

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2022  
7:00 p.m., City Hall  
301 King Street, Room 2000  
The Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Danielle Beach  
Justin Beland (attended by phone)  
Marc Bendick, Jr.  
Lisl Brunner, Chair  
Michelle Cho  
Matt Harris, Chair  
Susan Kellom  
Katherine O'Connell  
Elizabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson  
William Tom Reeder, Jr.  
David Rigsby, Vice Chair  
Scott Schwartz, Vice Chair

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher, Director  
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Member of the public

Meronne Teklu  
Jon Thompson

Guest speaker

David Lanier, Assistant City Attorney

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

Vice Chair Rigsby on behalf of Chair Brunner called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Introductions were made. Chair Brunner welcomed Meronne Teklu and Jon Thompson. Chair Brunner said that Ms. Teklu is interested in applying for the liaison position from the Economic Opportunities Commission. Mr. Thompson stated that he is a citizen and decided to check on the meeting process.

**2. Remarks & Moment of Silence in Honor of Chet Avery**

Commissioner Harris gave a brief remark on behalf of Chet Avery and said that Chet was a long-time member of the Human Rights Commission, over 25 years, and said that Chet was visually impaired since he was 17 years old and said that he was just a fantastic Person. Commissioner Harris added that Chet was highly opinionated, highly compassionate, and highly empathetic. He also added that Chet Avery was funny and great to be around; he shared some funny stories. A moment of silence was held in honor of Chet Avery. Commissioner Schwartz added that Chet Avery had an amazing influence in having the Pentagon bus terminal be accessible for the blind and vision impaired.

**3. Discussion Topics**

Chair Brunner welcomed guest speaker, David Lanier, Assistant City Attorney. Mr. Lanier joined virtually and gave a presentation on Public Meetings, FOIA Requirements, FOIA Meetings, Documents Rules, City Rules, Roberts Rules of Order, and Conflict of interest. He stated that the Virginia Freedom of Information Act has two main components: 1) Access to public records and 2) access to public meetings. He also talked about the limited ability for most public bodies to hold all-virtual public meetings, provided that the public body has adopted an electronic participation policy and follows the requirements enumerated in the Virginia Code and said that all-virtual meetings are limited in each calendar year to either two (2) meetings or 25% of the meetings held rounded up to the next whole

number, or whichever is greater. He stated that he will be providing the PowerPoint presentation to the Commission.

#### Presentation on Office of Human Rights & Commission Roles & Responsibilities

Director Kelleher decided not to do her presentation and said that she will email her slides to the Commission.

Chair Brunner asked under what circumstances can the Commission conduct studies and hold public hearings. Director Kelleher stated that there are a couple of elements and said that in the Code the Commission has the power to conduct studies, if they think there is something that rises to discrimination. Holding a Public Hearing, the Commission can have a private hearing that will be for two or three Commissioners, if the Office is working on a particular case, and the Commission is asked to do a predetermination conference, which will be confidential.

#### **4. Executive Committee / Goals & Initiatives for FY23**

##### Legislative Proposals for City Package

Director Kelleher stated that she had sent to the Commission what they did last year, which was to highlight principals. Human Rights and Non-discrimination is a broad principle, so that the Commission is watching the General Assembly for anything that will expand rights or will take rights away; things that the Commission will support or oppose. She also mentioned access to voting, marriage equality constitutional amendment, and “Ban the Box,” would like to have expanded into Virginia Law. Also, immigration and Law enforcement, Reporting requirements in Virginia which differs from those in Maryland and DC; amending language in the Virginia Code. For example, (as Legislative Director Taylor has suggested), specifically removing the word “handicap” wherever it appears and replacing it, as appropriate, with “disability” or “person with a disability,”; Police/Community Relations, and support legislation to enhance positive police/community relations.

Director Kelleher stated that the Commission can put forward something similar to this, it just needs to be done by the end of September. Commissioner Palmer Johnson suggested putting forward something related to contributory negligence. Commissioner O’Connell suggested adding something about protecting abortion rights. Commissioner Bendick suggested seeking a state mandate for police body camera. Director Kelleher stated the Commission might want to tailor the request, so that there is something funding that goes along with it.

##### Electronic Participation Policy

The Commission adopted the Electronic Participation Policy.

##### Outreach

Chair Brunner stated that Director Kelleher, Commissioner Palmer Johnson, and she attended the Tenants and Workers United semi-annual meeting and said that they had a table and handed out some literature. She added that she also met with Legal Services of Northern Virginia, with African Communities together and with two members of City Council to find out what the Commission’s priorities should be and said that all of these organizations indicated that Housing was the number one issue. She added that all of the issues that exist in the City with regards to housing are not clearly tied to discrimination, but there are practices that could be discriminatory with regards to housing. People are

complaining about living conditions repeatedly, things like rodents, insects, and they are being told “That is because you are from African and that is the way you live there”. She added that she thinks that there are a lot of systemic issues. There are issues that are more appropriate for the Landlord and Tenant relations office to address. She stated that Director Kelleher and she attended the eviction prevention task force, which meets monthly, and they have invited someone from the Human Rights Commission to attend regularly. Commissioner Reeder volunteered to attend this meeting and Commissioner O’Connell stated that she can attend half of the meetings.

Director Kelleher stated that it is important to maintain a presence with them, because they asked the basic question as to where one starts with a housing complaint, and the answers is, it depends because if it is landlord and tenant, it is the office of Housing; if they think it is discrimination they can start with our office. Director Kelleher stated that the eviction prevention task force is holding a number of meetings and they are all public, they are focusing on Landlord and Tenant issues.

Director Kelleher stated that Chair Brunner and she talked about inviting the key representatives from Legal Services and Office on Housing to meet with the Commission and talked about distinguishing among the jobs that we all have and what will be most helpful from the Human Rights Commission for all of that.

Chair Brunner suggested inviting someone who can speak to the concerns of the residents such as Tenants and Workers United.

Vice Chair Schwartz asked if the City has a contingency plan if suddenly we find 50 migrants coming to Market Square? Director Kelleher stated that she did not have an answer to that but will get the information. Commissioner Beach stated that there should be some set up were at least the churches and interfaith community have a big network and resources to help.

Commissioner O’Connell stated that the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board is putting on three in-person tenants’ rights and responsibilities workshops. She will forward the information to the Commission.

Director Kelleher stated that the Executive Committee has a list of the invitation for future meetings and said that they had talked about inviting the Alexandria Police Department for the Office of External Affairs & Professional Responsibility investigations report. Director Kelleher stated that the Civilian Review Board has been meeting, and they have an annual report and said that the auditor should be on board soon. She stated that she has mentioned to the Deputy City Manager that the Commission would like to invite the Police Chief and said that she is waiting for the City Manager’s office to get back to her. The Commission decided to invite the Police Chief.

## **5. Old & New Business**

### **Annual Report**

Commissioner Harris request to remove the rainbow crosswalk under accomplishments from the annual report. Director Kelleher stated that the Executive Committee had also discussed having a Task Force to work on Rainbow Crosswalks. The following Commissioners volunteered for the Task Force: Commissioner Harris, Vice Chair Rigsby and Vice Chair Schwartz.

### Staff Appreciation

Director Kelleher reported that, because of family obligations the office staff prefers to have a lunch, or gift cards will also be great.

### Fund for Human Services (DCHS)

Vice Chair Rigsby stated that he had attended a meeting at DCHS in August, which was for all the Chairs of the various Commissions or staff members, and he filled in for Chair Brunner. He stated that everyone is interested in the Housing issue. Specifically with fund for Human Services, they fund a lot of organizations that do a lot of good work for people, and it is sort of like a grant review process. It is very intense, and they had 60 applications last year; they granted 43 of them. He stated that they are looking for volunteers for two different groups, one is in the short term for October and November. they are going to reevaluate their process for how they grant the money. The second one is the actual grant review, reviewing applications process, which will be in March and April, and it involves receiving a number of grants; score them and serve in a panel, and then they will put that into a formula and decide who gets the money. Commissioner Bendick volunteered to serve on both groups and Commissioner Schwartz also volunteered.

Director Kelleher stated that Governor Youngkin has established a Department of Education policy on trans students and said that there is a lot of reaction to this. She added that the Alexandria City Public Schools have issued a statement with their position saying that ACPS will follow its own policy and it is not changing it. Director Kelleher also informed that the Mayor had contacted her to asked if she would help draft a formal position for City Council that can be brought forward in the next legislative meeting. She added that she responded and said that she wanted to loop in Erika Kleiner and the LGBTQ+ Task Force, so she copied Erika as well, and the Mayor thanked everyone. She said that she expects that, what they will do tomorrow is sort through all the different languages and come up with one final. Director Kelleher asked for the Commission's input and to let her know things that need to be included in that position, she said that the Mayor specifically wants ACPS to be in the lead.

Commissioner O'Connell asked if is there a statement that they can sign on as the Commission and encourage Commissioner to attend the School Board meeting. Director Kelleher stated that, as long as Council is out in front on an issue, the Commission does not have to advise him to take a position, because they are already planning to take a position, but they welcomed the Commission's input. Chair Brunner stated that the deadline for the Commonwealth Public Comment is October 26<sup>th</sup>.

## **6. Liaison Reports**

Commissioner Palmer Johnson reported that the Commission for Women met on Saturday September 10, at 2525 Mt. Vernon Avenue for four hours for their retreat. Jessy Cuddy, Chair of the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission was the facilitator, and their objectives was to identify their priorities for FY2023 to include advocacy and actions items. In additions of their existing two committees of affordable housing, domestic abuse, and sexual assault; they have added human trafficking and reproductive rights. She announced that they are planning their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2024 and they will be planning a 50 under 50 and a 50 over 50 acknowledgements of the women in Alexandria. They will be asking for nominations from the various commissions and want to honor "Del" Pepper.

Commissioner O'Connell reported that the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board had a public comment hearing during their meeting about the Madden public housing relocation from the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority. She added that they also had tenant representatives who live there and now will have to go through the relocation. She added that it was a thorough plan, they have been doing a lot of project management and a lot of case management; there are 65 families that live there, and the goal is that all 65 families will be moved back in when the building is done. The new building is going to have more affordable housing units than the current Madden at 0-35% AMI, it will also have middle-income units and Market rate units as well.

The Landlord and Tenant Relations Board recommended to City Council to approve and move forward with the plan. They are making sure that each tenant gets their own case manager to help them find new housing, they are getting Housing Choice vouchers, to ensure that they can still afford housing and they are working to make sure that residents with children are relocated in the same district, so that kids do not have to change school districts for two years.

Commissioner Beland stated that they had Joan Porte, President, League of Women Voters of Arlington, and Alexandria City and they had conversations about ensuring that folks with disabilities are not going to have an issue this fall, and they are going to be assisting voters. He stated that they also had Jennifer Monaco from T&ES, who talked about the new transit improvements in the Duke Street corridor that runs from Landmark to the King Street Metro Station.

#### **7. Announcements /Adjournment**

Director Kelleher announced that it is National Voter Registration Day. She also distributed information on the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project and said that on Saturday there will be a soil collection event, archeologist have taken soil from sites that are connected to the two individuals, Benjamin Thomas and Joseph McCoy who were lynched in Alexandria. She added that there is a Pilgrimage from October 6-10<sup>th</sup> and said that she is going on the bus ride to Montgomery, Alabama. Director Kelleher also mentioned the successful Naturalization ceremony last week.

**MOTION:** adjourn the meeting.  
Schwartz/Harris **PASSED** unanimously.  
The meeting adjourned at 9:14 p.m.