

City of Tampa
Human Rights Board
Meeting Minutes

December 9, 2015

The City of Tampa Human Rights Board held their annual meeting on Wednesday, December 9, 2015, at 10:00 a.m., at City Hall, in the Mayor's Conference Room on the 1st floor 306 E. Jackson Street, Tampa, Florida 33602.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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| Laila Abdelaziz | Clinton Paris |
| Anthony Carswell | John Perry |
| Parker Homans | Reginald Tim |
| Amy Mandel | Elias Vazquez |

CITY OF TAMPA REPRESENTATIVES IN ATTENDANCE:

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| Mayor Bob Buckhorn | Deborah Seigler |
| Rebecca Cortes | Karen Sinnreich |
| Margarita Gonzalez | Thomas Snelling |
| Vanessa B. M ^c Cleary | Justin Vaske |

GUESTS:

Gary and Patricia Newton

Call to Order and Roll Call

The Chairman, Anthony Carswell, called the meeting to order and called the roll.

Approval of Minutes – October 13, 2015

Motion by Ms. Mandel, second by Mr. Vazquez to accept the minutes as submitted. The motion was accepted unanimously.

The agenda was amended to move up the topic of New Business.

NEW BUSINESS

Introduction of Human Rights Investigation Supervisor

Ms. McCleary introduced Ms. Patricia Newton as the newly hired Human Rights Investigation Supervisor. Ms. Newton was with the City of Orlando Office of Community Affairs and Human Relations. Comments by Ms. Newton followed. She introduced her husband Gary. Ms. Newton is from Orlando and previously employed with the City of Orlando for twenty-two years. The Orlando Community Affairs and Human Relations office is under Mayor Dyer and located in that mayor's

executive office. She plans to retire on December 18, 2015 and commence with the City of Tampa on January 4, 2016. She oversees and works with the civil rights board and legal office in Orlando. She is looking forward to learning more about Tampa and working with the people. Mayor Buckhorn asked Ms. McCleary to contact the Director of Public Affairs, Ashley Bauman, for a press release. Mayor Buckhorn then extended a welcome to Ms. Newton. Ms. McCleary said Ms. Newton has incredible talent and during the interview, was impressed with what she does now, not only in Human Rights but also her human relations work, which is similar to our Neighborhood Enhancement in Tampa. She has meetings in the community, coordinates the Martin Luther King events and various community events. In looking at HUD reports, Ms. Newton has one of the best records in the country for closing cases within 100 days and her last record shows closing 100% of cases within 100 days. Ms. McCleary said this is impressive, something that we needed, and we are looking forward to her leadership.

MAYOR'S COMMENTS

Mayor Buckhorn began by saying this is an exciting time for Tampa. This is his second term and he will focus on things that were worked on during the last four years, which include the human infrastructure. He thinks everyone should be given an opportunity to participate, and that every neighborhood benefit from the rising times. Tampa is a diverse city, and he is proud of it, celebrates it and honors it and will not allow anything to divide us, as long as he is here. In light of what is happening in the country, he thinks that this board can and should stand up with the Muslim friends and neighbors. He has tried to do it as Mayor, but thinks it is important to let our friends know we stand shoulder to shoulder with them. He is not sure how this board can do it, but he knows how he can do it, by making a statement as a city that this is not happening during his watch. He asked Ms. Abdelaziz to help in this area and let him and the board members know how our voices could be heard, and she accepted. He said it is so un-American and goes against everything that we stand for as a country. She is employed by CAIR and they have noticed that ever since the Syrian refugee issue, there have been various attacks on Muslims. They have seen a significant rise in hate crimes, and the mosques are receiving constant death threats here in the Tampa Bay area. They are working with Federal law enforcement agencies daily to address the threats properly. People need to realize that words have impact, especially at this level. When you hear it from someone on a national platform, it enforces fear and paranoia. We are lucky to have Mayors like Buckhorn, Kreisman and Myer, who are active and have involvement with Muslims in their communities. It is a reality that touches people's lives in many ways. The Mayor said he was at the White House last week, and that it is the big city mayors who have stood up against the governors, and he finds ignorance among some of them astonishing.

The Chairman commented on the disparity in media coverage, how certain comments are sandblasted everywhere, while others are buried. He asked the Mayor if he received an invitation for an interview on his overall thoughts on issues, tweets, or his thoughts in general, on what should we do as a country or as a community, when it comes to addressing immigration. The Mayor said we need to step up to basic American values. He is the product of Irish immigrants who arrived in the 1840's fleeing religious persecution. He said it is un-American to discriminate against people. Ms. Abdelaziz commented that she has been working with refugee re-settlement agencies all year long, and the largest concern is national security and refugees. Refugees are the most scrutinized people in the country. They are cleared by five federal agencies, and their bio print data is cross-checked with national/international law enforcement agencies. So far 2,000 refugees with the most dire medical need have been allowed to enter this country, and the majority are children. There has been no history of Syrian refugees being charged with terrorism

activity or national security risk. The dangerous risk is that Republicans use fear of the Paris attacks to start saying that Syrian refugees are people that we have to look out for. At the height of the Bosnian war, the country let in 140,000 refugees. Eleven million were displaced, due to the Syrian crisis versus the two million from the Bosnian war. Ms. Abdelaziz suggested making a motion on making a statement. The Chairman said to cover the motion under new business.

At this time, a few minutes were granted for a group photo, which was taken by Ms. Conchi Tilton.

REGULAR REPORTS

Administrator's Report

Mr. Snelling extended a welcome to Ms. Newton. He mentioned that upcoming festivals could be an opportunity for outreach and education, and this will be worked on in the next months with Community Affairs (CAFF) staff and the Human Rights Board (HRB) members. Participation will be expected by the Human Rights Board members. The things that are happening now will make CAFF and HRB more relevant. He referred to Connie Burton, a citizen who attended the HRB meeting on October 13, 2015, who expressed concern about citizens and herself experiencing discrimination in housing. Ms. McCleary said she has begun to receive telephone calls, but that only one has filed a formal housing complaint.

Staff's Report

Ms. McCleary stated that after Ms. Burton's attendance at that meeting, she has referred many people, and we have received numerous inquiries about criminal background history blocking people to secure affordable and decent housing. It is a major issue in the community. From that meeting, about twenty calls were received, and one complaint form received, but there is an issue getting other citizens to fill out the complaint form. Follow-up will be made with the citizens who made inquiries. She had asked that Ms. Gonzalez contact HUD and at first, HUD did not want to take complaints. However, when Ms. McCleary contacted HUD again and explained that it was a "Desperate Impact" case, they expressed interest in accepting the case. She is looking forward to Ms. Newton working with this issue. Ms. McCleary pointed to Operation Reveille as an example of their program that took place on 11/12/15. It is a program that houses homeless veterans. The City, County and THHI are trying to find units for about 127 homeless veterans in the area. Ms. McCleary asked that if anyone knew of available affordable housing, to let her know. The lack of placement is not due to funding, instead there is a need for more housing units. Some of the veterans have criminal backgrounds and that limits their housing options. Ms. McCleary said that having new leadership, it will allow the office to be more active in the community. She thinks there are more cases that are not being touched, because people do not know that the office exists. She has heard that back in the days, CAFF was more engaged in human rights issues, and that is where she would like to see the direction of the office moving.

The Chairman asked if citizens stated why they are not filling out questionnaires and what has been the feedback from staff. Ms. McCleary stated that one female's complaint was not a Fair Housing issue. Upon further discussion, she just needed to follow the process and challenge the Tampa Housing Authority's denial, which was based on her background. She submitted an appeal through the process and was successful in securing housing. That's where the education comes in. Most persons do not understand their rights and do not follow through. Ms. McCleary said that no reason is given, and follow-up will take place with persons who made an inquiry. Ms. Mandel asked if a person needed to

make a complaint in person. Response was, that the form is available online and mobile phones. The Chairman then asked if it was a good metric to track or if it was additional work, even though staff does quality work. If a complaint is not formally filed, it should count for something. Ms. McCleary said they are trying to track those. Even though the case load is low, it does not mean staff is not working. Sometimes there's a lot of background work to be done for a case, and she has requested that staff show inquiries on their reports to reflect that information better.

Mr. Tim asked if HUD was going to cooperate and asked if there was anything to send to HUD at this time. Ms. McCleary responded she has not received anything yet. The Chairman asked if there was a minimum number needed and Ms. McCleary said nothing was mentioned regarding the quantity of complaints. Ms. Newton added that in her experience, they typically like to see six complaints before forwarding to HUD.

ADA Coordinator Report

Ms. Sinnreich informed the members that the Mayor's Alliance for Persons with Disabilities' annual awards luncheon took place on October 16, 2015, and a job fair for veterans and persons with disabilities took place on November 12, 2015 at the Port Tampa Bay, as part of Operation Reveille, a program that provides housing for veterans. Ms. Sinnreich received an ADA complaint and it was resolved to the person's satisfaction. She has provided ADA Title II training to about 4,200 City of Tampa employees. Mr. Snelling there are about thirty new employees left to complete the training, and they can complete it online. Mr. Snelling is to meet with Kimberly Crum, Director of Human Resources, to discuss the addition of ADA Title II training as part of the new employee orientation, and for completion within the six-month probation of being hired.

OLD BUSINESS

Chairman referred back to Ms. Burton, and said that in seeing new management staff's style, you can see more aggressiveness in outreach to get more cases, where the lack of cases was a concern of his. With regard to outreach, Mr. Paris said he does a show on WTMP and would like to feature awareness of the HRB. Someone asked if there was any conflict. Mr. Paris said he would be a co-host.

Ms. Abdelaziz would like to see citizens attend future meetings and speak to the board members. Mr. Snelling and Ms. McCleary are working on a proposed tri-fold brochure for education and outreach, and the department web pages need to be updated. The Chairman asked staff if the footage in the video that Mercury Productions prepared could be used. Ms. McCleary said that perhaps some pieces from it could be used. The Chairman asked if their work included radio spots in English and Spanish. Response was no, that it was only for the video.

NEW BUSINESS continued

Ms. Abdelaziz commented that a motion could be made for a joint statement with the Mayor on addressing the issues, reiterating that Tampa denies uniphobia, based on national origin and religion, and that we are a welcoming city that is very diverse, and that we pride ourselves on diversity, and asked who would draft the statement. The Mayor's inclination was that it be prepared by the board members, since they are not City employees. Mr. Perry said it could be simple in support of the Mayor's position, and not

too wordy. The Mayor thanked the members for their support and thinks an independent voice is better, since people know where he stands.

Mr. Vaske said it would be okay, as long as it is within HRB's purview. Mr. Snelling, Ms. McCleary and staff would assist with a draft of a simple statement to present to the board members and that the statement include contact information. One suggestion was made by Ms. Mandel was to put the question, "Where do you think we came from?"

At this time, the Mayor excused himself from the remainder of the meeting.

The Chairman said the statement could be a caption in the website for the public to see. Ms. Abdelaziz stated that people need to be educated on the protected classes, and she offered to do research.

Mr. Tim said he is familiar with the equality groups in Orlando. They push hard for equality, because the citizens care. He is hopeful that Tampa has that same support. Ms. Newton said they have good advocates in Orlando and that she was impressed with the HRB wanting to make a difference. Mr. Snelling commented that CAFF was created when Sandy Freeman was mayor and when current Mayor Bob Buckhorn was part of her staff, and who has been supportive of these issues for many years. Ms. McCleary said that every time there is a rating about something, the Mayor asks what changes could be made to get more points. Things have not happened because the City did not want them to happen, it is simply because something like these new issues, need to be presented to the right place(s). She feels that CAFF has been reactive instead of proactive, and that if CAFF would have been more engaged with the community, they could have helped bridge gaps to bring folks together and have better communication.

Ms. Mc Cleary said that is part of what Ms. Newton does for the City of Orlando, the human rights part that CAFF does, as well as the community engagement part, where she is out in the community. We are looking forward to her being out in the community, because there are leaders, but they need the right voice to help them to bring issues to light. Ms. Newton said it can happen with collaboration and partnerships. Ms. McCleary is excited and looking forward to bringing these things back and put in place.

The Chairman said that the topic of public comments would remain as part of the agenda and at the beginning of the agenda.

The Chairman asked if Mr. Newton had comments. Mr. Newton said that the board looks like they are ready to go and are standing with a purpose.

A **motion** was made by Ms. Abdelaziz and **seconded** by Mr. Vazquez, for a statement to be drafted on behalf of the Human Rights Board that will be communicated to the community. The **motion passed** unanimously. Mr. Tim asked if the draft could be seen first and Chairman responded yes. Question was asked if the members could vote via email and Mr. Vaske responded No. Mr. Snelling is to send the draft individually to each board member via email and the members are to send their response directly to Mr. Snelling. The draft would be sent close to the new year, but before the next meeting. Mr. Vaske advised that members could not speak to each other, but could speak to staff per the Sunshine Law. In lieu of a meeting, the Chairman asked that the draft be sent to the members individually.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Paris for his advice, knowledge and oversight, Mr. Homans for joining the board, and comments, Mr. Vaske for joining in immediately and quality advice so the board could be efficient as a board, Mr. Snelling and Ms. McCleary for jumping in and picking up with staff during management transition, retirement, death, sickness, and moving. Other than that, it was a common year. He said that the board sees what the staff does and deals with and he thanked everyone for their time and opinions.

Mr. Clinton commented that all of these things come from good leadership from the Chairman.

The Chairman then passed out the 2016 meeting schedule.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, February 9, 2016, at 8:30 a.m., Development Services Center, 1400 N. Boulevard, Tampa, FL.

Adjournment

A **motion** to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Abdelaziz, seconded by Mr. Vazquez, and the **motion passed** unanimously.

Respectfully submitted