CEDAR RAPIDS CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION (CRCRC)
MEETING MINUTES
June 19, 2019 5:30 p.m.
Civil Rights Commission
50 2nd Avenue Bridge
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

Commissioners Present: Mr. Leland Freie, Chair
Ms. Salma Igram
Mr. Esaie Toingar
Ms. Linda Topinka

Commissioners Absent: Mr. Anthony Arrington, Vice Chair
Mr. Keith Rippy
Dr. Ruth White

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

Guests: Renae Forsyth-Christy

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

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

III. Public Response
No public response.

IV. Approval of Minutes from May 15, 2019 meeting
Commissioner Igram moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Topinka seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved, with no discussion.

V. Discussion Item
Review & Approval of the FY20 Work Plan
Janet Abejo-Parker, Acting Executive Director, stated the creation of the FY20 Work Plan was a team effort and staff has been working to create the plan since May. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff took a look at last year’s plan to evaluate how it could be improved and staff also reviewed other Commission’s work plans, such as the work plan for the City Planning Commission. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff reviewed data from the last four years regarding areas of protections cases have been filed under. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff went through a SWOT analysis that Ms. Munsterman-Scriven will discuss further and staff also reviewed the City’s EnvisionCR strategic plan. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated for a City entity, a work plan is meant to be a departmental plan that is tactical in nature and consists of goals and tasks for one year. Ms. Abejo-Parker turned the presentation over to Alicia Abernathey.

Alicia Abernathey, Administrative Assistant / Intake Specialist, stated like Ms. Abejo-Parker mentioned, staff reviewed the work plans of other boards and commissions to see what we liked

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and did not like about their plans to incorporate into the Commission’s. Ms. Abernathey stated while the Mission, Vision, Meetings, and Commissioners sections stayed the same in the General Information section, the Declaration of Purpose was added to give a historical account of when the Commission was created. Ms. Abernathey stated the Staff section also changed to Staff Liaisons which is consistent with other boards and commissions and instead of listing all staff members it provides contact information for individuals to be contacted directly with regards to the work plan. Ms. Abernathey stated the Commission previously had a work plan and an outreach plan, which were both lengthy documents. Ms. Abernathey stated in going through the work plan staff realized there was a big focus on outreach and due to redundancies in the two documents and outreach being a main focus, staff decided to combine the two plans into one plan. Ms. Abernathey turned the presentation over to Stefanie Munsterman-Scriven.

Stefanie Munsterman-Scriven, Investigator, explained the SWOT analysis stating it included staff identifying internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven provided examples of what staff came up with in each category.

Commissioner Igram stated she believes one threat to the Commission is safety. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated staff also identified that as a threat and are working to alleviate the threat through renovations. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Veterans Memorial Commission plans to renovate the 3rd, 6th and 7th floor of the Veterans Memorial Building and staff plans to include safety elements in the renovation project. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated the City also recently initiated an active threat system to address safety concerns among all City departments. Commissioner Freie, Chair, stated the safety concerns could be carried over into Commission meetings. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated Commission meetings have to be made available to the public but staff could evaluate addressing safety concerns with meetings.

Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated the goals for the FY20 Work Plan are divided into enforcement, outreach and development. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven identified the tasks listed under the enforcement goal including updating the Commission’s Rules of Practice, updating Chapter 69, rejoining agencies the Commission is no longer a part of, improving the Commission’s knowledge management system, partnering to address gaps in credit complaints and continuing to collaborate with other City departments.

Commissioner Topinka stated employers look at a person’s age or the year they graduated and disqualify them from positions due to their age. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated people may file with the Commission based on age discrimination. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission has seen approximately two to five age based cases each year over the last four years, however, the Commission has not seen any credit cases over the last four years. Commissioner Igram stated unfortunately people do not know credit is covered under discrimination. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated that is why staff wants to work to educate the public on signs of credit discrimination. Commissioner Igram stated educating the public could cause fear with lenders and prevent them from discriminating. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated credit cases have been a tricky area for all Commissions. Commissioner Freie asked if staff considered training lenders. Mr. Walther stated a lending training was offered a few years ago and unfortunately not many lenders came, but realtors did. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated mortgage brokers have annual training that includes civil rights education. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven turned the presentation over to Bernie Walther.

Bernie Walther, Investigator, identified the tasks listed under the outreach goal including developing a communication strategy for social media, developing a plan for crisis communications, continuing the Legacies Series, customizing promotional materials, continuing outreach events and partnerships, revising trainings offered by the Commission, partnering with
local schools and neighborhood associations to educate the public on civil rights matters and partnering with local organizations on community initiatives. Mr. Walther turned the presentation over to Janet Abejo-Parker.

Ms. Abejo-Parker identified the tasks listed under the development goal including Commissioner training, Commissioner participation in outreach events, updating Committee charters, staff training and staff participation in cultural competency training. Ms. Abejo-Parker turned the presentation over to Alicia Abernathey.

Ms. Abernathey identified next steps stating if the Commission approved the work plan tonight, it would go before City Council on Tuesday for approval. Ms. Abernathey stated if City Council approves the plan on Tuesday it will go into effect July 1st. Commissioner Igram asked if the Commission needed to approve the plan tonight. Ms. Abernathey stated if the Commission is in agreement with the plan, staff would ask for a motion of approval tonight. Commissioner Igram stated staff did a great job and it made sense to combine the work plan and outreach plan. Ms. Abernathey turned the presentation over to Janet Abejo-Parker.

Ms. Abernathey stated once the work plan is approved by the Commission, and City Council, staff leads will be assigned to each task. Ms. Abernathey stated updates will be provided on a quarterly basis regarding the progress of the tasks and goals. Commissioner Igram asked how progress is communicated publicly. Ms. Abernathey stated it is typically included as highlights in the annual report. Ms. Abernathey stated other boards and commissions included major highlights and accomplishments from the previous year’s work plan in their new work plan and staff talked about doing the same thing with each new work plan.

Commissioner Freie asked how goals are measured. Mr. Walther stated it is hard to measure outreach but staff aims to measure outreach efforts. Commissioner Igram stated the Commission has had an impact as people are more enthused to see the Commission at outreach events.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she wanted to commend staff for their work in putting together the FY20 Work Plan. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated it was a team effort with all hands on deck.

Commissioner Igram moved to approve the FY20 Work Plan. Commissioner Toingar seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved with no discussion.

Approval to Pursue Debt Collection in the Behnke V. Subway (Mt Vernon Rd) Case

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated a default judgement was received in April 2019 for the Nikki Behnke V. Subway case in the amount of $6,500. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated this amount covered the debt owed to the Complainant and to the Commission and includes late fees, but was capped at $6,500 in order to remain in small claims court. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Respondent was given the opportunity to defer after the judgement was issued but he did not. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she worked with the City’s Finance Department to determine debt collection options and they recommended the debt be placed in the State’s offset program that would collect income tax refunds of the Respondent. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission can use the City’s current debt collection agency but will be charged a 10 percent processing fee on any funds received. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated, if the Commission agrees, the Commission would take on the processing fee, not the Complainant.

Commissioner Igram asked if there was a time limit on collecting the debt or if the Commission could change the amount of money owed. Commissioner Igram stated it will be two years in October since the Commission issued the final order and it is not fair to the Complainant. Ms.
Abejo-Parker stated the City’s Finance Department will send a letter to the Respondent indicating the debt owed and how it will proceed to collection. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the City’s Finance Department did not mention a time limit but indicated staff can determine when to give checks to the Complainant and will continue to collect the amount owed as funds are available.

Commissioner Igram asked if the debt collection includes garnishing wages, taking funds from bank accounts or if it includes penalties. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will ask the City’s Finance Department what options are available for pursuing the debt collection. Commissioner Igram asked if interest could be included in the amount owed. Mr. Walther stated because it is court ordered penalties probably cannot be included. Commissioner Freie stated at least a piece meal payment is an outcome for the Complainant and the Commission.

Commissioner Topinka moved to approve staff pursuing debt collection through the City’s Finance Department in the Nikki Behnke V. Subway (Mt Vernon Rd) case and for the Commission to inquire the 10 percent processing fee. Commissioner Igram seconded the motion.

Commissioner Freie called for discussion. Commissioner Toingar stated he would suggest a two percent penalty to put pressure on the Respondent to pay the debt. Mr. Walther stated he does not believe a penalty can be placed on a court order. Commissioner Igram asked if staff could find out for sure. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will check with the City’s Finance Department.

Commissioner Topinka asked if debt collection procedures could include garnishing wages or going after the Respondent’s business. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she is unsure. Commissioner Igram asked if the Respondent sold his business. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Respondent sold one business but may still own another business, not located in Cedar Rapids. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will inquire about what the City’s Finance Department has done before. Mr. Walther stated this is probably the quickest and easiest way to pursue the collection but the City’s Attorney Office may be able to put a lien on the Respondent’s property in the future.

Following no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

VI. Report from Chair

Growing Futures
Commissioner Freie, Chair, stated he wanted to share some information on Growing Futures. Commissioner Freie stated Trees Forever started the program and it helps get youth involved in planting trees in the community and teaches them conservation. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven asked what age group it was geared toward. Commissioner Freie stated he believes it is geared toward high school students.

Committee Assignments
Commissioner Freie stated the list of committee assignments for FY20 is included in the packet. Commissioner Freie stated if any Commissioner is not comfortable with their assignment to let him know. Commissioner Topinka asked if the Cedar Rapids Community School District Liaison was new. Commissioner Freie stated the Commission has had it for several years.

Commissioner Attendance
Commissioner Freie stated he wanted to remind everyone of the ordinance’s verbiage regarding attendance. Commissioner Freie stated he understands things come up but he would like everyone to consider their commitment to the Commission and try to attend as many meetings as possible. Commissioner Freie stated he has conflicts with another board he serves on and is therefore considering stepping down from that board, as it is not fair to the board or its members.
Commissioner Igram stated Commissioners should take their commitment to the Commission seriously and should step down if they cannot commit. Commissioner Igram asked what the ordinance states for attendance. Ms. Abernathey read a portion of the Commission’s ordinance that states “Members who miss 3 consecutive meetings or 4 meetings within 12 months will be replaced; however, special or unusual circumstances will be considered.” Commissioner Igram asked if anyone has ever missed three consecutive meetings. Ms. Abernathey stated she was uncomfortable disclosing that information in a public setting but stated the ordinance has not historically been followed in replacing Commissioners who have not met the attendance standard.

VII. Committee Reports

Outreach Committee Liaison
Commissioner Freie, Chair, asked who from the Commission participated in the television interview. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Commissioner Anthony Arrington conducted the television interview that focused on the Pride in Action event taking place this weekend at the Marion Public Library. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated unfortunately there has been some community push back regarding the event as it includes drag queens reading to children. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated both the Commission and the Marion Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) will be present at the event. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated Commissioner Arrington’s interview focused on what agencies will be at the event.

Commissioner Igram stated it is a good idea to have both Commissions present and it was nice sharing a table with the MCRC at the Juneteenth event. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated the Commission is not advocating for any party at the event but feel it is important to go as the LGBTQ community is protected under the Commission’s ordinance. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated the Commission will be present to share information about our services.

Commissioner Freie identified upcoming outreach events including the LGBTQ Forum, PrideFest, AsianFest and Protecting Places of Worship. Mr. Walther stated staff could still use some assistance in the afternoon at PrideFest and at AsianFest. Commissioner Igram stated she may be able to work AsianFest. Mr. Walther stated he will send out reminders of who is scheduled to work the events. Mr. Walther stated the Protecting Places of Worship event is through a partnership with the U.S. Attorney’s Office of the Northern District of Iowa and will focus on hate crimes, religion, security at religious institutions, etc. Ms. Walther stated a similar event was held in Sioux City, Iowa and there were over 100 people in attendance.

Marion Civil Rights Commission Liaison
Renae Forsyth-Christy, Marion Civil Rights Commission Liaison, stated the MCRC had a representative from the Marion Library as a guest speaker and they are working to set up a program for homeless individuals. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated the program currently includes a sleep kit that provides hotel vouchers, gift cards, etc. for those who are homeless. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated they are hoping to eventually have hair cutting, dental and other services available. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated the representative from the Marion Library did indicate they have received some hateful comments regarding the Pride in Action event on Saturday. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated the MCRC is working on its strategic plan and are planning an event to celebrate the MCRC’s five year anniversary. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated they hope to have the celebration soon and invitations will be sent out when details are confirmed.

VIII. Director’s Report
Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the City is conducting a wage review for all non-bargaining positions through Segal Waters and the results will be available in the fall of 2019. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated
the City recently launched an active threat system that notifies all City employees when there is an active threat in a City facility. Commissioner Igram asked if the notification only goes to City computers. Ms. Abernathey stated the alert goes to City computers, City issued cellphones, other City issued electronic devices and employees have the option of adding it to their personal phones.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated HUD announced the Region VII Conference will be held August 6th through 8th in Omaha. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she feels it is important for all staff to attend the conference as it is specific to the Commission’s region and is conducted by HUD employees staff works closest with. Commissioner Igram stated there are plenty of HUD funds available so why not send everyone. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated all staff will attend the conference and the office will be closed August 6th through August 8th. Commissioner Freie asked if staff would report out on the conference. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff is in the habit of compiling key takeaways from trainings and staff will share key takeaways from this conference with Commissioners.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated a meeting was held with the Mexican Consulate and representatives from various organizations. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the City Manager, Mayor, the Police Department and the Commission were represented, along with YPN, Alliant Energy, Mount Mercy University, and the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance. The meeting allowed for Guadalupe Sanchez Salazar to share information on the Mexican Consulate.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Commissioners Freie and Arrington agreed to stay in the case summary rotation even though they are now Chair and Vice Chair. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated because some Commissioners have not done a case review in awhile, there will be a refresher presentation at the July Commission meeting. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission office will be closed on July 4th for Independence Day. Ms. Abejo-Parker thanked Commissioner Igram for participating in and providing a speech at Juneteenth. Ms. Abejo-Parker also thanked Commissioner Arrington and Commissioners Forsyth-Christy and Brown from the MCRC for their participation in the event.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she reached out to the City’s Finance Department regarding the budget for the recruitment firm and was told the contract with the recruitment firm has not been signed. Commissioner Igram stated there are some small issues with the selected recruitment firm and the City might switch recruitment firms.

Commissioner Igram stated she received a text from LaSheila Yates last month in which Ms. Yates sent Commissioners and staff well wishes and Ms. Yates apologized for some of her actions. Commissioner Igram acknowledged her medication had her acting differently. Commissioner Freie stated he recently saw Ms. Yates and he was happy to see she has moved on.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff recently purchased new trinkets including bubbles, kids sunglasses, keychains, fidget cubes and tissue packs. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the fidget cubes are a huge hit and staff is already working to order more. Commissioner Freie stated the best thing the Commission does is provide outreach to youth.

Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated she is considering hosting a financial literacy fair that will teach youth about finances and better prepare them for financial situations in adulthood.

IX. Adjournment
Commissioner Igram moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:55 p.m. Commissioner Freie seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by Alicia Abernathey