



MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING

APPROVED

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

DATE: Thursday, March 18, 2021

TIME: 5:30 p.m.

PLACE: Urbana City Council Chambers
Urbana City Building
400 South Vine Street
Urbana, Illinois 61801
*Virtually Via Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT: Megan McKissack, Peter Resnick, Frances Rigberg, Julie Robinson Schaeffer.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Carol Bradford, Stacie Burnett

LATE ARRIVAL: Rev. Florence Caplow

1. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chair Frances Rigberg called this meeting of the Urbana Human Relations Commission to order at 5:30 p.m. Roll was taken. A quorum was present.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Frances Rigberg called for a motion to approve the agenda. Peter Resnick moved to approve the agenda. Julie Robinson Schaeffer seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Christopher Hansen shared his thoughts on filling the position of the Human Rights and Equity Officer and encouraged it being an intentional hire that will do the job effectively.

Grace Wilken also emphasized the need for the new Human Rights and Equity Officer to be someone who will do the job effectively. Ms. Wilken also asked the Commission members to address why they agree with the City not holding itself to the original Human Rights ordinance as she interprets in the letter that will be addressed in the meeting today.

Tracey Chong asked how the City will be held accountable to following the Human Rights Ordinance.

4. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. Letter to Mayor re Human Rights and Equity Officer Hire

Chair Frances Rigberg introduced the letter and its purpose regarding the Commission's restlessness with not having an officer.

Peter Resnick shared information from the Mayor's office that interviews will begin the week of March 29. He recommended the letter still be sent to the Mayor to have it on the record.

Elizabeth Hannan provided an update on the current status of the hiring process for this position and the timeline goal.

Peter Resnick made a motion send the message as drafted and shown on the website to the Mayor for the Human Relations Commission with the Signature of the chair along with a copy going to Carol Mitten and Elizabeth Hannan. Megan McKissack seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote.

5. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Frances Rigberg declared the meeting to be adjourned at 5:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Tamra Jane Corbin
Recording Secretary

March 18, 2021

Dear Mayor Marlin,

Ending unlawful discrimination has been a priority in Urbana for decades. But for over eight months, the Urbana Human Relations Office and Commission have gone without a half-time Officer, and we have been without a full-time Officer since 2017. Elizabeth has done a great job handling contractor approvals and incoming human rights complaints, but she has a full-time job without these duties. We appreciate the capable new members you have found to join our ranks. However, to be fully effective and make any substantial progress in eliminating discrimination, we need a full-time Officer with specialized experience and training in human rights law and practice. Filling this position also gives Human Rights a full place at the table of upper City management and governance.

This year has had some unusual challenges, particularly an influx of complaints against the City and public input that included personal attacks and other forms of bullying. With a strong Commission membership and the support of you, Carol, and the City Council, we have managed these challenges, but we are worn thin and are frustrated in our larger mission. The most recent changes in the Ordinance are welcome and address longstanding problems, but they have also created even more work for us by requiring us to create a process to handle reported concerns about the City's compliance with the Ordinance. We have leadership in our ranks, yes, but we are nonetheless unpaid volunteers without specialized training or full-time hours in our schedules to contribute. For example, initiatives to address the well-documented problems of *blatant discrimination in housing* and *almost complete lack of diversity in local trade unions* simply have not been undertaken.

We can limp along, even pretty well at times, but we are not the full Human Rights team envisioned by the Ordinance. We have gone too long enough without an Officer, and we have all felt the lack. We can't help but wonder why, after the field was reportedly narrowed to a small number of good candidates, we still have had no interviews or apparent progress in filling this position.

So, we collectively formally ask that you *make filling this position a priority*, that you *let us know what the current time-line* is for this hire, and *that you share any information* you can about why the position has not been filled. We would also like to see a copy of the *job description* for this position.

Along with you, we look forward to future of the renamed Human Rights and Equity Office, for which this hire is crucial.

Yours truly,
The Urbana Human Relations Commission
Frances Rigberg, Chair



cc: Carol Mitten, Elizabeth Hannon