



One City for All People

Full Commission Meeting Minutes

Monday, October 26, 4:00-5:30pm

The mission of the Metro Human Relations Commission is to protect and promote the personal dignity, peace, safety, security, health, and general welfare of all people in Nashville and Davidson County.

I. CALL TO ORDER: Davie Tucker, MHRC First Vice-Chair

This meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

Commissioners in Attendance: *Maryam Abolfazli, Samar Ali, Jeremy Davis, Lethia Mann, Oscar Miller, Kobie Pretorius, Erin Pryor, Marisa Richmond, Linda Robinson, Janice Rodriguez, Davie Tucker, Irwin Venick, Chuck Yezbak*

Commissioners Not in Attendance: *Pratik Dash, Paula Martinez, Issa Y. Mohamed*

Others in Attendance: *Keenya Gilchrist (Metro ITS), Mel-Fowler-Green (Metro Human Relations Commission), Sarah Imran (Metro Human Relations Commission), Avi Poster (Former Vice-Chair, Metro Human Relations Commission), Derrick Smith (Metro Legal). Guests from MDHA: Jamie Berry, William Biggs, Jim Harbison, Bill Purcell*

II. CONFIRM QUOROM (Share regrets from Commissioners not in attendance; introduce guests)

A quorum was achieved at the beginning of the meeting.

III. APPROVAL TO CONDUCT MEETING BY ELECTRONIC MEANS (motion)

Comm. Venick moved that the items on the Meeting Agenda constitute essential business of this board. Meeting electronically is necessary to protect the health, safety and welfare of Tennesseans considering the COVID-19 outbreak and any Rule that conflicts with the Governor's Executive Order permitting electronic meetings be suspended.

Comm. Yezbak seconded the motion to approve conducting the meeting by electronic means in compliance of the Governor's Executive Order.

Pursuant to the advice of Derrick Smith (Metro Legal), the motion was unanimously adopted by a roll call verbal vote of the Commissioners.

In the interest of accommodating the time of our guests, Executive Director Mel Fowler-Green suggested that we skip to New Business to discuss the affordable housing crisis in Nashville.

IV. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Action was tabled until next month.

V. FINANCIAL UPDATE

- **Savings**
 - **E.D. Fowler**-reported that we have been able to conserve some of our budget as a result of COVID because many of our programs and events are virtual. In response to the referendum, Fowler-Green noted that the impact of excising 30% from our budget would likely require multiple layoffs for the staff.
 - **Comm. Rodriguez** inquired about the timing of the referendum. **E.D. Fowler-Green** responded by early December – depending on how the court rules on the lawsuit filed by the Board of Elections.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

- Roadmap for selecting new Chief of Police
 - Community Safety Townhalls

E.D. Fowler-Green acknowledged **Board Chair Marisa Richmond** and Jill Fitchard, the Executive Director of Community oversight for their leadership to coordinate community conversations regarding hiring a Chief of Police.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

Status of Current Housing Crisis

- Affordable housing update and hiring of new director at the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency (MDHA)
 - Guests: MDHA Chair Bill Purcell and MDHA Director Jim Harbison
- **Bill Purcell**, *Chairman of the Board*, Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency (*Former Mayor, Metro Nashville Davidson County*)

Mr. Purcell discussed his administration’s efforts to address affordable housing, including creating the first Office of Affordable Housing within the Mayor’s Office. Salient features of this Office included replacing public housing with mixed-income housing options where neighbors co-exist irrespective of their income. Mr. Purcell reiterated that the affordable housing crisis can only be resolved by a collaborative approach among public and private sectors, non-nonprofit organizations, grassroots activism, and communities of faith.
- **Jim Harbison**, *Executive Director*, Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency
Mr. Harbison reviewed several MDHA highlights, including the Rental Assistance Demonstration (“RAD”) initiative. One of the key features of RAD is that MDHA owns the land – not the federal government. MDHA-owned property is income based and is in partnership with the Housing of Urban Development, a department of the federal

government. A community-based planning coalition has been created to monitor the RAD transformation process.

- **Will Biggs**, *Director of Affordable Housing*, Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency
Mr. Biggs reiterated that mixed-income, as opposed to communities of concentrated poverty, *i.e.* public housing, is a preferable and more ideal affordable housing model. Current focused is to develop a “hospitality mindset” for the MDHA team to offer superior customer service to residents.
- **Jamie Berry**, *Director of Communication*, Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency
Ms. Berry referenced a pilot program that transformed existing apartments into affordable housing units. She also discussed the opportunity for prospective residents to apply for multiple waiting lists, in contrast to the previous “one waiting list” protocol.

Questions, Responses, and Insights

- **Comm. Tucker** expressed his appreciation for the discussion and requested clarification regarding the funding mechanism. Mr. Harbison responded that while the federal government funds all the properties, MDHA owns the land – which allows for broader financing options.
- **Avi Poster** asked if MDHA and MHRC could revisit mandatory inclusionary zoning with the state. Mr. Purcell suggested prioritizing relationships with national public and private partners as well as revisiting substantial federal investment.
- **E.D. Fowler-Green** inquired if, like Austin, TX, the will of the people in Nashville could be leveraged to effect change. Mr. Harbison responded that low-income tax credits are proving to be effective as a form of dedicated funding, noting that additional efforts are being considered. Mr. Purcell added that there is a myriad of local, state and federal resources that coordinates funding to address the affordable housing crisis. Nashville is the lowest taxed big city in the lowest taxed state.

Selecting New MDHA Executive Director

- Mr. Purcell said that a transition team has been assembled to lead and conduct the search for the next Executive Director of MDHA.

VIII. DIRECTOR’S REPORT: E.D. Mel Fowler-Green

- **Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund for Consumer Protection Initiative** – MHRC will administer this fund to employ a consumer protection fellow for a year
- **Just Conversations**
This community reading project assembles a broad spectrum of community partners to discuss *How To Be An Antiracist* by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi. The book has 18 chapters - each of which will be facilitated by 18 community partners. **Comm. Venick** noted that Dr. Kendi will be speaking at the Christian Scholar’s Conference at Lipscomb University in June 2021 and encouraged some form engagement between Just Conversations and the conference.
- **Celebrate Nashville: Mel Fowler-Green** acknowledged that staff member **Mark Eatherly** coordinated over 130 participants in the online version of this annual events. Representatives from Nashville’s diverse communities included artists from the Kurdish, Latino, and Black communities – among many others. The event was Saturday, October 3, 2020.
- **Nashville Human Rights Stakeholder’s Group** – MHRC is participating in this collaborative

in preparation for the 2026 World Cup Application. **E.D. Fowler-Green** noted that FIFA require a robust human rights report to address challenges regarding human rights issues from prospective host cities.

IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Comm. Pretorius recognized **Comm. Richmond's** quote in *The Tennessean* regarding the MHRC's leadership for MNPD diversity training.

Comm. Pretorius also recognized the collaboration between Celebrate Nashville and the local South African dance challenge featuring a locally acclaimed Zulu dancer.

E.D. Fowler-Green acknowledged **Comm. Pretorius** and **Comm. Yezbak** for donating essential items to residents at the Fairgrounds, including clothing, masks, computers, and other personal protective items. **Comm. Pretorius** also offered rides from the residents to early vote.

Comm. Pretorius shared that the Davidson County Democratic Party is offering rides to the polls 615-669-8119

E.D. Fowler-Green announced that the next meeting on Monday, December 7, 2020, will be held in person unless otherwise determined.

X. ADJOURN

Comm. Rodriguez motioned to adjourn. **Comm. Venick** seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 5:30p.

A recording of the proceedings is posted at:

<https://www.nashville.gov/Government/Boards-and-Committees/Committee-Information/ID/20/Human-Relations-Commission.aspx>

Appeal of Decisions From the Metro Human Relations Commission

If you are not satisfied with a decision of the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission, you may appeal the decision by petitioning for a writ of certiorari with the Davidson County Chancery or Circuit Court. Your appeal must be filed within 60 days of the date of the entry of the Human Relations Commission's decision. We advise that you seek your own independent legal advice to ensure that your appeal is filed in a timely manner and that all procedural requirements have been met.

NEXT MEETING: December 7 (in person unless Governor's Executive Order 16 is continued)

***Note – I will be out of town November 9-13 (working part time with limited internet access)**