

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2022
7:00 p.m.
VIRTUAL (Zoom)

Members Present

Lisl Brunner, Chair
Marc Bendick, Jr.
Michelle Cho
Matt Harris
Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson
William Tom Reeder, Jr.
David Rigsby, Vice Chair
Scott Schwartz, Vice Chair
Conrad Sylvanus
Jon Thompson

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher, Director
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Members Excused

Danielle Beach
Justin Beland
Susan Kellom
Katherine O'Connell

Guest speaker

Erika Calloway Kleiner, LGBTQ+ Task Force Staff & Liaison to the CMO
Charles A. Costen-Sumpter, Immediate Past LGBTQ+ Task Force Chair & Chairman of Board, Safe Space NOVA
Jordan L. Costen-Sumpter, Founder & Executive Director, Safe Space NOVA

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Brunner

Chair Brunner called the meeting to order at 7:15pm, and a quorum was established by 7:40 pm.

2. Guests: Erika Calloway Kleiner, Charles A. Costen-Sumpter and Jordan L. Costen-Sumpter

Chair Brunner welcomed guest speakers, Erika Calloway Kleiner, LGBTQ+ Task Force Staff & Liaison to the CMO; Charles A. Costen-Sumpter, Immediate Past LGBTQ+ Task Force Chair & Chairman of Board, Safe Space NOVA; and Jordan L. Costen-Sumpter, Founder & Executive Director, Safe Space NOVA.

Erika Calloway Kleiner started by saying that she has been working for the City for 20 years in some capacity or another. She added that since 2007, she has been working on Task Force efforts to create better services and better access to services for LGBTQ+ people in Alexandria. Ms. Calloway Kleiner shared a slide presentation with the Commission. She talked about the Task Force and specifically about work with LGBTQ+ youth in Alexandria and said that Charles and Jordan do all the work. They have been active members of the LGBTQ+ Task Force for many years. She stated that the mission of the Alexandria LGBTQ+ Task Force is to create a space where LGBTQ+ people and allies gather quarterly to network, share ideas, and plan training and community events. The goal of the Task Force is to create safe and inclusive service provisions to LGBTQ+ people in the City of Alexandria. She stated that their main focus since 2007, has been, but they have been also focusing on doing Alexandria Pride the past five years.

Ms. Calloway Kleiner provided a brief history of the Task force. The program receives funding in many different ways, currently, they are being funded by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). This will get them through 2024, and then they will be looking for other funding opportunities. Their organizational structure has evolved over time. The taskforce initially had a chairperson with staff support when they were the Victim Services Advisory Board, and then for a long time it was staff facilitation with some community leadership, and now they have an Executive Board and LGBTQ+ Navigators as part of the ARPA funding. In the last year the leadership of the Task Force has been remarkable. She added that they created and passed the By-Laws in 2022. She added that they have about 70 members comprising of all different kinds of folks across the city, and community members as well.

Ms. Calloway Kleiner stated that they regularly conduct training for new employees of DCHS, Police, Sheriff's Office, and the Fire Department. She added that they provide training on requests, and it is free. She added that they have trained thousands of services providers on inclusivity and equitable services and spaces, and they constantly see that folks know how to create a safe and more inclusive environment after training. They also help folks create inclusive policies and practices at different levels, they have helped other jurisdictions like Fairfax and Arlington. They have talked to folks there about creating Task Forces. She added that one of the things that they have done a lot in this past year is providing support and technical assistance in different ways, for example the health department reached out for feedback about messaging around monkeypox and monkeypox vaccine, so the Task Force crafted a lot of that language that was coming out from the Health Department as well as they just helped to revamp the Communications Guide for the City. She also mentioned that they also conducted a day-long training with ACPS counselors and social workers. She added that after that training there was an opportunity for Alexandria to sign onto an Amicus brief that was around the Gavin Grimm case which went to the Supreme Court and said that this was due to the training, they received, and it was because the schools felt comfortable signing on to the Amicus brief. She shared that it appears that that more LGBTQ+ people are accessing services.

Charles A. Costen-Sumpter stated that he is now the immediate past Chair of the Task Force, and prior to that, he Chaired the Commission on HIV/AIDS in the City more many years. He stated that he also chaired the School Health Advisory Committee where he worked with Dr. Julie Crawford on Family Life Education for students. He stated that it has been a tremendous experience to work with the City and said that currently he is the Senior Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at World Wildlife Fund for all of the US. He stated that he believes in the Task Force and said that he is working with Erika on a lot of the initiatives. He stated that they have had workshop centered in BIPOC and trans communities and many people continue to attend. - He said that just a couple of weeks ago they advised the City regarding language in their publications and the proper words to be use.

Mr. Costen-Sumpter stated that they saw that there was a gap when it comes to youth and what resources LGBTQ+ youth have, The Task Force, in its capacity, has dragged a storyteller, which is important and fun for the kids, it captures their imagination and it give kids the opportunity to participate. He added that they have done this at the Alexandria Pride for the past couple of years. He added that they have partnered with other groups such as the City, Equality Virginia and Safe Space NOVA. He shared that these events are publicized and promoted through the City Government

platform. He shared that the events are well attended and added that they had about 250 people that participated in the Alex Pride Fair in 2022 earlier this summer. He stated that the 6th Annual Pride Fair will be held on June 3rd and said that they are always looking for support, sponsors to participate, and for organizations to have a table.

He added that they have conducted training for the Sheriff Department as well as the Police Department; the aim of the training is to help the Sheriff's and law enforcement to the LGBTQ+ community see them as humans, have compassion for them when offering their services because they deserve respect, care and attention. He added that the questions that they received from the Sheriff and Police Department were good, they wanted to know how to better provide those services and how to be part of the process.

Charles A. Costen-Sumpter stated that Safe Space NOVA is dedicated to providing a safe, accepting and supporting environment to combat social stigmas, bullying and other challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ youth. He added that they have lived here for years and realized that there was not a space for youth in Alexandria, in Northern Virginia, and a lot of kids had to go to DC to find resources and support.

He stated that he and his husband started Safe Space NOVA in 2016 and said that over the past six years they have worked with Alexandria City Public Schools, Loudoun County Schools, Fairfax County Schools and Arlington County Schools.

Jordan Costen-Sumpter stated that he is originally from Georgia and is fortunate to be living in the progressive area of Northern Virginia. He shared that he was very surprised to learn that there was no LGBTQ+ center and no program for LGBTQ+ Youth in such a progressive area as Alexandria. He added that LGBTQ+ community is 35 times more likely to attempt suicide, experience depression and anxiety. He stated that the only way to combat that, is building a sense of community.

Safe Space NOVA was founded on March 29, 2016, with very little funding and has been in business since then. They started with some social activities for the first couple of years and started attending different events and festivals around the area and just letting people who they are. He shared that last June in 2022, they hosted a LGBTQ+ Prom at the St. James, and it was a very well attended event with approximately 175 students. He added that they now have expanded to include a social support group and they met every other Saturday, so twice a month.

Jordan Costen-Sumpter stated that everything that all Safe Space services are free for to the youth and said that their goal is to expand activities to include tutoring and mentoring. He stated that they need to do coalition building because LGBTQ+ Youth are just not just residing in Alexandria, they are all across the Northern Virginia. He added that they are a very small organization, consisting of 7-8 members who all have full time jobs He added that up until 2022 everybody was a volunteer, including himself, but they have decided to start giving some stipends as a show of appreciation. They are sustained from donations, personal donations. He added that he quit his job and went back to school and became a social worker and provides therapies for the LGBTQ+ community as well. He stated that people can find out more about Safe Space NOVA in all the social media platform and they have their own website as well; this is an easy way to donate and find out about their donations. He added that they have a quarterly newsletter that they started last year, and it has been very well received and they also have an annual report available.

Charles Costen-Sumpter suggested for the Commission to put in an annual request for the City to provide funds to provide training for ACPS staff on LGBTQ+ Youth.

Chair Brunner thanked Erika Calloway Kleiner, Charles A. Costen-Sumpter, and Jordan L. Costen-Sumpter for their presentation.

3. Approval of Minutes of October Meeting

Upon a motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Palmer Johnson, the Commission approved the minutes of the October meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye.

4. Executive Committee Report

The Executive Committee did not meet.

5. Old & New Business

Fund for Services

Commissioner Bendick reported that each year the Department of Community and Human Services spends about 100 million dollars, within that, about two million dollars are set aside as grants to human services non-profits through the Alexandria Fund for Human Services to, provide essential City Services according to City's priorities. He stated that the City's Department of Community and Human Services holds a grant competition for these funds every three years, and he is just finishing representing this Commission on the committee that has updated the processes, criteria and priorities for the 2023 competition. He added that Director Kelleher distributed a PowerPoint slide that gives all the details of what the Committee went through and what they came up with, which has been sent to the Commission members. They came up with a 100-point scales for evaluating proposals, with 50% of the points awarded based on: (1) what focus populations within the City will receive services (consistent with the City's priorities, including initiatives on reducing racial equity); (2) what specific unmet needs these services will address; and (3) whether the program design to deliver the services is likely to be effective (consistent with evidence-based best practices). The other 50% of the points go to other aspects of the proposal such as innovation, collaboration, efficiency.

The idea of this explicit point-based scoring system is that information will be shared transparently both with people who will be scoring the proposals and with the grant seekers, so they will know how they are going to be evaluated. The goal is to create a very open and fair process. He said that he will be happy to go through the PowerPoint slides with anyone with questions. He stated that the Department of Community and Human Services is open for public comments this week. The proposed design for the competition will go to City Council in late January, and then the competition will be held in the late Spring.

Legislative Package

Director Kelleher stated that the first reading of the legislative packet took place last Tuesday, and a public hearing is on Saturday. She stated that this session will be a short session, and that there are a lot of really good principles that are outlined, many Human Rights issues that are being highlighted. She added that they are beginning their Friday legislative meeting where they get updates from Sarah Taylor and said that once she receives that information, she will share it with the Commission.

Chair Brunner mentioned a letter that the Economic Opportunity Commission sent to City Council on Saturday which has six points, two of the points that are most relevant for the Human Rights Commission mandate are: ensuring that defendants have equal access to legal information, right to counsel during eviction proceedings, and making sure that communications occur in languages other than English.

6. Liaison Reports

Commissioner Reeder reported that the Commission on Aging met a couple of weeks ago and said that heard from the City Manager's for global warming initiatives. He added that they discussed at length having more emphasis on the fund's allocation in relationship to the target audience of the City, and more funds allocated towards services that addresses seniors, and said that they passed a resolution to that affect. He added that they had a long discussion raised by a citizen commentor who requested that their Commission endorse a resolution in favor or Medicare for all and the Commission decline to that because it was outside their authority.

Commissioner Bendick inquired about the demographic data that Police Chief Hayes was going to provide and asked if it had arrived. Director Kelleher responded by saying that she has not received it, but that she will follow up on it.

7. Announcements /Adjournment

MOTION: adjourn the meeting.
Schwartz/Harris **PASSED** unanimously.
The meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.