

Austin Human Rights Commission
Minutes: February 23, 2015

Present: Richard Lemons, Jake Vela, Lyndsey Waletzke, Darya Gemmel, Christine Stiehm, Jason Baskin and Tricia Wiechmann (city liaison).

Absent: John Brown Bol, Lysie Moritz, and Kathryn Martin

1. Welcome to new commission members – John Brown Bol and Jason Baskin.
Jason Baskin was welcomed to the Commission
2. Adopt/Amend Agenda
Commissioner Vela moved to adopt the agenda as written; Commissioner Stiehm seconded; motion carried
3. Kelly Nesvold
Kelly and Danielle Nesvold shared information on 300M4FREEDOM, their initiative designed to raise awareness of human trafficking in Minnesota. It is a 300-mile triathlon (5 miles swim, 240 miles bike, 55 miles run) beginning in Grand Rapids, MN and finishing at Cornerstone Church in Austin. The event is scheduled for August 2016 (date yet to be determined). The Nesvold's have already invited several other organizations and churches to participate, and the funds raised will be donated to Mission 21 and Project Rescue. Their goal is to raise \$100,000 to combat sex trafficking. They made no specific request to the Commission, but presented to "create momentum" and inquire about the possibility of the Commission's willingness to "align efforts" with them. Commissioner Lemons referred the Nesvold's to the State Human Rights Commission for additional support and involvement and then expressed interest in future updates on the project. Nesvold's shared "Domestic Sex Trafficking: The Criminal Operations of the American Pimp," a report developed by the Polaris Project.
4. Jennifer Lloyd Benson
Jennifer Lloyd Benson is a member of Albert Lea Citizens Against Human Trafficking Task Force (ALCAHTTF), which has partnered with the Office of Justice Programs to analyze the presence of sex trafficking in the Albert Lea community. Currently, the Task Force is ministering to and building relationships with the women who are performing in local strip clubs. They'll be expanding their efforts to Myrtle, MN, where there is another strip club. Lloyd Benson reported that 4 Austin Law Enforcement members will be attending specialized training in Sex Trafficking, and she announced a September 9 training session for the SE Minnesota Region. Details will be forthcoming, but anyone is welcome to attend. Lloyd Benson shared information about the presence of trafficking in Austin, including details about backpage.com and places in Austin that cater to such trafficking. Lloyd Benson also shared several documents: "MN Girls Are Not For Sale," by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota; "What You Need to Know About Human Trafficking" and "Next Step: What Can You Do to Help Unlock the Chains," published by ALCAHTTF; Resolution 13-032, Resolution In Support of Amending Minnesota's Safe Harbor Act to Define All Sex-Trafficked Children Under the Age of 18 as Crime Victims.

Commissioner Lemons asked whether Lloyd Benson would be available for a possible work session. The Commission discussed the information shared and how the Commission might respond to the information. Lemons suggested that we need data for our community, asked the other commissioners to consider for discussion next month whether the topic is/should be considered a major issue to be addressed by the Commission. Commissioner Baskin suggested that we need to meet with law enforcement to determine what is currently being done to combat trafficking in our community so that we can further consider commission action on the matter.

5. Approval of January 26, 2015 meeting minutes

Vela suggested an amendment to the January minutes: In New Business, it should read that Commissioner Lemons, not Commissioner Vela, who invited Lloyd Benson to present to the Commission. Commissioner Gemmel made a motion to accept the minutes with the amendment; Commissioner Stiehm seconded; motion passed.

6. Treasurer's report – 2015 budget \$4,500

So far expenses total \$124.90; Commissioner Vela asked for clarification about expenses for the MLK event; Current balance equals \$4375.10.

7. Reports & Discussion

- Essay contest – approve top three: Commissioners Gemmel and Lemons have completed the first read of the essays and have narrowed the field to about 10. They will meet on Tuesday, February 24, to finalize the top 3.
- City Liaison Wiechmann asked about recognition/awards for the winners. After discussion, Commissioner Vela made a motion for the top 3 to each receive \$50 in Chamber Bucks. Commissioner Stiehm seconded; motion passed.

8. Strategic development update

- Respecting Human Rights: Commissioner Gemmel reported that she, Commissioner Martin, and Commissioner Moritz met to discuss possible topics for Community Conversations.
 - Their recommendations are
 - Homelessness: Sex Trafficking and Poverty
 - Mental Illness and Stigma
 - Diversity Issues in Wellness, Health, and Healthcare
 - Commissioner Gemmel also reported on a University of Minnesota initiative called Critical Conversations About Diversity and Justice, which provides video recordings of past sessions. Commissioner Gemmel will take action to determine how to obtain rights to use the videos in a public setting.
<https://diversity.umn.edu/criticalconversations>
 - Other possible resources include TED Talks
- Commissioner Lemons agreed to take action on learning more about the possibility of providing CEUs for attendance at Community Conversations.
- Valuing Diversity: The subcommittee was not able to meet prior to this meeting, but Commissioner Waletzke reported on her idea to plan an event aimed at young members of our community. She shared a summary of an article called “Diversity in the

Classroom: Activities that Promote Racial and Cultural Awareness,” which mentioned that individuals’ racial attitudes are set by the age of 9. Commissioner Waletzke suggested hosting an event at the public library, where children can complete art projects and listen to a reading of *Beads on One String*, by Dennis Warner.

- Cultivating a Just and Inclusive Community: Commissioners Vela and Lemons reported that they and Commissioner Baskin had met and discussed the status of the Road Shows. As of this meeting, members of the subcommittee have met with Chief Krueger, Mayor Stiehm, and member(s) of Zonta. They plan to continue to tailor the presentation for different groups.
 - At their meeting, Commissioner Lemons and Chief Krueger discussed the mostly white police force in Austin and the department’s recruiting process. Local law enforcement does not currently keep data on arrest rate by ethnicity. Overall, Commissioner Lemons is pleased with the how the meeting went, and plans to follow up with the Chief again next week.
 - Commissioner Vela asked the Chief about any formalized diversity training the force has received, and the Chief explained that they are “trained to treat everyone alike.” Commissioner Vela expressed concern over this tactic, citing an example of how it might not be appropriate to approach, for example, a citizen on the autism spectrum in the same manner of one who is not. Commissioner Gemmel mentioned an article she posted to the Commission’s FaceBook page, “Playing the ‘Colorblind’ Card: 3 Truths that Social Colorblindness Tells Us.” <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-orgbon-iii/laying-the-colorblind-car_b_6679196.html?ncid=newsltushpmg00000003>

9. New Business

- Diversity Council Proposal review/discuss/action: Commissioner Lemons presented and requested approval for the proposal from the Diversity Council, detailing the Facing Race project, which had been presented by email for Commission members’ perusal prior to the meeting. After discussion of the proposal and clarification on potential topics, Commissioner Gemmel made a motion to approve the \$2120 expense; Commissioner Baskin seconded; motion passed.
 - Ideas for additional topics: Sex Trafficking (suggested by Commissioner Baskin), Workplace Stereotypes/Prejudice/Discrimination (suggested by Commissioner Vela, and a topic appropriate for youth of our community (suggested by Commissioner Lemons).
 - Commissioner Lemons reported that the Diversity Council is working on a follow-up proposal for training local community members.
- Commissioner Lemons reported on a potential collaboration with the local Zonta Club regarding the film *Not My Life*, a film depicting “the cruel and dehumanizing practices of human trafficking and modern slavery on a global scale.” While Zonta has not yet met to approve the collaboration, Lemons suggested that AHRC accept responsibility for advertising and coordinating the event, and that Zonta accept responsibility for procuring the film (a \$75 expense).
- Commissioner Lemons also requested that the Commission approve the purchase of *A Path Appears*, a 4-hour documentary produced by PBS. He suggested that the documentary be presented in four parts, either as a Community Conversation topic or as

an educational topic. Commissioner Stiehm made a motion to approve the purchase; Commissioner Gemmel seconded; motion passed.

- Commissioner Vela formally announced his resignation from the Commission, wished the Commission luck, and expressed confidence in the direction of the Commission. Members of the Commission thanked Vela for his five years of service.
- Commissioner Waletzke reported on an ACLU article she read about the inequalities in enforcing drug laws and prosecuting violations across races. Commissioner Lemons offered to scan the article and share it with the Commission members via email.

10. Other Business

Commissioner Gemmel followed up on the possibility of the Commission taking the “Road Show” to staff meetings in the public schools. She asked about the amount of time needed for such a presentation; Commissioner Lemons reported that it would require only 15 minutes.

11. Communications

None at this time

12. Citizens Addressing the Commission (3 minutes per person limit)

- Mr. Dan Kane commented on several topics
 - He again expressed concern that the Commission will include no people of color, now that Commissioner Vela has resigned. He expressed a similar concern about Austin Public Schools. He offered that we need to “grow” our own by supporting our students of color in gaining leadership positions in our community.
 - Mr. Kane also expressed concern about the many different topics the Commission is addressing related to sex trafficking. He recommended that the Commission clearly define its focus and continue to create partnerships with other community groups.
 - Mr. Kane expressed frustration about the Commission’s plans for holding “Community Conversations,” as it’s an approach that has been tried many times before and does not seem to result in action.
- Jessica Swanson, a member of the local Zonta chapter, confirmed their interest in partnering with AHRC. She also expressed support for the Community Conversation concept. She and Commissioner Lemons discussed the challenge of informing the community about planned events, as the traditional approach of using local media doesn’t seem to reach enough people.
 - Commissioner Lemons asked that we add to the March agenda a discussion about how to be more effective in getting the word out to the community, and stressed the importance of using a variety of methods in order to reach our diverse population.

13. Next Meeting – March 23 @ 6:15 PM

Meeting adjourned at 8:07. Chair Lemons asked that members communicate with him about the length of meetings.

Respectfully Submitted, Darya Gemmel