

Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2004

Attendees: Valentina Gallegos, John Hagen, Jeanne Poppe, Nancy Clark, Gabe Garcia, Susan Wagner, Anu Kasturi

Staff: Trish Wiechmann

Others: Dan Kane, Tom Plehal

Meeting was called to order by Nancy Clark at 7:04 pm. The minutes will stand as corrected (included the meeting was called to order by Nancy Clark and the signature line of the secretary).

Update on the Ethnic Festival. John distributed a handout detailing the people from the committee and the responsibilities they will have for the festival. John said there is a general feeling the festival is something for minorities in our community and they want to make it more inviting to all. There will be a logo contest and the winner will receive \$100. 2nd and 3rd place winners will be determined based on popularity vote at the festival. Jeanne asked if the logo was free hand drawing or could be computer generated. Susan and John said they can follow up to make sure the rules for the contest will deal with that.

Under the entertainment section there will be some work done to try to bring in some additional northern European influence (polka dancing contest). John stated that DARE to CARE will also be doing the games from that event at the Ethnic Festival. Susan clarified that DARE to CARE will also be hosting a separate event as they have in the past. The next committee meeting is February 19. The date for the Ethnic Festival is likely Sunday, August 29 but John and Susan will confirm at our next meeting.

Father Paul Nelson will be recognized as our 2003 Austin Human Rights Award recipient. Trish had given out posters and sent out additional posters. The recognition will be at the public library on Saturday February 28 from 1 – 2:30 pm. There will be a short program at 1:15 pm. Trish has already gotten the plaque he will receive and she has updated the large plaque that includes all past recipients. Coffee, punch and cookies will be served. We are expecting Maryann Wolesky and Jim Peck to be available to speak about Paul. Liliana too should be available to help with the presentation. Other suggested names to help get information would be Dick Cook who might have photos or materials from Father Nelson's retirement and Joan Hagen can help to see if a family Father Nelson helped would be available. Susan and Jeanne will be on a subcommittee to work with Trish for the program and reception. Susan indicated she likely will be out of town that day.

HRC Regional meeting will be Monday March 8 from 7 – 9 pm at Riverland Community College in the West building. Jeanne has invited the Owatonna and Albert Lea HRC. Celeste Ruble from the college will be presenting info about the grant Riverland received. That should take about 45 minutes then we can take about 75 minutes to interact between the three HRCs. We might want to ask questions like what is the scope of interaction of the HRC with the community, what is the nature of the members and amount of time devoted to HRC business,

how much of a budget do each have, what amount of education AND advocacy does each HRC do.

Nancy gave a report about the Mason City HRC. They operate differently under the Iowa law that states any city of 29, 000 or larger must fund a Human Rights commission. They have a FT director and two part time staff. They do very little education and spend most of their time and energy on investigation including employment and fair housing. In addition to paid staff they have nine volunteer commission members who are unpaid.

Trish said after our last meeting since we had questions about our duties and responsibilities she sent us Austin ordinance 2.52. She reviewed it with us and pointed out some language, which would indicate we are doing what is being asked of us – more education not actually investigating.

She also said she had spoken with Jim Hurm City administrator after our last meeting when we were talking about possible unfair housing/rental practices in Austin. She had suggested having some type of education/training of landlords, realtors, attorneys and commission members regarding housing and crime in our community.

Trish also stated we have a budget of \$300 but could ask for more if we had a need to do so. After some discussion about the role of the local HRC it was decided to have a subcommittee for bylaws since they hadn't been updated for a while. Gabe Garcia, John Hagen and Jeanne Poppe will serve on a subcommittee to review bylaws. Comment was made by John Hagen on getting together a book of what we can do which would be helpful for us and for other people who are wondering about the Austin HRC.

Officer elections. Motion made by Susan and seconded by John to reelect Nancy Clark and Gabe Garcia as co-chairs. Jeanne Poppe was reelected secretary (Susan moved, John second).

Dan Kane addressed the commission and asked to share some comments. He initially apologized for any offense he created based on his emails or inquiries to staff and commission members. He indicated he is here because he is interested in making the community better.

Mr. Kane requested to add some things that were omitted from the January minutes. One was the question he raised of Trish asking about the number of fulltime employees of the city who are people of color. He also said it wasn't clear in the minutes that the grant Jeanne was speaking of that Riverland Community College received was a Bremer Foundation grant. He asked if he could specifically be included in any emails of the HRC to be notified when meetings were happening. Trish said he couldn't be included in all emails and receive correspondence but the meetings are posted and on the website as well as at City Hall.

Mr. Kane asked Nancy and Jeanne if they were aware of any League of MN HRC grants that have been received in Austin; both answered in the negative. He asked for clarification of what it takes for him as a citizen to get information – he was unclear if he goes to Trish as the liaison for the city or if he should go to individual members of the commission.

Mr. Kane commented on state statute 363 and wondering how we are doing that? He indicated he is interested in this topic because he was on the faculty of the U of MN (including at the MLK center) and spent years working within the field of anti-poverty on the areas of discrimination and state department of human rights.

Mr. Kane purchased some copies of the Declaration of Human Rights and distributed to members of the HRC.

Mr. Kane indicated there were a couple of other things to add to January minutes including a comment from Gabe that there was a concern of racial profiling and Valentina had indicated concerns about housing in Austin. He has been in contact with others including Dave Mueller from Olmsted County. He asked if there is any thought to having a countywide HRC –Trish indicated that there was some discussion several years ago and that there wasn't interest at that time and it hasn't recently been brought up.

Mr. Kane specifically asked about the issue of meth houses and how people can move into rental property that was formally a meth house. HRC members indicated that this might be an issue to address through the crime-free ordinance. Trish indicated that the County is working on a countywide ordinance addressing specifics that landlords, etc. would need to abide by. He also inquired if the HRC could keep a record of hate crimes since the state doesn't keep track of hate crime data. Susan said police reports involving adults can be public, involving minors would be private data. John Hagen also asked if we were keeping a file for letters, etc.

Our next meeting will be Wednesday March 17 at 7:00 PM. Reminder that all HRC members are invited to the Monday March 8 meeting at 7:00 PM at Riverland Community College, West building room A237 for the meeting with HRC members from Albert Lea and Owatonna.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Poppe, secretary