

Approved



**CITY OF YPSILANTI  
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING  
MONDAY, March 23, 2015  
7:00 P.M.  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

|                    |         |
|--------------------|---------|
| Benjamin Elmgren   | Absent  |
| Claudia Pettit     | Present |
| Krista Nordberg    | Present |
| Darlene Scott      | Present |
| John Shuler, Chair | Present |
| Jennifer Symanns   | Present |
| Sue Melke          | Present |
| Theresa Saunders   | Present |

**II. AGENDA APPROVAL**

Commissioner Pettit motioned, Commissioner Nordberg supported to approve the agenda as submitted.

On a voice vote, the motion carried and the agenda was approved.

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

– February 23, 2015

Commissioner Shuler stated at the bottom of the second page of the minutes his name is spelled incorrectly.

Commissioner Pettit motioned, Commissioner Melke supported to approve the minutes as amended.

On a voice vote, the motion carried and the minutes were approved.

**V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

None

## **VI. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

- Review of the 2014 Annual Report.

Commissioner Shuler stated the 2014 Annual Report is not yet completed and asked to table the item till the next meeting.

Commissioner Pettit motioned, Commissioner Melke supported to table the 2014 Annual Report until the April 27<sup>th</sup> meeting.

On a voice vote, the motion carried and the item was tabled.

- Potential Forum Topics.

Commissioner Saunders stated during the last meeting Commissioner Elmgren suggested the Commission examine “community policing” and asked if there is interest in that topic by the Commission.

Commissioner Shuler replied he was unclear what Commissioner Elmgren meant by “community policing”.

Commissioner Melke stated she would like to know where the surveillance cameras were in the City.

Commissioner Saunders stated concern regarding police departments is a very relevant topic, especially, regarding school systems and the community as a whole.

Commissioner Melke stated the Commission should examine discrimination in housing regarding the mentally ill.

Commissioner Shuler stated the Commission has examined both fair housing and the homeless in past forums. Mr. Shuler asked if Commissioner Melke had an idea of the kind of discrimination the mentally ill might face.

Commissioner Melke responded that the mentally ill feel outside of society.

Commissioner Shuler asked Ms. Melke if she knows of any resources the Commission could gain information regarding the topic.

Commissioner Melke replied the National Alliance of Mental Illness provides a good deal of information on the topic. Ms. Melke stated the Commission could also reach out to those who are mentally ill for their perspective.

Commissioner Pettit asked if Commissioner Melke knew of people to invite to the forum, or at least attend a Commission meeting to discuss their experiences during audience participation.

Commissioner Melke asked how the Commission designated forum topics.

Commissioner Nordberg responded early topics, such as housing discrimination, the Commission enlisted help from Fair Housing Center. Each forum topic was a vehicle both to inform the public, but the Commission as well. Ms. Nordberg added the Commission, other than a specific topic presented by City Council or the public, to decide on topics on its own.

Commissioner Saunders suggested the Commission investigate what happens in the case of poverty, what citizens are provided services. Ms. Saunders stated this would take time, possibly over a year, but trends may produce evidence of discrimination.

Commissioner Melke stated how the City handles handicap issues.

Commissioner Pettit agreed and stated the light to cross Michigan Ave. at Huron does not allow enough time to cross safely for handicapped individuals.

Commissioner Nordberg stated the Commission could address many smaller issues regarding accessibility.

Commissioner Melke stated these are things that can be accomplished and there are several issues throughout the City that create inaccessibility to handicapped individuals.

Commissioner Shuler asked if there is a group, or an agency that might assist in identifying where problem areas are located in the City, or should the Commission go and investigate itself.

Commissioner Melke responded she feels it is important for the Commission to take an active role in the assessment.

Commissioner Shuler asked if the eight members of the Commission cover the entirety of the City.

Commissioner Pettit stated the members of the Commission are not experts on accessibility and this assessment should be performed by those who have the knowledge to provide an accurate assessment.

Commissioner Melke responded if the Commission relies on an accessibility study nothing will be accomplished.

Commissioner Pettit stated the Commission would be active in both the study and through recommendations to Council.

Commissioner Melke replied the best course of action is the Commission doing its own research and bring those findings to Council.

Commissioner Pettit stated she does not see the Commission, on its own, having the ability to complete that research.

Commissioner Melke replied she would be willing to conduct the research.

Commissioner Pettit stated it would be impossible for the Commission to conduct research though the entire City, or perform the assessment properly.

Commissioner Shuler stated he is not unwilling to attempt to perform research, but he is interested to know who could assist in conducting the assessment.

Commissioner Melke responded Americans with Disabilities Act representation, but it is difficult to actually have people complete any type of analysis.

Commissioner Nordberg stated the Commission could invite the City Manager to discuss what the City's plans are for completing accessibility projects, including budgetary constraints.

Commissioner Shuler added the Director of the Department of Public Services could also be invited to discuss accessibility issues.

Commissioner Nordberg asked what the next steps should be in this process.

Commissioner Pettit responded a discussion needs to take place with City officials on what the process is and what the City is already doing to rectify the problem.

Commissioner Saunders stated the Commission should decide what it wants to know before approaching City officials.

Commissioner Melke stated City Council responds more positively when they are provided with a presentation.

Commissioner Shuler stated that would be the final step in the process once the Commission is prepared to make recommendations to Council.

Commissioner Scott stated during the January Meeting the Commission took part in a brainstorm of possible forum topics and asked if there was further discussion at the February meeting.

Commissioner Shuler replied there was not further discussion.

Commissioner Melke asked what the topics were, developed during the January meeting.

Commissioner Scott replied; youth in schools, health issues for the poor, housing, employment discrimination, and crime.

Commissioner Symanns stated the forum topic regarding crime in Ypsilanti reality and myths and regarding housing the discussion revolved around Ypsilanti being Ann Arbor's Brooklyn.

Commissioner Scott added there was also discussion on surveillance cameras.

Commissioner Melke stated during the February Commission meeting it was mentioned that there is difficulty in trying to get people engaged and asked what could be done to improve citizen participation. Ms. Melke asked if it would be possible to create a Facebook page.

Commissioner Shuler stated probably not without an administrator to maintain. Mr. Shuler added although the attendance at forums is relatively small he does not consider it poor attendance as those present are very engaged.

Commissioner Nordberg stated she does not see a low attendance as a failure.

Commissioner Saunders stated if the Human Relations Commission had a Facebook presence it would provide the ability to inform the public of upcoming forums and events.

Commissioner Melke added there are Ypsilanti discussion boards and individuals are pretty active on those boards.

Commissioner Shuler asked how the Commission would like to go about prioritizing possible topics and said there is not a reason why the Commission cannot take on two topics.

Commissioner Saunders stated she would like to examine youth experience of discrimination and include student voice in the process.

Commissioner Melke stated racial discrimination is a very important issue in Ypsilanti.

Commissioner Scott added since this topic creates very strong emotions she feels the Commission should use a professional facilitator.

Commissioner Saunders asked at the end of the process what the Commission hopes to accomplish.

Commissioner Scott stated the actual conversation itself would be the goal.

Commissioner Shuler answered one of the goals of holding forums is to gain information on said topics and decide what the Commission should do with that information. Mr. Shuler added the majority of forum topics have not produced any actionable items aside from the Latino Forum which produced support for a County ID.

Commissioner Nordberg stated the County ID is already moving forward and does not require support from the Commission.

Commissioner Shuler asked if the City would need to formally adopt the County ID in order to give direction to City staff to accept the ID.

Commissioner Symanns responded that she does not feel that it is a matter of using the ID system it is that this is a legitimate form of ID.

Commissioner Shuler asked if the County can compel the City to accept the ID. Mr. Shuler said the Commission may want to provide a recommendation that City Council direct City staff to accept the County ID as a legitimate form of identification.

Commissioner Symanns stated it depends on what you would need an ID for considering transactions with the City.

Commissioner Nordberg stated the more that this form of identification is accepted the more likely other private institutions will accept the County ID as valid.

Commissioner Scott stated if the ID did not hold any weight why would the County waste its time on creating one.

Commissioner Symanns stated as a former police officer she would assume that police departments would have no issue with accepting this form of identification. Ms. Symanns added that she was no issue with recommending that Council formally accept the County ID as a valid form of identification.

Commissioner Pettit asked if City Council has already accepted the County ID as a valid form of identification.

Commissioner Shuler responded that was more of a communication to the County that the City supports the County ID.

Commissioner Nordberg stated the ID is not yet in place and is still working toward funding the program.

Commissioner Melke asked if the police department could use the County ID as a way to discriminate against those who are undocumented.

Commissioner Symanns replied there are many citizens that do not have identification that could use this, not simply undocumented workers.

Commissioner Shuler asked the Commission its feeling on what topic to choose.

Commissioner Melke responded she will bring information regarding accessibility and handicap issues in the City.

Commissioner Symanns stated the issue of accessibility should be examined more specifically in order to make recommendations to Council.

Commissioner Nordberg stated she would bring more information on where the County is regarding the implantation of the County ID.

Commissioner Melke stated she would like to see the Commission to focus on providing a forum on racial issues in the City.

Commissioner Pettit replied that Commission Saunders stated she would like to examine that possible topic.

Commissioner Symanns stated she would provide the Commission with information regarding Crime in Ypsilanti, both realities and myths.

Commissioner Nordberg stated the County is holding a "black Lives Matter" Symposium.

Commissioner Melke added that would be a great place to inform people about the Human Relations Commission racial forum.

#### **VII. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

None

#### **VIII. PROPOSED BUSINESS**

- 2014 Annual Report
- Prioritize Commission Topics

#### **VIV. NEXT MEETING DATE**

April 27, 2015

#### **X. ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Nordberg motioned, supported by Commissioner Melke to adjourn the meeting.

On a voice vote, the motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.