is task in doing with help the Commission; maybe promoting some of the history of what the Commission has accomplished. He is going to be having focus groups sometime in the summer.

Chair Harris Thanked the Commission allowing him to be the Chair this past year.

**MOTION:** adjourn the meeting.  
Schwartz/Cho **PASSED** unanimously.  
The meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.