



Meeting Agenda

City of Ypsilanti Human Relations Commission Special Meeting

**EMU Student Center – 900 Oakwood St. Room 320
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Monday, December 3, 2018, 7:00 P.M.**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Commissioner Browning	Absent
Commissioner Choudhuri	Present
Commissioner Fellows	Present
Commissioner Gaines (7:30)	Present
Commissioner Hicks	Present
Commissioner Hunter	Present
Commissioner Jones-Darling	Present

III. AGENDA APPROVAL

Commissioner Choudhuri moved, seconded by Commissioner Hicks to approve the agenda.

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

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. October 29, 2018
- B. November 9, 2018
- C. November 26, 2018

Commissioner Fellows moved, seconded by Commissioner Hicks to approve the minutes.

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

Human Relations Commission
December 3, 2018

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION/COMMISSION RESPONSE

None

VI. DISCUSSION ITEMS

-Approval of Regular Meeting Schedule for 2019

Commissioner Choudhuri stated she is teaching a class on Monday nights in the coming semester.

The Commission engaged in conversation regarding transition of the meeting schedule to the first Wednesday of the month.

Commissioner Fellows moved, seconded by Commissioner Hicks to approve the 2019 schedule as amended.

Vote:

Commissioner Browning	Absent
Commissioner Choudhuri	Yes
Commissioner Fellows	Yes
Commissioner Gaines	Absent
Commissioner Hicks	Yes
Commissioner Hunter	Yes
Commissioner Jones-Darling	Yes

On a roll call vote, the motion carried, and the 2019 schedule was approved.

-Public Kiosk Discussion

Commissioner Fellows stated the resolution the HRC passed regarding public kiosks was provided to Council under the 'Communications' in a meeting agenda. To date Council has taken no action and it has not appeared on other agendas. Commissioner Hunter stated his concern regarding HRC approved resolutions being provided to Council in that manner. Ms. Fellows agreed, and encouraged other Commissioners to voice their objections to Council regarding the process.

Commissioner Fellows stated she informed the Planning Commission about the potential policy change to create a coalition regarding public kiosks. The next Planning Commission is scheduled for December 19th and asked for Commissioners to attend and support the potential for this policy change.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated he spoke with the Mayor regarding concerns that cross communications between commissions being jammed by the City Manager. He explained the Mayor believes that cross commission communication should be at the discretion of the chairs.

Commissioner Choudhuri asked why the procedure was developed. Commissioner Hunter agreed, there seems to be too many hoops to jump through in order to have Council review a potential policy amendment. Commissioner Fellows responded it is placed under communications in order for Council to discuss it prior to taking action.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated after discussing this with the City Planner two issues were discussed; the kiosks being in the budget and where the kiosks were to be placed. Commissioner Hunter asked what is in the ordinance regarding where the kiosks would be placed. Mr. Jones-Darling responded the ordinance does not include a location. Another potential issue is how to keep the kiosks current, and what the kiosks would look like. Mr. Hunter responded this is what this body should be doing, rather than discussing what roadblocks are in the way of constructing kiosks.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated budget development is about to begin, and this should be discussed with Council. Step two, location of the kiosks, is a more difficult conversation.

Commissioner Fellows stated this Commission does not need to discuss if it supports this ordinance amendment. She views step one as convincing those with decision making authority to support this amendment. She encouraged Commissioners to engage with their representatives on Council and voice their support. She asked the Commission to attend the December 19th Planning Commission meeting to voice the support. She was approached by a member of the Planning Commission to possibly amend the resolution to provide more information to why it was requested.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated the current ordinance could be considered vague and unenforceable. He explained the ordinance was written in the 1980s and states 'when' kiosks are created, and they have not yet been created.

Commissioner Fellows has spoken with many community members about the possibility of having kiosks. One person she spoke to had approached the DDA regarding the possibility of funding a kiosk. She explained that Council Member Murdock had informed her to request funding from the DDA, however, the city controls the ordinance.

-Commissioner Attendances

Commissioner Jones-Darling explained why this item is on the agenda.

Commissioner Hunter asked how many members meet the criteria for dismissal. Commissioner Jones-Darling responded two; Commissioner Choudhuri, and Commissioner Browning. Mr. Hunter stated it appear the situation with Commissioner Browning is clear. Commissioner Hicks agreed.

Commissioner Hicks asked if the bylaws read 'consecutive unexcused absences' or simply 'two unexcused absences'. Commissioner Jones-Darling responded consecutive.

Commissioner Hunter moved, seconded by Commissioner Hicks to request Commissioner Browning show cause for his absences.

Commissioner Hicks asked if the Commission must request cause. Commissioner Jones-Darling responded in the affirmative. Commissioner Choudhuri asked how the Commission can get in touch with Commissioner Browning. Commissioner Hunter replied if Commissioner Browning does not respond to the request that would be the response.

Vote:

Commissioner Browning	Absent
Commissioner Choudhuri	Yes
Commissioner Fellows	Yes
Commissioner Gaines	Yes
Commissioner Hicks	Yes
Commissioner Hunter	Yes
Commissioner Jones-Darling	Yes

On a roll call vote, the motion carried, and Deputy Clerk Hellenga was directed to request Commissioner Browning show cause for his absences.

Commissioner Fellows stated it might be useful to add supportive help, such as transportation, for youth members of the Commission. Commissioner Hicks agreed, however, it appears Commission Browning has been avoidant to any type of contact. Ms. Fellows explained her thoughts were more of an explanation of what to expect as a member of this commission. Commissioner Jones-Darling stated the City Attorney is willing to provide onboarding to new members of all city boards and commissions. Commissioner Choudhuri interjected that might be intimidating for a youth member. Ms. Fellows stated the Commission will assist in building an appropriate process.

Commissioner Choudhuri provided an explanation to her absences.

Commissioner Fellows stated she is more interested that Commissioners are interested in attending meetings. Commissioner Jones-Darling stated the intent of the bylaws were to ensure participation. He asked if Commissioner Choudhuri wishes to continue with as a Commissioner. Commissioner Choudhuri explained while she thinks this process is crazy, if her participation is helpful she would be delighted to continue. However, if the Commission feels there are other people you could assist the commission achieve its goals she would be willing to step down. Mr. Jones-Darling responded there are already vacant seats on this commission. Commissioner Hicks stated her concern is that Commissioners maintain communication, and she hopes she would be held to the same standard. Ms.

Fellows stated the 2019 meeting schedule was rearranged to fit the schedule of Commissioner Choudhuri making it clear the commission wishes her to continue as a member. The intent of the bylaws are not punitive, she just wants to ensure members want to serve.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated in a conversation with the City Attorney it was explained the rules are in the bylaws, but a decision must be made on how to enforce the rule. It is important to develop a process for the intent of the bylaws. Commissioner Choudhuri stated if a commissioner is to be absent they should make every effort to inform the chair or the Clerk's Office. She asked how the commission would deem an acceptable absence. Commissioner Hunter responded on a case by case system. Commissioner Hicks added she feels it would be subjective. Mr. Hunter stated most people in the professional world understand the need to inform someone of their absence. Commissioner Fellows added it is also important to know if there will be absent members to know if quorum will be met. Mr. Jones-Darling stated each member takes an oath of office to follow certain rules.

Commissioner Fellows stated Commissioner Gaines has missed many meetings, but has been attending recently, however he has been late. She would like to know if he is still interested in being a part of this commission. Commissioner Gaines replied he does not get off of work until 7:00 p.m., and it is difficult for him to be on time. In response to his absences he has had some personal issues, and it is disrespectful to assume he would be attending those meetings. He also recently ran an election and had forums on the same days as meetings. Every time he missed a meeting he can provide a reason. He understands being a Human Relations Commissioner is very important, but running for City Council was more important. Commissioner Hicks asked if he provided any notice for his absences. Mr. Gaines responded he had not, which he realizes was incorrect. He understands he signed up to be a member and needs to follow the appropriate protocol. Ms. Hicks understood, and as a commission she would like there to be better communication.

Commissioner Gaines apologized for his absences, and for comments that he made. He did not have an intent to hurt feelings, he only wanted the African American Community to wake up. He has done research regarding the LGBTQ community, and realized he was uninformed. He stated he is a good person, and when he negatively affects others it hurts him. He hopes the Commission can accept his apology. He added his issue with government is nothing seems to get accomplished, and he signed up for this to do work in the community.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated as much as he appreciates the apology it should not be made to him, it should be to the residents of this community. Commissioner Gaines responded the residents agreed with what he posted on social media. There was only one group of people he disagreed with what he said. Commissioner Hicks failed to see that as sound reasoning, she asked that the Commission have a discussion on this issue during another meeting.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated members of the HRC have run for City Council in the past, and a former member is currently on Council. Voters, political action committees, and parties tend to look at if candidates have been able to comply with their oath that had already been given. He acknowledged government works very slowly. Commissioner Gaines responded even when the Commission meets

its not doing anything. Commissioner Hunter responded that is an opinion. Commissioner Fellows stated if Commissioner Gaines had been to more meeting he would have seen what exactly this commission has accomplished. She feels Commissioner Gaines's perspective and his voice are valuable, and she wants him to be here. She is concerned if his intent is to be present. Mr. Gaines responded he does not know if he wishes to continue. Ms. Fellows stated since there is a lack of communication the commission has a lack of relationship between members. If he is present he can bring forward the things he wishes to work on in the community and the commission can work together to accomplish them. Mr. Gaines understood. Ms. Fellows asked that if Commissioner Gaines intends on running for office again, or another project to let the Commission know. Commissioner Hunter stated the important fact is to communicate.

Commissioner Choudhuri appreciates what was said by the commission and understands communication is important, and not to assume the commission is aware. She asked that if there is a competing event to simply inform the chair.

Commissioner Gaines stated he is uncertain if he will continue in the New Year. Commissioner Hunter responded if Commissioner Gaines wishes to make that decision now the Commission is here to hear it. Mr. Gaines replied he is not ready to make that determination.

Commissioner Hunter stated he would like discuss why this conversation is even taking place. He stated there are certain nuances and intersectionality that a Human Relations Commissioner needs to understand. Since Commissioner Gaines is still learning and making declarations it will impact this Commission. Commissioner Gaines responded he does not see how what he said is reckless. Mr. Hunter replied the fact that Commissioner Gaines does not see why it is reckless is the point.

Commissioner Hunter asked if there were any communications from Commissioner Gaines regarding his absences. Deputy Clerk Hellenga responded he does not recall any communications regarding any absences, but he would need to do a search to verify. Mr. Hunter asked what the bylaws state for Commissioner Gaines absences. Commissioner Jones-Darling responded they are not consecutive absences, and would not warrant dismissal. Commissioner Hicks asked that the bylaws be reviewed and potentially amended. Mr. Jones-Darling added the City Attorney informed him even missing two meetings could constitute a violation of the oath of office. Mr. Hunter stated an email he received from Commissioner Gaines at 5:00 p.m. this evening states the Commission is wasting time, not doing anything of value, and was not sure if he would be attending this meeting.

-Anything properly before the Commission

Commissioner Choudhuri informed the Commission regarding the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday celebration Eastern Michigan University is holding this year. She explained the intent of this year's ceremony is to involve the greater community. There will be different topics and activities based on age groups. Commissioner Hicks asked if community children are being invited. Ms. Choudhuri responded in the affirmative, and pizza will be provided to children without cost. Ms. Hicks asked if this is the first year the university is providing that. Ms. Choudhuri responded in the affirmative.

Human Relations Commission
December 3, 2018

Commissioner Hunter stated he received an email from Council Member Murdock stating the Downtown Development Authority would be allocating grant funds in the total of \$420,081 to eight businesses. The email continued to say Sidetrack and 209 Pearl have already been approved for OPRAs. Mr. Hunter explained he asked Council Member Murdock his opinion on the matter and was informed Mr. Murdock's opinion is that the DDA has become an ATM for businesses. The DDA has not spent any funds on public improvements in many years and this is a function of DDAs. The DDA could be providing funding for kiosks, recycling containers, downtown parking lots, and many other activities. There is no accountability for the DDA, and asked what the Commission can bring to Council to audit DDA projects. Commissioner Jones-Darling responded the DDA is a separate governmental authority and outside the purview of the City of Ypsilanti, other than its members.

Commissioner Fellows asked if there are any checks and balances for the DDA. Commissioner Hunter responded no, and explained the DDA charges people to use the downtown dumpster enclosures.

Commissioner Jones-Darling asked how the DDA was created. Mr. Hellenga responded the DDA was created by a state statute, City Council approves the creation of a Tax increment Financing Authority, which can last between ten and twenty-five years. The Depot Town TIF was approved around two years ago for twenty years to his recollection. DDAs create revenue through tax increment financing, which sets a zero year and any revenue created above that cap is allocated to that district. The funds allocated must be used in the district they are created and can be used for promotions, infrastructure improvements, and business development. Commissioner Jones-Darling asked if funds can be used for housing. Mr. Hellenga responded in the affirmative, and explained they have been used in the downtown to redevelop loft space.

Commissioner Hunter asked how many DDA Board members are city residents. Mr. Hellenga responded he is uncertain, but it is not a requirement that members be city residents. Commissioner Jones-Darling asked if the four districts share the same board. Mr. Hellenga responded in the affirmative.

Commissioner Hunter stated the majority of the DDA membership are white males. Commissioner Jones-Darling responded he believes that to be the case. He added the city does not track the demographics of its board members. Mr. Hellenga responded in the affirmative, and mentioned that is not requested in the application.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated the Commission could recommend demographics be tracked by the city. Commissioner Hunter responded that is a start, but there is inequality at a greater level regarding this board. Commissioner Choudhuri stated it is concerning that this board operates in hidden ways. Mr. Hellenga replied the DDA is a public body and is subject to the Open Meetings Act. Ms. Choudhuri asked if it is publicized. Mr. Hellenga responded in the affirmative.

Commissioner Hunter stated it is concerning that DDA funds are not being used for the betterment of the city.

Commissioner Jones-Darling asked who appoints the members of the DDA Board. Mr. Hellenga responded the Mayor nominates and approved by City Council. Commissioner Hunter asked why it would not be in the interest of Council to check on the action of the DDA. Mr. Hellenga responded it is not that Council does not check on the activities of the DDA, it is that Council does not have say in what the DDA does.

Commissioner Fellows stated other DDAs hold festivals, parades, city beatification, and other civic ensembles. Mr. Hellenga responded other DDAs do perform those functions, however, the Ypsilanti DDA for many years had a negative budgetary trajectory, and nearly bankrupt other than the Depot Town District. It has been on the rebound for the past few years, and have not had the funding to perform those types of things. He added the DDA Downtown dumpsters were costing the DDA roughly \$20,000 annually to maintain. That was one issue leading to the potential bankrupting of the Downtown District. He added businesses outside the downtown pay astronomically for use of dumpsters.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated because this Commission has no direct authority over the DDA. However, this Commission does have the right to advise Council on who it appoints to the DDA Board.

Commissioner Jones-Darling asked who represents EMU on the DDA Board. Mr. Hellenga responded Dieter Otto. Mr. Jones-Darling stated he can request Mr. Otto to present to this body on DDA activities.

Commissioner Hicks stated she had never heard of DDAs and assumed there are small businesses in Ypsilanti that have not heard about them either. Mr. Hellenga noted the DDA cannot finance anything outside of its districts by statute. Ms. Hicks stated the Commission could make information regarding the DDA more accessible.

Commissioner Hunter asked how one would join the DDA Board. Commissioner Jones-Darling responded submit an application to the city, the Mayor nominates you, and the City Council appoints you. Mr. Hellenga added there are other stipulations to be on a DDA Board; the Mayor, at least one resident, business, or property owners that operate in those districts. Commissioner Hicks asked if they have to meet any standards.

Commissioner Hunter stated the dumpster issues is something that can be handled locally. Commissioner Hicks stated waste management is a worldwide issue, it is not easy. Commissioner Jones-Darling stated the DDA would be happy to hear any potential solutions. Mr. Hunter stated to allow all businesses to use the dumpsters. Mr. Hellenga replied the DDA tried to relinquish dumpster control to the downtown businesses, but the businesses did not want to do that. Mr. Jones-Darling stated he is willing to arrange a meeting with Mr. Otto. Commissioners Hicks and Hunter requested a meeting be arranged. Mr. Jones-Darling asked if any other Commissioners would like to participate in that conversation. Commissioner Gaines stated he would like to have Mr. Otto present for the entire Commission. Ms. Hicks agreed. Mr. Hunter asked if there is a possibility to have more than one DDA Board Member present. Mr. Jones-Darling responded it is possible.

Commissioner Choudhuri asked if anyone has spoken with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). She explained GARE is performing a government survey across the county, and it might be a wonderful vehicle to reach the community. A representative is willing to come and speak with the Commission regarding the work of GARE. The Commission agreed to have GARE provide a presentation.

Commissioner Fellows stated she will be sending a Housing Affordability/Accessibility Survey to the Commission. It is specific to the City of Ypsilanti, and encouraged the Commission to take the survey.

Commissioner Hunter asked for an update of the Police Advisory Commission (PAC). Commissioner Jones-Darling replied he has not heard much from them, he has heard from PAC Commission Sue Melke who is less than thrilled about the trajectory of PAC. He explained Ms. Melke believes the PAC is not performing its duty, and simply rubber stamping the Police Department. Mr. Jones-Darling stated this Commission has in its purview to review the ordinance that created that body. Mr. Hunter stated his question is in reference to a murder investigation from this past summer. Mr. Jones-Darling stated the County Sheriffs are investigating that homicide. Mr. Hunter stated the county isn't saying anything about the homicide. Mr. Jones-Darling replied the county will not comment on an open investigation. Commissioner Fellows stated the Commission should reach out to the Sheriff's Office, and is surprised this investigation has received so little attention. The Sheriff's Office could at least inform the community if the homicide will be deemed a hate crime. Commissioner Hicks stated that is what the current investigation is trying to determine. Mr. Jones-Darling added it is difficult to determine a hate crime when the target is deceased, and no one else is talking.

Commissioner Fellows stated this is a larger conversation this Commission should have, and will be recommending it for proposed business.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated if he is told by the Sheriff's Department it has been forwarded to the Prosecutor there will be nothing this body can do.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated a flow chart is going to be created regarding Boards and Commission. He explained chairs of Boards and Commissions will not be able to communicate with each other, and commissions will be able to cross communicate. He will communicate with the new Mayor when the Commission approves resolutions, and ask that it be placed on the agenda.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated he believes the Commission needs to go through a strategic planning for the next year. He believes the Commission should work through measurable goals for the year, and encourages bringing in a facilitator. Commissioner Choudhuri suggested a facilitator that can perform strategic planning. Mr. Jones-Darling stated it would be easier to make a case for Council to appropriate funding to the Commission if a plan is in place. Ms. Choudhuri stated developing strategic goal and objectives should not be that difficult, however, it would take roughly four hours. Getting a skilled facilitator is usually expensive, she suggested a member of organizational development, or potentially a member of GARE.

VII. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION/COMMISSION RESPONSE

1. Amory Cho, EMU Campus, stated he hopes the Human Relations Commission can resolve their differences and become stronger.
2. Brian Geiringer, resident, stated the HRC might get some meaningful results if it examines the recent homicide in the city.

VIII. PROPOSED BUSINESS

1. Discussion regarding the Downtown Development Authority.
2. Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) Presentation.
3. Discussion on recent homicide in Ypsilanti.
4. Human Relations Commission Strategic Plan.
5. Conversation on Special Meeting.
6. Amend attendance requirement in the HRC Bylaws.

Commissioner Jones-Darling stated chair and vice-chair elections will be held at the first meeting of the New Year. Commissioner Fellows stated then any interested members would need to submit their letters of intent to the body. Mr. Jones-Darling stated interested members must provide a statement of service prior to the vote.

Commissioner Jones-Darling asked if there were any nominations for chair.

Commissioner Gaines nominated Commissioner Jones-Darling for Chair and Commissioner Fellows for Vice-Chair.

Each member of the Commission submitted a year closing statement.

IX. NEXT MEETING DATE: TBA

X. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner moved, Commission seconded to adjourn the meeting.

On a voice vote, the motion carried, and the meeting adjourned at 9:44 p.m.