

**Human Rights Commission
Business Meeting Minutes**

June 18, 2020

Commissioners Present: Melvin Nobles, Lisa Snyder, Al Ratcliffe, Taniesha Lyons, Sarah Rumbaugh

Commissioners Absent: Sara Lee, Ronita Boult, Sara Nunez, Julie Tran

City Staff Present: Andreta Armstrong

Call to Order: Commission Nobles at 6:36 pm

Roll Call: Andreta Armstrong, Human Rights Manager

Approval of Business Meeting Agenda: The Commissioners agreed to add to the Agenda, Open discussion on HRC impacts moving forward.

Approval of Study Session and Business Meeting minutes: Commission approved both the Study Session and Business Meeting minutes for March, 2020, the last Commission Meeting before COVID-19 closure.

Public Comment: Former Commission Chair, Michealea Lemons, was present and commented on the HRC impacts moving forward.

Chairs Report: No report was shared

Commissioner Reports No committee reports were shared.

- **Policy and Advocacy**
- **Racial Justice and Equity**
- **Housing Task Force**
- **Educations and Outreach Task Force**

New Business: Response to the information shared during Study Session, regarding the closure of civil rights investigations, Commissioners asked the following questions and received answers by Andreta (answers are in red):

- When was this change proposed and why didn't OEHR inform the Commission of the proposed change before discontinuing the City's Contracts with EEOC and HUD? **OEHR was informed by Budget Staff and the City Manager (approximately 3-months ago), that the City will no longer fund having civil rights investigators, due to the heavy burden on the General Fund (Reimbursements from HUD and EEOC merely support 20-25% of the cost of having the two positions). OEHR was directed to inform the Commission after the City had an official end date with both federal agencies.**
- If someone wants to complain about discrimination, who will help them in Tacoma? **The Washington State Human Rights Commission has jurisdiction to investigate claims of discrimination throughout the State, and therefore has the authority to assist Tacoma residents with discrimination inquiries. However, the local matters not covered by the State is gender**

neutral bathroom signage, Source of Income discrimination in rental housing, and closed captioning mandate for Tacoma businesses.

- Did the City consider the impacts of ending civil rights investigations? The Director of OEHR asked me to prepare and submit to her a document outlining the impacts of not enforcing civil rights laws (both local and federal). Soon after being asked, I completed the assignment and forwarded her the document.

Commission Actions:

The Commission agreed to table further discussions until the Director of OEHR and/or the City Manager can attend a meeting to give additional information and for the Commission to share their thoughts on the probable devastating impacts to Tacoma residents without civil rights investigators (particularly during this time in Tacoma and nationally). Draft of the statement will include two points:

1. Black Lives Matter (including the death of Mr. Ellis in Tacoma; and
2. The negative impacts of staff changes of OEHR—City not enforcing anti-discrimination laws.

OEHR invites HRC to make a Black Lives Matter Statement

After the Commission discussed whether or not it should make such a statement (in-light of wanting to focus its efforts on the situation of the City having no Civil Rights Investigators), it was determined:

- The Commission will proceed with a letter to be drafted by the Racial Justice and Equity Committee.
- This letter would be inclusive of issues specifically and only pertaining to 1) Black Lives Matter and 2) Manuel Ellis.

There was a motion to not include language around the impact of OEHR's new decision and how that would impact discrimination in Tacoma. The recommendation was for a separate letter addressing this issue only.

The Commission directed Andreta to inform the public of the change in the Human Rights Unit on OEHR's website.

The Commission directed Andreta to have the Commission meetings, via Zoom, instead of conference call. During the remote phase of conducting business, Zoom would promote more connection between Commissioners.

It was noted that Commissioner Sara Lee resigned her post in November of 2019. The then Chair, Michealea Lemons, forgot to give notice to OEHR received no notice. Now a Community Member, Ms. Lemons will forward Commissioner Lee's e-mail of resignation to Andreta.

Staff Reports

Andreta was asked on the status of Commission interviews for vacant Commissioner posts. Andreta said she will ask the Clerk's Office about when interviews will resume.

Andreta noted to Commissioners the three employment investigations that are reported to them, in their packets sent before the meeting.

Meeting is adjourned at 7:30 pm

