

Human Rights Commission
Monday, January 25, 2021 – 5:30 p.m.
-Minutes-
Remote Meeting

Present: Sarah Mitchell Peck; Toni Borge; Maiuzia Alves; Nicole Richon Schoel, LHMC; Jennifer Beloff; Paul Wasserman; Hannah Kimberley

Absent: None.

Also Present: Councilor Jen Holmgren, liaison to the City Council; Assistant General Counsel Krisna Basu and Human Resources Director Holly Dougwillo, city staff liaisons, Vanessa Krawczyk, Interim CAO; and one member of the public in total.

1. *Call to Order*

Hannah Kimberley called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. She advised that this meeting is recorded by video and audio in accordance with state Open Meeting Law as with future meetings of the Human Rights Commission. Consistent with the Governor’s orders suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law and banning gatherings of more than 25 people, this meeting is being conducted by remote participation. Additionally, all votes taken by the Human Rights Commission during this and future remote meetings will be by roll call vote. If you are calling in on a phone you can press Star 9 (*9) to request to speak. If you are watching on a computer or device there is a “raise hand” button that you can tap or press to request to speak. Please use either of these options during oral communications to be recognized to speak.

2. *Roll Call and Introduction of Members*

Hannah Kimberley then called the roll of the Human Rights Commission and introduced the members of the Commission in attendance as follows: Sarah Mitchell Peck; Toni Borge; Maiuzia Alves; Nicole Richon Schoel, LHMC; Jennifer Beloff; Paul Wasserman; Hannah Kimberley.

3. *Review and approve minutes from December 14, 2020 meeting*

4. *Translation services*

We received an email from a Gloucester citizen (Rebecca Aliberte) asking “Would it be possible for the City to purchase devices such as this for people to use to help them accomplish business transactions at City Hall or to assist them so that they could participate at City Committee and Board meetings?”

Toni Borge noted that it’s great we have this technology. How might this work for people who are hearing impaired.

Councilor Holmgren suggested that we start with a proposal for the city to pilot and have one at the clerk’s office to test.

Toni Borge asked what languages we might need the devices to translate, and agreed to ask the schools because these folks may not be coming to city hall (fear of government, etc.) She notes that we need to think about how

the information goes out. For them to come and use the technology, people need to know it exists. What are the steppingstones we need to take?

Paul Wasserman inquired about a device that could work for translation as well as for people who are hearing impaired.

Sarah Peck noted that we can upload our recordings to YouTube, which has closed captioning.

Toni Borge volunteered to check with the schools to find out what languages are most spoken in our community.

5. Homeless services: programs, staff, and avoiding homelessness

Jennifer Beloff noted: We have a high number of people facing homelessness and landlords struggling because they can't collect rent as well as landlords evicting people from their homes. Action Inc. client services has an advocacy team. They will work with a client who is facing eviction, having a hard time paying rent, are homeless, etc. They have provided tenant-based rental assistance for up to six months to a year for those who qualify. They have assistance for landlords as well. They also help people apply for Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT); these can be layered on top of each other. If anyone we know of anyone who is displaced, they have a shelter. And if they are full, they can help navigate to another shelter. They also have survival equipment (tents, sleeping bags, etc.) and food.

Paul Wasserman asked: Are the Council on Aging or Executive Office on Aging resources to tap in to?

Jennifer Beloff said that Action Inc. works closely with Housing Authority and Senior Care.

Toni Borge asked that we post Action Inc.'s web address (www.actioninc.org) to the GHRC webpage.

Holly Dougwillo notes that she would try to get it posted.

Nicole Richon Schoel asked how many people can be sheltered.

Jennifer Beloff noted that Action Inc. has a yearly count. On days of extreme weather, the city has partnered with Life Bridge of North Shore and folks can gather at the Grace Center and have access to overnight shelter. The point in time count is this coming Wednesday [January 27]. Action Inc. received \$100,000 in assistance that has been depleted. The need is there; it's growing. We want to get people help to the best of our ability.

Sarah Peck noted that the moratorium was just extended.

Jennifer Beloff noted that it was extended. There is an eviction process. People do not have to vacate in 14 or 30 days even if their landlord says they do. Action Inc. has advocates that help mediate and work with the tenant and the landlord. If a tenant is working with their advocates, they have access to a lawyer

Sarah Peck asked that GHRC be able to share specific information on eviction moratorium on our webpage.

Holly Dougwillo noted that the library is sharing resources as well.

Hannah Kimberley agreed to mention this in her interview with 1623 Studios.

6. Discussion on updating the language in city codes/rules

Councilor Holmgren relayed information she received from Ryan Knowles, Information Technology Director, which **Hannah Kimberley** forwarded to members via email.

Paul Wasserman will examine the data and give us a report at our next meeting.

7. Overview of other Human Rights Commissions

Sarah Peck gave a brief overview of other Human Rights Commission.

Cambridge: enforces human rights ordinances and housing ordinances. They have their info translated in 8 languages. They have specific ordinances and codes and what they work on and respond to. They intake the information and then decide whether to send to their attorney or not.

Arlington is more like Gloucester. They make a lot of public statements on human rights issues. They have a monthly meeting with the community. They do intake for people.

Boston just started up again.

She notes that we should determine what we will respond to and establish an intake form. Also, March 8 is International Women's Day.

Holly Dougwillo noted that the state of MA does have a Civil Rights Commission and asked what we might spearhead for Human Rights Days.

Sara Peck noted that the mayor's office has spearheaded events around LGBTQ. We just had a change of administration, which will change legislation. We can do a lot in terms of general education – like a panel. March 8 might be ambitious. Public education events would be good work for the GHRC.

Jennifer Beloff asked what happened to the original GHRC.

Sarah Peck will contact the City Archives and ask them for history of GHRC.

8. Establish process whereby the HRC identifies and prioritizes issues to address

Nicole Richon-Schoel noted that we need to establish a process.

Sarah Peck offered to help create a proposal and **Nicole Richon-Schoel** offered to create questions for an intake form.

A subcommittee was created, on which **Sarah Peck, Nicole Richon-Schoel, Jennifer Beloff, and Councilor Holmgren** will serve. They need to make sure subcommittee is posted to the city website and that notes are taken. The subcommittee will establish intake process for community members to bring HR violations to the

Commission and establish the protocol for Code of Ordinance's "assist persons in the city who believe that their human or civil rights....have been violated...by offering independent mediation..."

Krisna Basu noted that she would be happy to review intake form but can't advise prior to that.

Hannah Kimberley agreed to send her notes from agenda numbers 7, 8, and 9 to the subcommittee members.

9. Email inquiry from the Gloucester Racial Justice Team

Hannah Kimberley read aloud, in part, an email message from the Gloucester Racial Justice Team:

"We are excited about the city's reinstatement of the Human Rights Commission and the beginning of your work in addressing issues of equity, inclusion, and human rights in Gloucester. We are grateful to the mayor for her leadership on this issue and for every one of the commission members who has stepped forward to serve.

Based on your Charter's Mission Statement we believe the GRJT shares the same vision for the city as the HRC. It is in this spirit we want to share our observation and concern about the low level of racial diversity among your members. We believe that having citizens from a range of races and ethnicities is an important step both to building trust with the minority community and to bringing insight and awareness to the HRC that only a person of color can bring.

Please know we are not suggesting displacing any of the commission members who have recently been appointed. What we would like to propose is that the number of seats on the commission be expanded. We recommend adding at least two seats to be filled with citizens of color. We would also like to offer our assistance in identifying and reaching out to qualified citizens who would be willing to serve as members of the Human Rights Commission."

The GHRC members were in unanimous agreement with the spirit of the email.

Krisna Basu noted that the city ordinance would likely need to be amended to account for more members on the commission.

Councilor Holmgren offered to take it to the mayor and loop legal in as well so that **Krisna Basu** and **Chip Payson** can make suggestions regarding language. If all goes through, we're looking at late march early April.

Hannah Kimberley offered to ask the Gloucester Racial Justice Team to get started on making a list of possible new members for the GHRC and ask the members who reached out to us, **Michea McCaffrey** and **Marcia Andrus**, to attend our meetings between February and when new members are officially appointed.

10. Maiuza Alves noted that she would discuss An Act relative to work and family mobility at a future date.

11. Other business

Councilor Holmgren asked if we could invite Kathleen Mache to discuss the digital divide gap via Essex County Community Foundation at our next meeting. She will email Ms. Mache to ask her.

A member of the public, **Rebecca Aliberte**, President of Friends of Sawyer Free Library, spoke to say that she is pleased with how the GHRC is going.

12. *Adjournment*

By unanimous ROLL CALL VOTE, the Commission adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Hannah Kimberley
Substitute Recorder