Austin Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 24, 2021

Members Appearing in Person: Jenni Braaten, Miquel Garate and Sarah Hartman

Members Appearing Electronically: Lia Culbert, Laura Helle, Stephanie Holtorf and Vicki Spyhalski

City Members Appearing in Person: City Liaison Trish Wiechmann and City Councilman Jeff Austin

Absent Members: Dan Mueller and An Le

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the meeting was held hybrid with the option to appear in person or via a Zoom conference call. Commissioner Hartman called meeting to order at 5:31 pm with quorum present.

1. Adopt/Approve Agenda – Commissioner Spyhalski motioned to adopt and approve the reading of the agenda. Commissioner Helle seconded to adopt and approve the reading of the agenda. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Approve Meeting Minutes – Commissioner Garate motioned to adopt and approve the reading of the minutes. Commissioner Spyhalski seconded to adopt and approve the reading of the minutes from April 26, 2021. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Budget Report – $3,474 left which does not include upcoming expenses. We have up to $2,500 allotted for Write on Race and up to $500 allotted for Pride. That would leave $474 left for the rest of the year.

Unfinished Business:

4. Pride Event
    - Commissioner Spyhalski has the flyer ready to go. She will send to Commissioner Helle to make sure we have correctly credited the Southern Minnesota Arts Council for their grant money towards the 4th Avenue Fest. (It was later determined this was not necessary).
    - Commissioner Hartman – The snow cone machine is approved. She will also send out the links to all the items to purchase for decoration and supplies. Roxi charges $200 minimum for the event.
    - Commissioner Braaten asked if volunteers are needed, Hartman indicated that we should already have enough volunteers. Library will be there with books and to help make buttons.
    - Commissioner Garate would like a flyer to pass out at the upcoming vaccination clinic at Tienda y Taqueria Guerrero this weekend. Commissioner Spyhalski will get it approved and send to Trish to print.

5. Write on Race Journaling Project
    - Commissioner Spyhalski – Meeting with Stacy and Bukata in June to talk about fee structure and other things. Submitted the grant proposal for Austin Area Foundation and Blandin Foundation.

6. Discuss/Adopt Statement of Support
    - Commissioner Braaten – spoke with Audel Shokohzadeh from MN HRC about what we can be doing as a Commission. She also browsed other local HRC websites. She liked Northfield's HRC's statement of support and got permission to use it or adjust it to our needs.
    - Commissioner Helle – Suggested that we ask the City Council to adopt the statement as well. Commissioner Garate suggested we add Austin, Minnesota to the statement.
    - Commissioner Helle motioned to adopt and approve the statement. Commissioner Hartman seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
    - Commissioner Helle moves that we ask the City of Austin to adopt the statement. Commissioner Braaten seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
    - City Liaison Wiechmann will discuss with the Mayor whether the statement should be brought forth as a proclamation or a statement and it will be brought up at the next city meeting.
    - The Commission feels this is a good time to put out a statement declaring publicly where we stand. We denounce racism and discrimination of any kind. This is coming in the midst of George Floyd and other social justice issues. We have become aware of a recent incident at a local school involving racism. Students were uncomfortable and went to the administration about it and they were not heard. The administration did finally address it. We feel a mission statement to denounce racism is important.

7. Welcoming Week
    - Commissioner Helle suggested we tie in Write on Race launch with Welcoming Week.
    - City Liaison Wiechmann emailed a list of past Welcoming Week events. Some past ideas were "I am a Welcomer" posted on businesses, park cleanup, business food tours, flag walk with Sumner, and a Riverland's Immigrant Voices, Immigrant Stories they have held in the past. We brainstormed possible events and ideas that we could do while keeping in mind our budget. We only have $474 left for the year after Write on Race and Pride.
    - Commissioner Braaten – the Business tours were a good idea, but stressful, a lot of planning, and not a lot of participation. We are hoping to put efforts towards things that will have the most impact. Commissioner Helle suggested highlighting immigrant businesses, promoting on our website. Commissioner Holtorf mentioned the program the Welcome Center is doing providing food ingredients and recipes of different cultural cuisine. We should reach out to them to see if they want to collaborate and plan something for Welcoming Week.
    - Commissioner Garate – the flag walk seemed to work well in the past.
    - Commissioner Spyhalski – there is an incubator for minority businesses that we could ask to partner with – Commissioner Garate gave the contact as Juan Molina.
    - Commissioner Spyhalski – suggested we have events that are more closely aligned with Welcoming Week and involve our immigrant population.

- Commissioner Helle – asked if we want to do an art display or performances. Commissioner Garate liked the idea of a street dance. Commissioner Helle and Garate will get together to talk more about this.
- Commissioner Helle also suggested partnering with Sweet Reads for an author discussion, having a display at the library (library has typically done some kind of display in the past), and reaching out to Riverland's Dani Heiny for other possible collaborations (Riverland has held some kind of event every year).
- Commissioner Garate informed us of September 16th Mexican Independence Day occurring during Welcoming Week. There is a celebration at El Mariachi's and they could talk about Independence Day for South American countries that celebrate it.

New Business:

8. Commissioner Garate – Karenni community big event in El Parral event Sunday, June 27 and there is a need for ballroom sponsors of $500.
    - Commissioner Helle suggested HRC give $100 and she will match the $100. Commissioner Spyhalski also matched the $100 as well. Providing $300 total funds.
    - Commissioner Laura motioned HRC uses $100 of their funds coming up for the Sunday June 27 event. Commissioner Braaten seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

9. Commissioner Helle – City Data Collection
    - Commissioner Helle would like the city to start collecting data on demographics and populations within Austin. Specifically, jail roster, people pulled over, household administrative fines, people applying for and getting hired for jobs. These things are not tracked right now, and we need to start collecting these data to be able to know if there is a problem with discrimination within our community. Currently, the police do not keep that data, and other information on employees, boards, commissions, employees applying (not required) is not regularly tracked.
    - City Liaison Wiechmann has collected some of these data before but only on race, ethnicity, and gender. She will gather some more information for the next meeting.

10. Roundtable – None.

Commissioner Hartman moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Braaten seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

With no further business identified, the meeting was adjourned at 6:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Holtorf, Secretary