CEDAR RAPIDS CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION (CRCRC)
MEETING MINUTES
November 20, 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
Ms. Linda Topinka
Dr. Ruth White

Commissioners Absent: Mr. Esaie Toingar

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

I. Call to Order
Commissioner Freie, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

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

III. Public Response
No public response.

IV. Approval of Minutes from October 23, 2019 meeting
Commissioner White moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Rippy seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved, with no discussion.

V. Action Item
Review and Approval of the Commission’s FY21 Budget
Janet Abejo-Parker, Acting Executive Director, stated the proposed budget for FY21 is included in the packet for review and approval. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she worked with Susan Deaton, the Commission’s Budget Analyst, to determine the budget for FY21. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the only changes to FY21 compared to FY20 were changes to discretionary expenses and the changes were made based on historical spending under each item. Ms. Abejo-Parker outlined changes in the general fund budget for FY21.

Commissioner Arrington asked what the “transfer in” amount of $6,000 was for. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated that amount would cover tuition reimbursement for staff. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she and Alicia Abernathey currently utilize tuition reimbursement for college courses and the City Manager announced an increase in reimbursement from $1,700 to $3,000 starting in January 2020. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the “transfer in” amount will continue to cover her and Ms. Abernathey’s reimbursement and allows for other staff members to be reimbursed if requested.

Commissioner Arrington asked if the advertising and marketing budget should be more. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the amount aligns with past years spending and has typically only covered the
downtown banner displays. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission’s advertisements typically come from the FHAP account. Commissioner Igram asked where the funding of items given out at outreach events comes from. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated those items are funded through the FHAP account. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides funds to the Commission for outreach efforts to affirmatively further fair housing. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff believes any outreach materials that give exposure to the Commission as a resource have the potential of increasing housing cases and therefore, FHAP funds have been used. Commissioner Arrington asked if the Commission should be spending more on advertising. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff has been conservative with funds during the transition of hiring a new Executive Director. Additionally, an increase in advertisements would include taking funding from elsewhere in the budget or using cash on hand.

Commissioner White asked who the banner program was through. Alicia Abernathey, Administrative Assistant II, stated the Commission partners with the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance (Economic Alliance) to display the banners. Ms. Abernathey stated the banners were previously displayed for one month each October for a cost of $250, but in recent years the Economic Alliance switched to a quarterly basis display at a cost of $825. Ms. Abernathey stated the banner program is currently being redesigned with new poles and new locations, but staff plans to produce new, updated banners and display them in the future.

Ms. Abejo-Parker outlined changes in the FHAP fund budget and Seminar fund budget for FY21.

The Commission moved to the Finance Committee Liaison update under Committee Reports.

Following the Finance Committee Liaison update, the Commission returned to Action Items.

Commissioner Topinka moved to approve the FY21 budget as proposed. Commissioner Arrington seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved, with no further discussion.

VI. Committee Reports

Finance Committee Liaison
Commissioner Igram stated the Finance Committee met today and went through the closeout of the FY19 budget. Commissioner Igram stated the money from the Executive Director position vacancy went back into the City’s general fund and did not stay in the Commission’s budget. Commissioner Igram stated the Finance Committee reviewed the FY21 proposed budget. Commissioner Igram stated the Finance Committee will meet quarterly and she will serve as the Chair of the Committee. Commissioner Igram stated the FY20 budget is looking good thus far and the Commission is currently under spending and is over revenue. Commissioner Igram stated the funding for security upgrades can transfer to FY21 upon request from the Commission if improvements are not made this fiscal year.

Commissioner Arrington asked if the personnel funding covers the Executive Director position. Commissioner Rippy stated that is correct. Commissioner Rippy stated the City accounts for vacancies and uses the money elsewhere, but puts the money back when it is needed to cover the positions salary and benefits.

Commissioner Rippy stated the budget has remained consistent over the years. Commissioner Arrington asked why that was. Commissioner Rippy stated it is due to fiscal management and consistent spending. Commissioner Arrington stated he would be interested to see if the Commission can work to get additional money. Stefanie Munsterman-Sriven, Investigator, stated the Commission has pursued grants in the past to receive additional funding.
The Commission returned to Action Items following the Finance Committee Liaison update.

Outreach Committee Liaison
Commissioner Topinka stated she has no update.

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

VII. Report from Chair
Commissioner Freie, Chair, stated the hiring process for the Executive Director is underway, however, the deadline for applications was supposed to be December 13, 2019. Commissioner Freie stated, due to typos in the recruitment brochure, the process was delayed and the deadline for applications is now December 20, 2019, which is after the December Commission meeting. Commissioner Freie asked if Commissioners would like to keep the December Commission meeting on December 18 or move it back to December 11. Commissioners were in agreement on leaving the December 2019 meeting as December 18.

Commissioner Freie stated because the deadline for applications has changed, the Commission will need to have a closed session in January. Commissioner Freie asked if the Commission would like to meet on January 8 or January 15, with January 15 being the regularly scheduled meeting. Commissioners were in agreement on moving the January 2020 meeting to January 8 and going into closed session to review applications for the hiring of the Executive Director. Commissioner Freie stated he will share the updated timeline for the process, once received from Mercer Group.

VIII. Director’s Report
Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Ms. Munsterman-Scriven will share an update on social media. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated the Commission’s Instagram account has officially been created and will be used to reach younger generations. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven requested Commissioners follow the Commission on their personal social media accounts and requested Commissioners share the Commission’s content as sharing posts will increase the Commission’s exposure. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated she would like to put a face to the Commission and would like to do so by sharing pictures of Commissioners and their reason for joining the Commission. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated it is voluntary and if Commissioners would like to participate they can email her a photo and reason why they joined the Commission. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she would like to commend Ms. Munsterman-Scriven on her work on the Commission’s social media accounts as the Commission now has a higher presence on social media platforms.

Commissioner Arrington asked if the Commission will be getting another intern because social media management sounds like something they could do. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated social media management has been a struggle for past interns due to their time constraints of being in the office. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Ms. Munsterman-Scriven brought a social media skillset when she returned to the Commission. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated interns can assist in social media strategy but the primary person will be Ms. Munsterman-Scriven. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated as Senior Investigator it is her role to manage interns, however, in also taking on the role as Acting Executive Director it was decided it would not be fair to staff, or new interns, to have interns right now and not give them the full attention they deserve. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission will most likely have interns again in the future. Commissioner Freie stated interns are an asset as they have helped with things like the creation of the trivia wheel in the past. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated interns are certainly an asset but staff does not have the capacity to invest in them right now.
Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Ms. Abernathey attended Restorative Practices training and the Access to Justice Conference earlier this month. Ms. Abejo-Parker asked Ms. Abernathey to share a few words on the Access to Justice Conference. Ms. Abernathey stated at the conference she learned all individuals who work in Iowa’s judicial system are required to take implicit bias training, not just judges. Ms. Abernathey stated not only is McKinley Middle School working with Restorative Practices, they also provide a food pantry, clothing closet and laundry services to students in need. Ms. Abernathey stated Justice Appel talked about an initiative to potentially provide free legal services in public libraries throughout the state.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Ms. Munsterman-Scriven will attend a SHRM Certification Seminar the first week of December. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will be out of the office December 6 through December 20. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission office will be closed November 28 and 29 for the Thanksgiving holiday. Ms. Abejo-Parker shared upcoming outreach events including movie night, the public sector job fair and the housing resource fair.

Commissioner Arrington stated he serves on the Eastern Iowa Human Resources board and they are always looking for guest speakers. Commissioner Arrington stated perhaps someone from the Commission can be a guest speaker in the future.

IX. **Adjournment**
Commissioner Rippy moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:14 p.m. Commissioner Igram seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved, with no discussion.

Respectfully submitted by Alicia Abernathey