

Austin Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
September 23, 2019

Present: Miguel Garate, Sarah Hartman, Goutham Putta, Andre Godlett, Sara Karki, Tricia Wiechmann, Jenni Braaten.

Absent: Dan Mueller, Oballa, vacancy of one commissioner position

Visiting citizens: None

Commissioner Karki called the meeting to order at 6:18 with quorum present.

- 1) Adopt/ Amend Agenda—Commissioner Garate moved and Commissioner Godlett seconded to adopt the agenda and approve the meeting minutes from August with unanimous approval.
- 2) Treasurer's Report—Currently a balance of \$799.59 remains in the 2019 budget year. There is an outstanding bill yet to be paid from Diamond Ridge for expenses of printed materials during Welcome Week. Less money was spent on Welcome Week since the speaker for Boot Camp was a free will donation of time.
- 3) Welcome Week—The Commission spent considerable time de-briefing and discussing the events from Welcome Week. Commissioner Karki stated there was positive feedback from many people in the community. City Liaison, Weichmann, also reported hearing positive comments. The Commission broke down each event with the following reflections and comments:
 - a. YMCA Family Fun Night—approximately 120 people attended the joint event. It was positive to partner with the YMCA as they are nationally connected to Welcome America and has some resources they could access through the national YMCA. For next year, may need to consider having music or dancing to liven up the ambiance. Some of the stations for families to visit were hard to find. Next year it will be at the new Recreation Center which may alleviate this concern.
 - b. Todd Park clean-up—Approximately 25 people attended this event. It was wet from rain so there were some parts of the area which were not easily accessible unless one had boots. There was more garbage in the wooded area so may need to consider this next year. The park is well maintained so there was not a lot for people to pick up. There was only one person from the community which was not connected to the city so the intended audience participation was low.
 - c. Boot Camp—Commissioner Karki reported the people who did attend seemed to enjoy it. The hope is to make it more interactive between attendees and community connections and less lecture style. The format was shortened from the previous year and the speaker was considered engaging.
 - d. Small Business Tour—approximately 25 people attended this event. There were fewer people by the end of the tour. It was difficult to work with the Sudanese market due to lack of organization and planning with the store owners. Commissioner Mueller cooked the food as a measure to prompt the family to be there. The store was

- not in “good shape” and some attendees seemed to be uncomfortable with this. Something was purchased by attendees at each store. The other two businesses (K’Wyan Market and 1910) had more participation from the owners with explanations of the foods and cultural aspects.
- e. Adult Learning at Riverland—Approximately 30 people attended and shared “Immigrant Stories”. There were many positive comments received.
 - f. Sumner Flag Walk—it was posted on the Austin Public Schools website.
 - g. Inviting Table—Approximately 67 people attended with Molly from Welcoming America there presenting and discussing issues.
 - h. Austin Minority Business Project—Approximately 25 people attended but the hope was for many more. There was a significant cost from the Immigrant Law Center of MN to pay for the speaker from the Federal Reserve in St. Paul to come. It was disappointing given the number of attendees and the cost incurred.
 - i. Harvest Fest—due to the rain the event was moved inside which drastically cut the numbers of attendees. AHRC had a small table in conjunction with the 2020 Census coalition from the county but there was minimal exposure.
 - j. New Immigrant and Refugee Visions—approximately 10 people attended the facilitated discussion by Commissioner Karki. There was hope for higher numbers.
 - k. Flags downtown—there were some negative comments made verbally to City Hall and one letter to the editor in the Austin Daily Herald. There were also positive comments made. Discussion on creating one larger banner to go across Main Street to provide a visual to Welcome Week was an idea.
 - l. Overall—there needs to be more outreach and perhaps outsourcing of marketing for the events of Welcome Week. It was hard to get the word out to community members. Commissioner Garate suggested working in partnership next year with the Mower County Historical Society or the Austin Art Center. It was collectively agreed the AHRC was “maxed out” on how much more could be done by the Commission alone. Discussion on doing one large event for the week with food and music or entertainment was discussed. Obtaining a website just to promote events was also suggested as a marketing tool to consider for future events. The Austin Chamber of Commerce had verbally agreed to promote events on their calendar but that did not happen this year.
 - m. Planning for next year—Start earlier due to various organizations who AHRC could partnership go on break over the summer. It is hard to get the marketing completed earlier when Welcome Week coincides with the startup of the new year in September. Should AHRC have a separate committee to just work on Welcome Week similar to Taste of Nations? Commissioner Karki thanked everyone who participated in the events over Welcome Week.
- 4) Honorary Council Member vacancies—there is a need to find community member to apply to be an honorary council member for city council. Any suggestions are encouraged to apply online or reach out to Mayor Stiehm.
 - 5) ARHC vacancies—there will be at least two commissioner posts to fill due to Jessica Swanson’s departure and Andre Godlett pending departure.

- 6) Story Stitch—Commissioner Karki discussed doing Story Stitch which is a connection building activity in small groups of 6-8 people. There is a series of cards with questions that each participant answers to build bridges between different cultures and socioeconomic status. Discussion on doing a Story Stitch group in November was discussed. There was discussion on using up the remaining funds in the budget to pay for this event. Discussion on the need for more planning to invite other community members who have not participated in any event such as this. Discussion on: ‘are we only reaching the same core group of people?’ such as those connected to the Welcome Center. Discussion on more time needed to do this well and to promote or find different participants. Discussion on venue of perhaps the Ruby Rupner Center at the Hormel Nature Center or the Hormel House. Commissioner Godlett motioned and Commissioner Goutham seconded to spend up to \$500 on a Story Stitch event in November. Commissioner Garate, Hartman and Braaten did not vote. Since it was not majority, the discussion on the event continued with concerns raised on who is the intended audience, does it feel too rushed to do something, the need to follow-up with this after Welcome Week, and the need to use up the remaining budget. Discussion on pre-paying for the Martin Luther King Jr. event would be a means to use up remaining budget dollars. Discussion on supporting the Day of the Dead celebration at Riverland and using up remaining budget dollars for this event. Commissioner Garate shared the expense of this event and the number of people who attend and participate in the event increases each year. Commissioner Karki discussed the need to keep the issues separate and she reported the Day of the Dead is a Riverland initiative and AHRC has supported it in the past but it is not AHRC event. Commissioner Karki motioned and Commissioner Godlett seconded to support the Day of the Dead celebration at Riverland with \$200 from the budget. The motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Karki motioned and Commissioner Godlett seconded to move forward with the Story Stitch event and spent up to \$500 on the event. Commissioners Karki, Godlett, Putta were “yea” votes, with Commissioners Garate, Hartman and Braaten as “nay” votes. The motion was tied which did not receive the majority need to move forward. The discussion ensued further with discussion on the aforementioned points. Commissioner Hartman motioned and Commissioner Godlett seconded for a second time to move forward with the Story Stitch and spend up to \$500. Commissioners Karki, Hartman, Godlett, Garate and Putta voted in favor; Commissioner Braaten voted against. Motion carried with majority.
- 7) Upcoming events at Austin Public Library—October 2 and 25 will be speakers on race relations.
- 8) Roundtable—AAUW will have speakers from the Islamic Resource Group in Minneapolis come and speak on Islam on November 12. This event is free and open to the public.
- 9) Commissioner Garate motioned and Commissioner Braaten seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:54 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jenni Braaten
Secretary