CEDAR RAPIDS CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION (CRCRC)
MEETING MINUTES
October 23, 2019 5:30 p.m.
Civil Rights Commission
50 2nd Avenue Bridge
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

Commissioners Present:  Mr. Leland Freie, Chair
                        Mr. Anthony Arrington, Vice Chair
                        Ms. Salma Igram
                        Mr. Keith Rippy
                        Mr. Esaie Toingar
                        Ms. Linda Topinka
                        Dr. Ruth White

Staff Present:  Ms. Janet Abejo-Parker, Acting Executive Director
               Ms. Stefanie Munsterman-Scriven, Investigator
               Ms. Alicia Abernathey, Administrative Assistant / Intake Specialist

I.  Call to Order
Commissioner Freie, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

II. Roll Call/Introductions
Commissioners and staff introduced themselves.

III. Public Response
No public response.

IV. Approval of Minutes from September 18, 2019 meeting
Commissioner Arrington moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Rippy seconded the
motion, which was unanimously approved, with no discussion.

Commissioner Toingar arrived at 5:32 p.m.

V. Action Item
Motion Authorizing the CRCRC Chair to sign the FY20 Cooperative Agreement with the Iowa Civil Rights
Commission and staff to take additional action as needed to fully execute the agreement
Janet Abejo-Parker, Acting Executive Director, stated each year the Commission enters into an
agreement with the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) regarding the cross-filing, and payment,
of non-housing cases.

Commissioner Igram arrived at 5:33 p.m.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the total amount ICRC will pay in FY20 is $33,000 among all civil rights
agencies in Iowa. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated payment is on a first come, first serve basis and once the
$33,000 is gone no additional funding is available to pay for closed cases. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated
the Commission has typically not been reimbursed for cases closed during the fourth quarter of
each year as the funding is usually gone by this point.

Commissioner White moved to authorize the Commission Chair to sign the FY20 Cooperative
Agreement with the Iowa Civil Rights Commission and staff to take additional action as necessary
to fully execute the agreement. Commissioner Rippy seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved, with no discussion.

VI. **Report from Chair**
Commissioner Freie, Chair, stated he spoke with the City’s Human Resource Department and it was indicated the final version of the recruitment brochure for the hiring of the new Executive Director will be received in the coming days, hopefully tomorrow. Commissioner Freie stated the recruitment timeline indicated the position would be posted by October 1, 2019 but because of delays in editing the recruitment brochure, the position has not been posted and the process is now behind schedule. Commissioner Arrington requested Mercer Group provide an updated timeline once the recruitment brochure is finalized.

VII. **Committee Reports**

*Outreach Committee Liaison*
Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Outreach Committee report was mistakenly left off the agenda.

Commissioner Topinka stated the Outreach Committee met earlier this week and will meet quarterly going forward, with the next meeting taking place in January. Commissioner Topinka went through the list of events the Commission attended and the list of meetings staff attended.

Commissioner Topinka stated the Protecting Places of Worship event was held yesterday evening. Commissioner Topinka asked how many people were in attendance. Alicia Abernathey, Administrative Assistant, stated the United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Iowa shared with staff there were approximately 140 people in attendance. Commissioner Freie stated the event was very educational and the Commission served as a co-sponsor of the event. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Katie Hayden with the United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Iowa came into town a few days early in order to go door to door to different faith organizations and make them aware of the event.

Commissioner Topinka stated Commissioner Arrington will attend the Solving Poverty’s Puzzle event on behalf of the Commission. Commissioner Arrington stated the event is Saturday and will consist of roundtable discussions on poverty and housing.

Commissioner Topinka stated the Commission will host a movie night and job fair in January for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day (MLK). Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission’s events will not overlap the MLK events planned by St. Paul’s United Methodist Church.

Commissioner Toingar stated the Outreach Committee will meet quarterly, or as needed.

*Marion Civil Rights Commission Liaison*
The Marion Civil Rights Commission liaison was not present.

VIII. **Affordable Housing Commission Update**
Commissioner Rippy stated he missed the last meeting but will have a report out in December.

IX. **Director’s Report**
Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will begin her report with a presentation to check-in on the FY20 Work Plan goals and tasks. Ms. Abejo-Parker reminded the Commission of the goals for the FY20 Work Plan including Enforcement: Improve departmental infrastructure and address current community needs, Outreach: Improve visibility and increase community partnerships, and Commissioner and Staff Development: Continue education and engagement of Commission
members and staff. Ms. Abejo-Parker went through the Enforcement goal outlining progress made in the first quarter of the fiscal year that ran from July 2019 through September 2019.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission rejoined the League of Iowa Human and Civil Rights Agencies (League). Stefanie Munsterman-Screen, Investigator, stated she attended the last League meeting and there was discussion on lawful source of income as a protected class. Ms. Munsterman-Screen stated Des Moines and Iowa City have recently added lawful source of income as a protected class. Commissioner Topinka stated it is a good thing the Commission rejoined the League as Judy Goldberg, a previous Investigator, was reprimanded at a past outreach event for the Commission not being a member. Commissioner Arrington asked how long the Commission has not been a member of the League and why. Ms. Abernathey stated the Commission has not been a member of the League since 2016. Ms. Abernathey stated for some reason the membership was not renewed over the years. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the previous Executive Director was receiving renewal paperwork each year and for an unknown reason the membership has not been renewed since 2016.

Ms. Abejo-Parker continued to go through the Enforcement goal outlining progress made in the first quarter. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Bernie Walther, Investigator, met with the City’s Police Department, City Manager’s Office, and Housing Division to discuss the new State law regarding service and companion animals. Commissioner Freie asked what the new State law was. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the change in State law makes it a misdemeanor for a housing provider to deny a service or emotional support animal in housing. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated it also makes it a misdemeanor if someone falsely claims the use of a service animal in a public accommodation. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff, and other Commissions, are still learning how the new law applies.

Commissioner Toingar asked what the benefits are of being a member of the League and of the International Association of Human Rights Agencies. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated both agencies allow for the sharing of best practices in civil rights agencies, they provide resources for civil rights agencies and the International Association of Human Rights Agencies provides civil rights conferences and trainings.

Ms. Munsterman-Screen went through portions of the Outreach goal outlining progress made in the first quarter on the social media strategy task, the crisis communications task, and the partner with local organizations on community initiatives task. Ms. Abejo-Parker went through the remaining Outreach goals outlining progress made in the first quarter.

Commissioner Toingar left the meeting at 6:07 p.m.

Ms. Abejo-Parker went through the Commissioner and Staff Development goal outlining progress made in the first quarter. Ms. Abejo-Parker outlined highlights of the first quarter including the social media strategy, updated Committee charters, customer service initiatives for persons who are hard of hearing. Ms. Abejo-Parker asked Ms. Abernathey to share the customer service initiatives for working with persons who are hard of hearing. Ms. Abernathey stated she worked with Hands Up Communications to provide video remote interpreting should someone who is hard of hearing come to the Commission office unexpectedly. Ms. Abernathey stated the in-person or onsite interpretation with Hands Up Communications will still be used when scheduling meetings with persons who are hard of hearing but the video remote interpreting allows for immediate access to a sign language interpreter with walk-ins. Ms. Abernathey stated staff is also planning to take an introductory to sign language course in the spring.
Ms. Abejo-Parker shared key takeaways from her attendance at the Iowa Summit on Justice and Disparities conference. Commissioner Arrington shared key takeaways from his attendance at the LGBTQ Workforce summit. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff is working on changes in the office to be more inclusive of the LGBTQ community. Ms. Abejo-Parker asked Ms. Abernathey to share the customer service initiatives to be more inclusive. Ms. Abernathey stated the Commission’s intake form was updated to include a pronouns box where persons can indicated their preferred pronouns. Ms. Abernathey stated the Commission’s ordinance and Rules of Practice currently use he/she and himself/herself, but the documents will be updated to say they, them, themselves, etc.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission office will be closed Monday, November 11th for Veterans Day. Ms. Abejo-Parker shared case updates on the Nelson v. Executive Estates Unit XVII HOA and the Behnke v. Subway (Mount Vernon Road) case. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated in the Behnke v. Subway case, notification was received that the Respondent’s house will be foreclosed on and the bank and other organizations will get their money first. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the City’s Attorney’s office will respond to the correspondence. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will be a guest speaker at the upcoming NAACP meeting to share information on the Commission.

X. Adjournment
Commissioner Igram moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:39 p.m. Commissioner Topinka seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved, with no discussion.

Respectfully submitted by Alicia Abernathey