CEDAR RAPIDS CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION (CRCRC)
MEETING MINUTES
July 17, 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. Esaie Toingar
Ms. Linda Topinka

Commissioners Absent: Mr. Keith Rippy
Dr. Ruth White

Staff Present: Ms. Janet Abejo-Parker, Acting Executive Director
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 5:31 p.m.

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

III. Public Response
No public response.

IV. Approval of Minutes from June 19, 2019 meeting
Commissioner Igram moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Topinka seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved, with no discussion.

V. Report from Chair
Commissioner Freie, Chair, stated he worked PrideFest with Janet Abejo-Parker and he thought it was a rewarding experience and contributed to his personal growth. Commissioner Freie stated there were a lot of people in attendance. Janet Abejo-Parker, Acting Executive Director, stated over 500 people stopped by the Commission’s booth throughout the day and there were times when there was a line to the booth. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the new promotional materials were a big hit at this event, as well as other events.

Commissioner Freie stated he and Commissioner Arrington, Vice Chair, met with staff to review and revise the Committee charters. Commissioner Freie stated the updated charters will be brought to the next Commission meeting.

VI. Committee Reports
Outreach Committee Liaison
Commissioner Freie, Chair, stated the Outreach Report was included in the agenda packet.
Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Investigator Stefanie Munsterman-Scriven took on the role of managing the Commission’s social media strategy. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated it has been hard for the Commission to keep up with social media and a strategy allows the Commission to increase its presence on social media, which research shows the majority of people are. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated the Commission currently utilizes Facebook and Twitter and will add Instagram by the end of the fiscal year. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated she developed a social media strategic plan and shared it with all staff for feedback. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated the plan focuses on how to increase the Commission’s followers and how to increase engagement of others on the Commission’s social media accounts. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission has already seen progress as Facebook followers have increased.

Commissioner Igram asked if the Commission plans to utilize Snapchat. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated in previous positions she has held it was determined people see Snapchat as personal, like text messaging, and do not want organizations or businesses on their Snapchat. Therefore, the Commission does not plan to utilize Snapchat as a social media platform.

Commissioner Freie asked if a date has been determined for the Linn County Extension Council training. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she does not believe a date has been determined yet.

Commissioner Freie stated AsianFest is scheduled for this weekend if any Commissioners would like to work the event. Commissioner Topinka stated she plans to work the event and asked when her scheduled shift is. Alicia Abernathey, Administrative Assistant II, stated Investigator Bernie Walther will send a reminder email, with her scheduled time, tomorrow. Commissioner Arrington stated he has a prior engagement but depending on what time it ends, he may stop by the event.

Marion Civil Rights Commission Liaison
Renae Forsyth-Christy, Marion Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) Liaison, stated the MCRC discussed committee assignments at their last meeting and also upcoming outreach events they plan to participate in. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated the MCRC also discussed concerns of different things taking place in the country as they tie to protected classes.

Commissioner Arrington asked if Ms. Forsyth-Christy was willing to share MCRC’s concerns. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated MCRC would like to use the Marion Library more for events and some of the concerns expressed involved the Pride In Action event that took place at the Marion Library. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated a Marion activist group opposed having a drag queen read to children at the event and there were protestors outside the event. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated this led to a discussion among MCRC Commissioners that awareness needs to be brought to LGBTQ and race issues in Marion. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated the Pride in Action event was well attended despite protests against it. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated the event was so well attended, the Marion Library was above capacity during the reading by the drag queen. Ms. Forsyth-Christy stated the MCRC wants to do more events similar to this to bring awareness to different protected classes.

Commissioner Arrington stated he did a news interview regarding the event on behalf of the Commission.

VII. Director’s Report
Ms. Abejo-Parker stated at the last Commission meeting the topic of how staff tracks progress on work plans was mentioned. Therefore, staff decided to share the outcomes of the fiscal year 2019 (FY19) Work Plan with the Commission. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated a tracking document was included in the agenda packet to show completion of tasks and goals in the FY19 Work Plan. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated only two tasks were not completed from the work plan and one was an
initiative that was led by the previous Executive Director, LaSheila Yates. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated when Ms. Yates when on a leave of absence staff wasn’t sure what the full intention of the initiative was and therefore did not complete the task. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the other uncompleted task was Commissioners sending a list of contacts to the Executive Director. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated although a list was not sent to the Executive Director, she does recall Commissioners sharing contacts with staff.

Commissioner Igram asked if the new work plan has been approved. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the fiscal year 2020 (FY20) Work Plan was reviewed and approved by City Council on June 25th. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff went through the work plan and assigned leads to each task. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff will provide updates to the Commission as tasks are completed.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the 2018 Annual Report is complete and Ms. Abernathey has provided each Commissioner with a copy. Ms. Abejo-Parker thanked Ms. Abernathey for her work on this report as it involved new programming that she was not familiar with and all her work on the report was self-taught. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated this year’s report is less text heavy, incorporates more photos and is more streamlined. Commissioner Igram stated she likes that staff included a back page to close out the report.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated copies of the report will also be sent to City Council members and will be available on the Commission’s website. Commissioner Freie asked what staff considered a partner. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated partners included organizations the Commission provided presentations to, attended their events, agencies that co-sponsored the Commission’s events, etc.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she and Ms. Munsterman-Scriven are currently attending “Peace Circles” training now through Friday. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated this is considered a new initiative in the FY20 Work Plan and the training allows staff to see if it is worth pursuing. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Judy Goldberg, a previous Investigator with the Commission, brought the idea forward when she worked with the Commission but it did not move forward. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Ms. Goldberg recently met with staff and explained how the “Peace Circles” work and the intent behind them. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated this could be a potential partnership with local schools if staff decides to provide this service.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Ms. Munsterman-Scriven and Commissioner Toingar represented the Commission when the Senegal Minister came to visit. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated a proclamation was read by Mayor Brad Hart and presented to the Senegal Minister, thanking the Senegal community for their contributions to Cedar Rapids. Commissioner Toingar stated the event continued with an evening event in which Senegal food was prepared and there were over 100 people in attendance.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will follow up with Assistant City Attorney Trish Kropf regarding the Nelson V. Executive Estates Unit XVII HOA case. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated now that bank statements and a response from the insurance company have been received, Investigator Bernie Walther suggested Ms. Kropf attempt mediation between the parties again. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will meet with Ms. Kropf in the coming weeks to discuss next steps. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated, as a reminder, the Commission voted to approve dismissing the debt owed to the Complainant if they made a good faith effort to work something out with, and pay, the Complainant in the case.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she followed up with the City’s Finance Department regarding the debt collection process as it relates to the Behnke V. Subway (Mount Vernon Road) case. Ms. Abejo-
Parker stated the City’s Finance Department communicated there are no additional penalties that can be pursued but the debt collection agency can make collection phone calls to create urgency with the Respondent, Scott Canterbury. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the City’s Finance Department clarified the debt collection includes taking tax refunds, vendor of the state funds and any casino winnings. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated a letter was sent to Respondent Canterbury notifying him the Commission is moving forward with the debt collection process.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission office will be closed Tuesday, August 6th through Thursday, August 8th as staff attends the HUD regional conference in Omaha. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the office closure will be posted in the building and on social media accounts.

Ms. Abejo-Parker shared upcoming outreach events including AsianFest, Veterans Stand Down, Freedom Fund Banquet, Festival Latino and the History Makers Gala. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Commission has one ticket still available for the Freedom Fund Banquet and five tickets still available for the History Makers Gala. Ms. Abejo-Parker requested any Commissioner that is interested in attending either event contact staff.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she received an update from Commissioner Rippy regarding the recruitment of a new Executive Director. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the contract will be signed by Mercer in the coming days and then it will be sent for the City Manager’s signature. Commissioner Igram stated Baker Tilly was originally selected to handle the recruitment but it didn’t work out. Therefore, it was decided to move forward with the second place company, Mercer. Commissioner Igram stated the delay in the process has been ironing out the contract.

Commissioner Arrington asked what the process was for selecting a new firm. Commissioner Igram stated Mercer was the runner up in the selection process and the City decided to go with them as the number two company.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated, as previously mentioned, Commissioners Freie and Arrington met with staff to discuss the Committee charters. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated during that discussion it was pointed out the Development and Personnel Committee are responsible for the hiring of the Executive Director. Therefore, Commissioner Freie and Arrington have expressed interest in being involved in the recruitment process. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will reach out to the City regarding the verbiage in the charter and having Commissioner Freie and Arrington involved. Commissioner Igram stated she is happy with whatever works best for everyone.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated she will be out of the office during the August Commission meeting and Ms. Munsterman-Scriven will share the Executive Director report in her absence.

Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the case report included in the packet reflects the final numbers for FY19 and the report will start over next month. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the report reflects 10 housing closures in FY19 but does not include a recent probable cause case. Ms. Abernathey explained HUD will count the probable cause case in their closure numbers but staff does not as there is still work taking place on the case. Commissioner Igram asked if staff met the required number for investigating housing cases. Ms. Abernathey stated the Commission is supposed to investigate eight housing cases a year and the Commission investigated 11 in FY19.

Commissioner Topinka asked if Commissioners will be involved in the recruitment of the Executive Director. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the recruitment firm will gather feedback from Commissioners regarding what they want in a new director.
VIII. **Case Summary Review Presentation**
Ms. Abejo-Parker stated staff was going to provide a refresher on reviewing case summaries but Commissioner Rippy is not present. Therefore, staff would like to postpone the presentation until next meeting as Commissioners Rippy and Igram have not been in the review rotation for awhile.

Commissioner Topinka asked if the Chair and Vice Chair are included in the rotation. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated the Chair and Vice Chair have historically not been included in the rotation due to their additional duties as Chair and Vice Chair. However, Commissioners Freie and Arrington have agreed to stay in the case review rotation, despite being Chair and Vice Chair.

Commissioner Igram asked how case reviews are assigned to Commissioners. Ms. Abejo-Parker stated Ms. Abernathey has a tracking document and informs the Investigators who is next in the rotation. Ms. Abernathey stated Commissioners Rippy and Igram have recently been skipped in the rotation until the refresher is provided.

Commissioner Freie asked if there was anything else to discuss. Commissioner Toingar stated the Intercultural Festival will be held on August 24th at the Tuma Soccer Complex. Commissioner Toingar stated the cities of Marion and Cedar Rapids will be involved. Commissioner Toingar stated staff is reaching out to the City of Marion and the City of Cedar Rapids to schedule their involvement and participation. Commissioner Toingar asked if staff would share the festival flyer on Facebook. Ms. Munsterman-Scriven stated she will share it on the social media accounts. Commissioner Freie asked if the event moved. Commissioner Toingar stated the event used to be held at Kirkwood Community College but was moved to Tuma Soccer Complex to accommodate the addition of volleyball.

Commissioner Freie stated the next “Not Without Me” event will be held on July 28th at the African American Museum. Commissioner Freie stated he came across a program that provides 60 free books to children zero to five who live in Cedar Rapids. Commissioner Freie shared informational flyers regarding the program.

IX. **Adjournment**
Commissioner Topinka moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:22 p.m. Commissioner Igram seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by Alicia Abernathey