

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

Members Present

Danielle Beach
Lisl Brunner, Chair
Marc Bendick
Iulia Fratila
Matt Harris
Susan Kellom
Katherine O'Connell
Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson, Vice Chair
Megan Prince
William Tom Reeder, Jr.
David Rigsby, Vice Chair
Jon Thompson
Scott Schwartz
Conrad Sylvanus (unofficial - application for membership pending before City Council)

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher, Director
Anna McClure, Investigator
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Commissioner Harris

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

Chair Brunner stated that Director Kelleher had some information to share. Director Kelleher reported that the Chief Human Resources Officer left, and the City Manager asked her to manage the Human Resources Department for up to six months. She reported that David Miller and Anna McClure are sharing the responsibilities for the Office of Human Rights. David Miller is going to be responsible for operations and Anna McClure is going to be responsible for legal matters, similar to a general counsel. She will be going into the Human Rights office every Friday.

Anna McClure gave a brief description of her background and said that she has been working with the office for a little over 10 years and that she went to law school at Georgetown University.

New Commissioner Fratila introduced herself. She is new to the area and is an assistant professor at George Mason University. She teaches in the Department of Local and Community Health and said that she was at James Madison for a year and just started here in the fall. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of Minutes of September Meeting

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

3. Zoning for Housing Briefing

Chair Brunner stated that, a couple of weeks ago, she spoke with a representative from VOICE, which is a coalition of religious organizations that are dedicated to social justice in the Northern Virginia area. The coalition had chosen two priorities to focus on in their advocacy: housing equity and mental health. Their position is that the government should pay attention to these issues and that resources should be properly allocated to them. Chair Brunner said that the representative was talking to her about their participation in the City's Zoning for Housing initiative. Chair Brunner stated that there is a lot of material on the website and there is a component that is relevant to the Commission. As a result, she asked if the Office of Human Rights could give the Commission a briefing on it.

Investigator McClure gave an overview of the Zoning for Housing/Housing for All Plan. She explained that Zoning for Housing is a comprehensive package of zoning reforms that are targeted at expanding housing production and affordability and addressing past and current barriers to equitable housing access. *Housing for All* is a program aimed at understanding how past discriminatory policies have shaped and continue to impact housing in Alexandria, particularly as it affects people of color and low-income individuals and families.

Investigator McClure provided statistics about housing in Alexandria, including that 15,000 households are paying more than 30% of income on housing and that half of households with incomes up to \$50,000, around 7,200 total, are paying more than 50% of their income on housing. She also talked about the history and timeline of Zoning for Housing/Housing for All. She explained the COG Regional Targets for new affordable housing and said that Alexandria's allocated targets are approximately 3,000 additional new units, with 2,250 (75%) affordable to low- and middle-income workers and 2,250 (75%) near high-capacity transit.

She also talked about the proposed initiatives, which are the following: historic development patterns, expanding housing opportunities in single-family, expanding transit-oriented development, analyzing industrial zones, Coordinated Development Districts, residential multi-family zones, office-to-residential conversions, townhome regulations, and a bonus height zoning text amendment (no longer recommended).

She also provided dates for upcoming events and engagement opportunities for the Commission and said that, on October 21 there will be a City Council Town Hall at Charles Houston Recreation Center; on November 1, there is a Planning Commission Public Hearing, at City Hall; on November 14 there is a City Council Meeting, at City Hall, and on November 18 there is a City Council Public Hearing, at City Hall. At November 28, at City Hall, City Council will vote on the Zoning for Housing reforms, and there will be no public comments at this meeting. She added that written comments can be submitted using the Community Comment Form on the Zoning for Housing/Housing for All website.

The presentation was followed by questions from the Commission. Investigator McClure stated that there is opposition to Zoning for Housing. She briefly summarized the primary arguments in opposition: that it promotes too much density and that the increase in density is going to make Alexandria significantly less livable for its existing residents, because there will be more traffic, more crowded schools, strain on public parking, and an increase in neighborhood conflicts. Some opponents also argue

that race discrimination is no longer an issue because overtly discriminatory housing laws have been revoked and contend that and that there is no data to support the notion of systemic discrimination. Commissioner Thompson suggested having commissioners attend some of the public meetings about Zoning for Housing to have a presence there. Commissioner Bendick, Jr. suggested submitting written comments from the Commission instead of speaking at the meetings. Commissioner Schwartz suggested that the Commission empower the Executive Board to designate a member to draft comments, consisting of the idea that the Commission is in favor of the broadest approach towards affordable housing for residents in Alexandria.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Schwartz, seconded by Commissioner Harris; the Commission authorized the Executive Board to approve a document expressing the Commission's support for a broader sense of affordable housing. The motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Thompson volunteered to attend the public meeting on November 14. Chair Brunner volunteered to attend the meeting on November 1, and Commissioner Prince volunteered to attend the meeting on November 18.

Commissioner O'Connell brought up a concern about having City Hall lit up in support of Israel. The Commission had a discussion on the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. Commissioner O'Connell volunteered to draft a statement reaffirming that Alexandria is an inclusive City and the Commission's support for residents' safety. Commissioner Schwartz suggested the Commission put out a position that is communicated to residents that the view of the Human Rights Commission is that all residents should feel safe within the City and their rights should be protected. Commissioner Harris suggested inviting Zeina Azzam to speak to the Commission on Palestinian issues. Commissioner O'Connell said she will send the draft statement to the office staff to be circulated to the Commissioners individually.

Commissioner Beach brought up an issue of panhandling in Old Town Alexandria. Director Kelleher stated that panhandling has not been, and is not, against the law.

4. Executive Committee

Chair Brunner asked if the Commission would like to invite the Police Chief to their Executive Committee Meeting. Director Kelleher stated that she had issued the invitation to the Police Chief, but that he is out of town, until October 26, 2023, so he has not heard from him.

Chair Brunner announced that Erika Kleiner, the City's LGBTQ+ Task Force Coordinator will come to the November meeting and will invite other guests to talk about transgender youth in public schools.

Commissioner Palmer Johnson volunteered for at the ALIVE Food Hub on November 11, 2023.

Vice Chair Rigsby stated that he and Commissioner Schwartz met with Hillary Orr, of TES, last week and received an update on the plan for the rainbow crosswalks. TES hopes that the crosswalk will be installed by May 2024. The budget is \$45,000 for two different crosswalks on either side of Market Square. Vice Chair Rigsby stated that it is on the City Council docket for November 7.

5. Old & New Business

Chair Brunner welcomed new Commissioner Iulia Fratila.

Director Kelleher stated that there is a letter that went from Senators Kaine and Warner, expressing their disagreement on Governor Youngkin's 'purging' of voter rolls in Virginia. Director Kelleher stated that, in Alexandria, anyone who shows up to vote early will receive a provisional ballot and then as soon as they present their information their vote will count.

Chair Brunner reported that the Commission for Women assigns a liaison to members of the City Council so that periodically someone can update the member on what the Commission is doing, and they can receive feedback from that member. She said that she thought about exploring that idea and thought about either assigning or having volunteers. She also wondered if there is interest in liaising with specific organizations that are active in Alexandria. Chair Brunner suggested discussing this at a later meeting.

6. Liaison Reports

Vice Chair Palmer Johnson announced that the Commission for Women will be holding a webinar, on October 18, on affordable housing, including Zoning for Housing and Housing for All. She said she would send the registration link to office staff to share with the Commission.

Commissioner Reeder reported that the Commission on Aging heard from three guests: two from the City, who discussed aging with HIV/AIDS, and one from Gilead Sciences, who discussed how to manage and prevent HIV/AIDS. He reported that 43% of HIV-positive individuals are over 55 years old.

Conrad Sylvanus reported that the Economic Opportunities Commission has been working on the Duke Street transit corridor plan, which has been approved. He stated that they are also redefining their legislative package proposal initiatives.

Commissioner Prince reported that the Commission on Persons with Disabilities heard from Doris Ray from the ENdependence Center, who provided information about a program called "Thriving Solo," a training series for people with disabilities who want to live on their own. The Commission also wants to promote the new City Council decision on increasing the number of fully accessible units, which is currently 2%. She also announced that she was elected Vice Chair of the Commission.

7. Announcements /Adjournment

Investigator McClure announced that Investigator Miller and Miladis will be conducting outreach at the Community Re-Entry Resource Fair, Hyland Government Center (8350 Richmond Hwy), on November 1, 2023.

MOTION: Adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Harris/Commissioner Schartz **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m.