



MINUTES

BOARD OF EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSIONERS

January 16, 2019 at 2:30pm

Room 301-A, City Hall, 200 E. Wells Street Milwaukee, WI 53202

Present:

Commissioner Chez Ordonez, Acting Chair

Commissioner Mayhoua Moua

Commissioner Tony Snell

Commissioner Martha Collins

Commissioner Jennifer Bennett

Commissioner Reggie Jackson

Commissioner Nathan Guequierre

Jessica Langill, Dept. of Administration

Ben Roovers, City Attorney's Office

Patricia Ruiz-Cantu, Dept. of Administration

Rebecca Rabatin, ADA Coordinator, Dept. of Administration

Abril Curiel, Fair Housing Council

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:35 p.m. by Commissioner Ordonez

2. Roll Call

Present at roll call:

Commissioner Chez Ordonez, Acting Chair

Commissioner Tony Snell

Commissioner Martha Collins

Commissioner Jennifer Bennett

Commissioner Reggie Jackson

Commissioner Nathan Guequierre

Commissioner Mayhoua Moua arrived after roll call

3. Approval of Minutes from December 14th Meeting

No objections. Minutes approved.

4. Black Male Achievement Council Update (Commissioner Ordoñez)

Commissioner Ordonez stated that he was invited to attend the Black Male Achievement Advisory Council (BMAC) meeting on January 10th and was given a few minutes at the end of the meeting to share an update about the ERC. He stated the meeting was very collaborative and had a mix between policy-driven and philosophical-focused members. He stated BMAC does not have policy oversight, but that he encouraged BMAC to partner with the ERC in an upcoming listening session and other policy initiatives.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that he has been working with Jessica Langill on extending invitations to elected officials, including Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes. He stated that Lt. Gov. Barnes has accepted an invitation to attend an ERC meeting in February and BMAC is interested in having a joint listening session or meeting when he visits.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that BMAC was very interested in the current work on gender inclusive restrooms and the new protections added in Chapter 109, especially gender identity and expression. Jessica Langill stated that BMAC is currently working on updating their Black Male Achievement handbook and there were a couple areas that BMAC thought the ERC members could potentially join some of their committees.

5. Gender Inclusive Bathrooms (Commissioner Ordoñez & Guequierre)

Commissioner Ordonez stated that Commissioner Guequierre made a motion in the December meeting to request a report from the Legislative Reference Bureau on what other cities have been doing around gender inclusive restrooms. He stated the ERC received the report back but felt that the report did not encapsulate everything that was requested. He stated that they are going to send the report back for more clarification.

Commissioner Guequierre stated that he was happy that the report was returned so quickly and that it had a lot of good information in it. Commissioner Ordonez stated that a more complete report would be able to define the ERC's strategy. He stated the report also included some fiscal notes.

6. ERC Committee Structure

Commissioner Ordonez stated that while going through strategic planning, it became clear that the current structure of the ERC (one meeting per month) did not lend itself to productivity and did not cover the current scope of work. He stated that Committees needed to be developed and that the work load does not overwhelm commissioners.

Commissioner Ordonez recommended three new standing committees and a select committee: Fair Housing, Employment, & Contracting Compliance; Community Engagement & Special Events; Access & Accommodations; and a Select Committee on Membership and Oversight.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that the ERC is able to request reports from departments and find out if due diligence is being taken to give everyone in the city a fair shot. He also brought up an equity toolkit that could be used to track city compliance. Commissioner Guequierre stated that public accommodations should also be remembered in the committee structure.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that committees could also have community members and that there should be three commissioners on each committee for a proper majority vote. Commissioner Collins asked if the County Human Rights Committee had any committees. Commissioner Ordonez stated the last time he checked they had two committees: a nominations committee and an accommodations committee. He stated that Madison has 2-3 standing committees and creates select committees when the need arises. Commissioner Ordonez stated that community partnerships are going to be essential in not only accepting discrimination complaints but having working partnerships among committees. Rebecca Rabatin reminded the commission that staff can also be included in the committees. Commissioner Ordonez stated Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) should also be considered for working partnerships with other discrimination complaint agencies.

Commissioner Snell suggested that the Community Engagement & Special Events Committee could focus on the 75th anniversary events as well as Human Rights Day and community listening sessions. Commissioner Ordonez added that the committee could also focus on getting the ERC involved in public events (parades, festivals, etc.). Commissioner Snell suggested shortening the name to Community Engagement Committee, but that names can be decided on later.

Commissioner Ordonez stated the Access & Accommodations Committee would be able to handle special interest projects (accessible bikes, gender inclusive restrooms, etc.) in a timelier fashion. He stated that other similar commissions that have a committee like this also focus on health, homelessness, and hunger. He stated that the new health commissioner has been invited to a future ERC meeting.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that the Select Committee on Membership and Oversight could help find and nominate commissioners to fill vacant seats and could also work on completing a handbook and training materials for incoming commissioners. Commissioner Snell stated this could also be considered the Governance Committee.

Commissioner Snell also suggested that commissioners should be offered professional development and training opportunities to help them be better committee members. Commissioner Snell also brought up the Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE) and asked if the city is going to be joining. Jessica Langill stated that currently the city of Milwaukee is not officially signing on to GARE, but that they are in the process of joining a committee “trial

run.” She stated she will be a part of the city GARE workgroup and would ask if there is an opening for an ERC commissioner. Commissioner Snell stated that Milwaukee County has already signed on and that it is a great opportunity and investment. Langill stated that she guesses the city will join in 2020 after the trial run. Commissioner Ordonez stated the ERC should invite the director of the County’s Office of African American Affairs to discuss GARE, BMAC, and partnership with the County Human Rights Commission. Commissioner Bennett stated the GARE website has several resources including a document on advancing racial equity and transforming government. Langill stated she would send these documents to the full commission. Commissioner Jackson stated that there is a great deal of information on the website talking about how other jurisdictions have used GARE support. Commissioner Jackson stated he is a member of the Milwaukee County GARE team and that he would bring information back to the ERC as they progress with their plan.

Commissioner Jackson stated that this is a larger discussion that could be had after strategic planning is complete. Commissioner Ordonez stated that the committees are not set in stone and can be changed at any time. Commissioner Ordonez stated commissioners should think about what committees they would potentially like to join.

7. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Resolution (Commissioner Snell)

Commissioner Ordonez stated that Commissioner Snell put together a MLK Proclamation (not resolution as stated on the agenda). Commissioner Snell stated that the city has many events to recognize black history month but that it is still important for the ERC to make a statement, especially now because what is happening across the country. He stated people are in volatile and vulnerable situations. He acknowledges that the city and country recognize Dr. Martin Luther King Day, and that the ERC would like to also recognize the day as a day to remember, celebrate, and act.

Commissioner Bennett stated that Dr. King worked a lot on poverty and the dignity of humanity. She asked if dignity could be added in paragraph four to read: “...the threads, truths, and dignity, that bind us together as human beings.” Suggestion added. Commissioner Collins suggested that his 90th birthday be mentioned. Commissioner Ordonez suggested that his 90th birthday be recognized in the posts when the proclamation is shared.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that all commissioners should feel comfortable bringing up proclamations, resolutions, and other topics that they believe has a cause for celebration or action. He stated it builds good community relations.

All present commissioners voted in favor of passing the proclamation. Proclamation was signed by all commissioners present. The first page of the proclamation will be amended to include the word “dignity.” Commissioner Ordonez instructed Langill to request a digital signature from Commissioner Ashley.

8. Annual Report Discussion

Commissioner Ordonez stated that he has started the annual report process with Jessica Langill. They have compiled the 2018 agendas and minutes and have shared key accomplishments. He stated a one-page FAQ could be put together to outline the ERC's accomplishments. He stated the deadline by ordinance is February 15th, but that there is some flexibility if needed. He asked if anyone was interested in helping to write the annual report that they should reach out to him or Langill. He stated he would put the outline and the draft on GoogleDocs. Commissioner Guequierre stated he volunteered to edit the annual report, and that last year's report was robust and well put-together.

9. 2019 Listening Session Schedule

Commissioner Ordonez stated by ordinance, the ERC is only required to have four meetings a year. He stated that the ERC can decide to not have monthly meetings if the committees are handling the work and that the ERC could also have a listening session once a quarter. Commissioner Snell stated that the listening session schedule could also align with the 75th Anniversary Celebration and that the 4th quarter would be a bit difficult with the Human Rights Day Event and the holidays.

Jessica Langill stated that housing was an important topic to discuss in an upcoming listening session. Commissioner Ordonez said that was a timely topic since the Common Council is currently focusing on homelessness. Commissioner Ordonez stated the first listening session should be in the black community with a clear agenda on what will be discussed. Commissioner Snell suggested that BMAC and ERC partner in a listening session with Lt. Governor Barnes. Commissioner Ordonez stated he would reach out to BMAC to have a joint listening session in March with Lt. Governor Barnes to allow more time for scheduling. Commissioner Ordonez stated he would have a conversation with Mike Peeples and Director Robinson regarding the outline of the listening session.

Commissioner Ordonez stated the ERC should also have a listening session regarding Native American issues. He stated the focus could be on passing a resolution to change Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day and that other disparities and access issues could be highlighted. Commissioner Bennett stated that changing the name would be a symbolic gesture but that confronting other important issues the Indigenous people's face is much-needed. She stated the listening session should be held somewhere centrally located like the Indian Health Center. Commissioner Ordonez stated previous listening sessions felt raw and safe and inspired personal stories and relationship building. He asked Commissioner Bennett to reach out to the Director of the Indian Health Center to try to set up a listening session around Columbus Day.

Commissioner Jackson suggested that another topic be health disparities. He stated there needs to be a real discussion about the lead issue and the misinformation and lack of information going around. Commissioner Bennett stated Alderwoman Coggs recently passed an ordinance regarding water filters and that the Health Commissioner needs to do investigative

research. Commissioner Bennett stated it would be helpful to have a listening session regarding this issue to restore the public trust in city government. Commissioner Ordonez stated since Alderwoman Coggs is the author of that legislation that we loop her in and let her know that we are interested in having a listening session regarding that issue to see if she would be interested in partnering. Commissioner Ordonez stated health disparities can also be brought up at the other listening sessions.

Listening sessions agreed upon: Black Community, Native American Community, Housing, Health. Dates to be determined.

10. Community Dialogue & Upcoming Events

Commissioner Snell stated the Martin Luther King Day Celebration was on Sunday, January 19th at the Marcus Center at 1:00pm. He stated a link has been sent out. Commissioner Jackson stated he will be the keynote speaker at Milwaukee County Technical College (WCTC) on MLK Day. Commissioner Bennett stated on Saturday, January 18th there is a free and open to the public pow-wow happening at the Indian Community School and that she will send the invite. Commissioner Snell stated the LGBT Center is recognizing the new Executive Director, Amy Orta, on January 30th. Commissioner Moua stated there is an event at the end of April celebrating the publishing of a new book that will feature Hmong pilots from the Vietnam War.

Commissioner Jackson stated he will moderating a panel on January 23rd talking about how Wisconsin is the only state that uses violations of supervised release as a reason to send someone back to prison. He stated 3000-4000 people a year go back to prison for violating one of the 18 supervised release rules. Commissioner Jackson stated that many states had the same rule but changed it because it was a harmful rule. He stated that Wisconsin is also the only state that makes a person start their supervised visit time all over again if they are sent back. Commissioner Jackson those rules are made by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and that there are currently groups that are having conversations with the new Commissioner. He also stated that over the last twelve year, eight of the twelve years more people have been sent to prison for revocations of their parole than for new convictions. He stated if Wisconsin were to get rid of the revocation system, the prison population would quickly drop. He stated these rules disproportionately impact people of color and people that live in Milwaukee, but that it is very difficult to get detailed information and data. Commissioner Ordonez stated it is important for the ERC to help move the conversation and the policy forward on this issue.

11. Next Meeting Date: February 20th, 2019

12. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

jml