

Human Relations Commission

Tuesday, February 8, 2011; 6:30 p.m.

City Hall Conference Room #2 South



Present: Duane Anderson, Chair; Martin Buck, Vice Chair; Barb Mehwald, Tom Lock

Absent: Shanton Bland

Others: Darlene Colaso, ACM/HRA, Staff Liaison; Sharon Pearson, Commission Secretary, and Meagan Schief, resident

Anderson called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

Anderson introduced Tom Lock who is a new member on the Human Relations Commission. Lock said that he has lived in Oberlin since 2003. He has been involved in the Oberlin community with issues related to peace and social justice. He has been trying to get into the Oberlin College Dialogue Center for formal training.

Before Anderson began the meeting, Mehwald reminded members about the meaning of mediation. It involves the principles of careful listening and being open-minded and coming together to resolve issues. Oberlin resident Megan Schief suggested Lock speak with Gene Cash. Schief felt she would be a good person to have on the Commission because she is well versed on mediation and has managerial experience.

Approval of Minutes: November 9, 2010

Buck made a motion to approve the minutes as submitted. Mehwald seconded the motion. Motion carried 4 – 0.

Election of Officers

Mehwald nominated Anderson as Chair and Buck was nominated as vice-chair. Lock seconded the motion. Motion carried 4 – 0.

Staff Reports:

Colaso informed the Commission there have not been any fair housing complaints nor ADA complaints. Colaso reported that she was able to watch the ADA video that many of the members had the opportunity to view in 2010. Colaso thought it was a very good video and plans to share the video with City Department Heads. Schief said that she would like to help Colaso increase the knowledge about disabilities in Oberlin. Mehwald informed Schief that every year members attend the annual Lorain County ADA conference. Pearson said she believed this year's conference will focus on the blind.

2010 Equal Opportunity Report

Buck said that upon his review of this report, it does not appear that anyone with a disability has applied. Colaso said that is correct or it may be that they have chosen not to indicate their disability. Colaso further pointed out that under Appendix B, none of the applicants indicated they had any disabilities. In years past, there have been a few applicants with disabilities.

Colaso said she added more information to the report this year than was in the report in previous years. Some of the changes included information on how many minorities and women have applied for jobs and also how many applicants are from the community. Currently, 62% of the workforce lives in Oberlin. Anderson inquired as to why the Municipal Courts are not included in the report. Colaso said that while the Oberlin Municipal Court is housed in our building and the City payroll department is used to issue their checks, their jurisdiction goes beyond Oberlin and the employees are not employees of the City, per se. The Court establishes their own handbook, manages their own hiring, promoting, disciplinary, and termination actions and they are supervised by an elected judge.

Buck reminded members that last year the Commission talked about City staff identifying positions that would be available within the next five (5) years. Colaso said there has been very little succession planning, in general, and that there are employees who have a lot of institutional knowledge. Colaso said that based on a cursory review of the current workforce; there could be as much as 30% of the workforce eligible to retire under the PERS retirement system in the next few years. Colaso said there had also been a discussion about grooming high school students for jobs that may come available over the next few years; however, when there are job opening the City receive many applications from many people who already have the appropriate skills and training.

Colaso reported the City is working with schools like the local Joint Vocational School to build a kiosk for the Underground Railroad Center. The City hopes to receive a \$500 grant from the Bill Long Foundation to pay for materials. The kiosk will be installed to hold brochures and a map of the community. The ability to engage students in that capacity may facilitate future projects like this one.

Anderson suggested the City hold a job fair. Colaso said that many organizations hold job fairs when they have a substantial amount of job openings. Buck asked if the potential job openings showed there would be a significant change in the minorities that work for the City. Colaso said there is a high percentage of part-time minority employees, primarily because the City Recreation Department employs a high number of minorities for the summer recreation program. The community has 18% of its population represented by minorities. The City has hired a total of 32% minorities (female and by race) for both part-time and full-time positions. Lock asked what the minority population was for the United States. Buck said that he believed the minority population of the United States is 35%.

2010 Final Report

The Commission commended staff for their work on the 2010 Human Relations Commission Final Report.

Establish 2011 Human Relations Commission Goals

NAACP

Anderson said that race relations topic will be an ongoing goal for the Commission to address.

Mehwald mentioned the NAACP letter that was sent out to the Commission members. Colaso said that she was concerned the local NAACP Chapter may vanish and that it is a worthwhile organization in Oberlin. There is some talk about encouraging students to get involved in this organization. Commission members were asked to think about ways to assist this organization.

Pearson added that she has learned that people do not get involved with organizations like in years past. She has been a part of many organizations and has seen the membership drop drastically. Also, if members do not use technology and social media to alert people they exist, there is a tendency for the community not to be aware of their programs or ways to get to people who may be interested in what they have to offer. Buck said he will forward this information to the local churches. Anderson suggested the commission partner with the NAACP and set their goals to support the NAACP.

Utility Bill Stickers

Mehwald asked about the utility bill situation. Anderson said conversations have been had and letters have been sent. Lock said after reading the minutes from the last two meetings, that he felt there still appeared to be an issue. Anderson stated the HRC can only advise and make suggestions and do not have the authority to act on this issue. Anderson was told by Sal Talarico, Finance Director, the complaining party needs to talk to him if they have a problem they need to resolve.

Lock said that since they are an advisory board to City Council, they can go directly to them about this situation. Anderson said that he believes there is a way to offer the community due process without using the orange stickers. He said that suggestions have been made. He desires for the Commission to take this issue to their Council liaison so he could take it back to City Council, but he has not been able to attend their meetings. Lock asked why the Commission, if they are an advisory board of City Council, isn't taking this matter up with City Council directly.

Schief said there is support to help people who are low-income with their utility bills through Oberlin Community Services but she thinks the stickers are stupid. Mehwald said she is interested in putting this issue to rest. Lock requested that Anderson send him a copy of the letters and the response to him.

Domestic Partner Registry

Buck said that, in addition to developing a domestic partner registry, he would like to add lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) as a complete package. He would like to make sure the ordinances offer protection in this area. Currently the City's Fair Housing and EEO policy does not cover gender identity and/or expression.

Buck presented information on communities that have passed ordinances for protection of LGBT for employment and public accommodations. By including LGBT in the ordinance, it will offer protection beyond what the Ohio Civil Rights provides. Two years ago there was a law developed that would have protected gays and lesbians from being fired from their job or from housing discrimination. This law

passed in the House but died in the Senate. In Ohio, a person can be fired for being gay, lesbian or transgender. By including this type of protection in the ordinance, Oberlin becomes a community that welcomes all, regardless of their race or sexual orientation.

Buck said he is still willing to work with Charles Peterson on this domestic partner registry. The three communities that offer partner registries in Ohio are Cleveland, Cleveland Heights and Toledo. Buck would also like to work with the City to provide partner benefits.

ACTION: The goals the HRC plans to work on besides race relations in Oberlin are developing an ordinance that address LGBT and includes a partner registry. Also the Commission would like to assist the Oberlin NAACP and offer them support.

Next agenda items

Deal with action items next meeting.

Anderson said that he does not want to go through another year without a liaison from City Council. As a result of some of the issues the Commission has dealt with over the past year, the Commission needs representation from City Council. The lack of a representative means there is no communication between the Commission and City Council. Buck suggested Anderson speak with Ken Sloane about the lack of participation by Charles Peterson.

ACTION: Anderson will contact Ken Sloane about the lack of attendance by the current City Council liaison.

Buck made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:57 p.m. Lock seconded the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Sharon Pearson CAP
Commission Secretary

/skp