

One City for All People

**Full Commission Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, April 4, 2016, from 4:00 PM to 5:30 PM**

**Metro Office Building, 800 Second Avenue South, 2nd Floor**

**Davidson Room**

***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.***

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**Commissioner Attendees**: Phyllis Hildreth, Aisha Lbhalla, Abdishakur Mohamed, Alistair Newborn,

Deb Palmer George, Erin Pryor, Janice Rodriguez, Frank Trew, Peter Woolfolk

**Commissioner Absentees**: Samar Ali, Tasha French-Lemley, Jeff Gibson, Marcela Gomez, King Hollands,

Sharon Kay, Oscar Miller, Avi Poster

**Others**: Executive Director Mel Fowler-Green and Director of Community Engagement Barbara R. Gunn Lartey—both from the Metro Human Relations Commission, and Josh Lee from Metro Legal

1. **CALL TO ORDER:**

Meeting was called to order at 4:05pm by MHRC Board Chair, Frank Trew.

Note: Though the Davidson Room at the Howard Office Building was customarily reserved for Commissioner meetings from 4:00p-5:30p, it was occupied by another group and unavailable. Consequently this meeting was held in the Robertson Room across the hall.

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

Because a quorum was not attained at the beginning of the meeting, Commission Board Chair Trew advised waiting to attain a quorum before reviewing minutes or voting on any measures.

Commissioner Pryor recommended changing monthly meeting days from Monday to Thursday.

1. **CONSENT**

When a quorum was reached, the Commissioners reviewed the minutes from the Commissioner Board Meeting held on March 3, 2016.

Commissioner Hildreth moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Pryor seconded. Minutes were approved.

**IV. FINANCIALS**

No discussion.

**V.**   **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**:  Executive Director, Mel Fowler-Green (30 Minutes)

E.D. Fowler-Green provided an update on current projects and programs.

**MNPS IncluCivics Snap Shot** (included in meeting packet).

E.D. Fowler-Green reviewed the significant pay disparity between women and men, as well as underrepresentation of professionals of color. Commissioner Woolfolk noted that even security personnel tended to earn more.

Commissioner Mohamed inquired if ***IncluCivics*** explored how people with disabilities fare as employees in the Metro School System. Because the federal government gives preference re employment consideration to people with disabilities, he asked if Metro has a similar strategy. E.D. Fowler Green proffered that the report did not control for people with disabilities—but wants to look closer at those metrics.

She noted that there is little data regarding self-identification for the disability and LGBTQ communities. Commissioner Mohamed shared that the federal government makes it easy for the disabled to apply for jobs, even interview. E.D. Fowler-Green responded that she appreciated these questions, that we should know the answers, and that we will extend our research to get them. Commissioner Mohamed requested that she please share her insights once obtained.

E.D. Fowler-Green continued the ***IncluCivics*** discussion by emphasizing that we not only compared professionals, but assessed educator demographics with that of the student body. Referencing page 27 of the Report, she said that there is sharp underrepresentation of diversity in the education work force. She further noted that this disparity is disturbing particularly since white students comprise a minority of the student population; by contrast, Hispanic Latino students are emerging as a significant cohort.

As a recommendation, E.D. Fowler-Green suggested that MNPS consider recruiting from non-traditional but well-established resources, including FUTURO, the Latin American Chamber of Commerce, and Latino Achievers--an initiative of the YWCA. She also recognized two local programs (Fisk, TSU), and proposed that those entities consider more robust training for prospective teachers. She mentioned that other are institutions of higher learning should consider developing their own teacher preparatory programs.

Commissioner Hildreth said that one remedy could be developing K-12 educators in African-American and Latino communities. She recommended that the Commissioners develop an elevator spiel, one that will engender an opportunity to address disparities in unified way.

Commissioner Woolfolk said that as a board member of the Latin American Chamber, he is interested in the connection between the Hispanic and African American communities. In addition to Ann Gillespie, he also suggested Tony Majors as resources, especially given Mr. Majors’ experience and poignant insight from Glencliff High School. E.D. Fowler-Green agreed, and said that though she’s already coalesced with Ms. Gillespie, she will reach out to Mr. Majors.

CBC Trew and Commissioner Hildreth said that the ***IncluCivics*** report was phenomenal. Commissioner Pryor suggested that we find a way to address the needs of first-generation English Language Learners (ELL) where English is not spoken at home or in their immediate environment. She said that ELL students spending half of their day in ESL classes complicate literacy achievement. She offered that we consider ways to address this.

E.D. Fowler-Green expounded upon the preceding discussion by offering the reason for the timing of producing this ***IncluCivics*** Report: To force a discussion during the Superintendent search.

Commissioner Hildreth noted that because Title VI is a salient aspect of the Commission’s core mandates, the research presented in the MNPS ***IncluCivics*** report fits our mission; she suggests that we frame the issue accordingly. Commissioner Hildreth reiterated the need to speak in one voice and requested E.D. Fowler-Green to craft and disseminate three sentences for the Board. E.D. Fowler-Green committed to doing to so by week’s end.

To conclude this discussion, E.D. Fowler-Green said that the Chamber of Commerce, among others, is interested in the report. She also shared that Laura Moore appreciated our analysis. E.D. Fowler-Green thanked the Commissioners who assisted with this success of this effort.

**Mayor’s Budget Meeting**

CBC Trew announced that the budget submission process has been completed. The Commission has submitted the adopted statements discussed and agreed upon at the March Commission meeting. He feels that the reception by the Mayor and her Budget Panel was positive, noting that it was very different from former procedures. CBC Trew described the process as less of a hearing and more of a conversation. Commissioner Newbern asked about the kinds of questions posed. CBC Trew said they were programmatic-oriented; none regarding salary.

E.D. Fowler-Green said that an intriguing aspect of the hearing was the Mayor’s response to MHRC’s request for an administrative staff member. The Mayor countered the request by asking if we’d considered interns. Commissioner Newbern said that having interns would be staff intensive. Commissioner Mohamed asked if we’d be interested in volunteers from AmeriCorps. Several Commissioners noted that AmeriCorps Volunteers cannot work for the government. Metro Legal Representative Josh Lee said that the Metropolitan Homeless Commission uses them, although there’d still be a cost factor.

E.D. Fowler-Green also noted that she was troubled by questions about training, particularly with respect to Human Resources offering the training. E.D. Fowler-Green said that the MHRC infuses cultural competency into its training. For example, the Title VI Coordinators Training has been completely transformed—not only with substantive data, but with Language Access data for context. She assured the Mayor that these types of trainings are better-suited for MHRC.

CBC Trew had a slightly different take. He interpreted the questions to be more leading, opening a door to advocate for our true needs, *e.g.*, administrative support. Commissioner Hildreth recommends watching budget hearings from other departments to discern a pattern of questions the Mayor posed. To facilitate access to this information, Commissioner Hildreth researched and offered the link on Nashville.gov. She also noted that she sees this process as a way to restructure government in light of a new mayor, new budget process, and new staff. CBC Trew agreed.

CBC Trew and E.D. Fowler-Green invited the Board to support MHRC’s budget request by contacting their Metro Council Representative with emails and telephone calls. E.D. Fowler-Green said this could be very effective.

**Public Investment Plan** (PIP)

E.D. Fowler-Green said that despite extensive planning we lost program partners at 11th hour because they were worried that PIP requests would negatively impact their own programmatic interests. E.D. Fowler-Green said that, frankly, she initially disregarded this concern. But, she noted, in pre-PIP meetings the Mayor asked presenters to prioritize PIP plans and budget requests. E.D. Fowler-Green believes this request not only stifled innovation and creativity, but sparked fear that budgets would be cut. On the contrary, she said, PIPs do not have a deleterious budgetary impact; there is no money is involved, just project facilitation.

The MHRC’s proposal, ***Nashville Speaks***, is a training initiative designed primarily for high school juniors and seniors to develop a pool of interpreters, providing interpretation skills to enhance their employability. She said that the concept for ***Nashville Speaks*** grew out of the Language Assessment that we commissioned, which revealed that 120 languages are spoken by MNPS students.

Commissioner Mohamed expressed concern that students born and reared here in the United States have difficulty interpreting the cultural nuances of the language from the native country. Commissioner Rodriguez shared a similar concern with the PIP proposal. She explained that developing interpreting skills is complex, noting that just because someone may be bilingual does not necessarily mean the ability to interpret effectively.

She also cautioned that fluency in a native language does not automatically translate to sophistication in language interpretation. Commissioner Mohamed said that language interpretation requires understanding the culture of a language and the distinctions among its many dialects. Commissioner Woolfolk agreed.

E.D. Fowler-Green said she seeks to identify students who have a natural inclination for language prowess. Commissioner Hildreth suggested we consider another speaking point: Just as pre-law or pre-med studies do not qualify the student to practice their respective craft without additional, more-formalized training, we can appreciate that the proposed language interpretation is not a comprehensive conduit for professional language interpretation. But, rather, it is more analogous, to an “on-ramp” training module for developing this skill set.

Significant discussion ensued.

Commissioner Pryor echoed previously-posited positons regarding cultural considerations. She asked about the chances of getting the PIP funded. E.D. Fowler-Green said she’s not encouraged but is pleased that we’ve at least issued the conversations.

**Project Updates**

* **MNPD Diversity Training**

Robust plans continue to make this Mobile Diversity Seminar thoughtful and effective. We are collaborating with several community partners. Tuesday, June 7, 2016, 6:30am-4:00p.

* **Iftar**

E.D. Fowler-Green said that it’s looking like OZ Arts will be the venue. She observed that while the optics to get there are interesting, it’s a beautiful place with gorgeous ambience. She noted that since we have to invest in a locale this year, we are seeking financial support. Public tickets will be offered on Monday, May 9th. This year’s theme: *American Muslim: Serving the Nashville Community*.

**VI. OLD BUSINESSS**

 No Old Business discussed.

**VII. NEW BUSINESS**

 **Committee Work**

E.D. Fowler-Green said that since we have a new ordinance with changes regarding terms, we are required to revise the rules and procedures.

She also noted that we need to set a new date for officer elections. E.D. Fowler-Green suggested that officer elections be aligned with the fiscal year, not the calendar year, acknowledging that getting a quorum during the summer is difficult. Commissioner Hildreth said June is not so bad. CBC Trew recommended May as a safer alternative.

Commissioner Mohamed inquired about the issue of terms, particularly regarding those who served time from another Commissioner. He specifically asked if he will continue as a Commissioner. E.D. Fowler-Green said she doesn’t know because Commissioners are appointed or reassigned by the Mayor. Commissioner Lbhalla asked about the number of seats becoming available. E.D. Fowler-Green responded at least 10. Commissioner Lbhalla then inquired that since the Mayor is making the appointment- and reappointment-related decisions, is she at least asking for our input? CBC Trew said yes, she has requested E.D. Fowler-Green’s opinion.

Additional discussion ensued regarding terms. Commissioner Hildreth recommended that we maintain the status quo and not conduct elections until the next meeting.

Commissioner Lbhalla requested a clarification: Will there be one committee to address these issues or three separate committees. E.D. Fowler-Green said one committee that will give special attention to these matters. She then asked if anyone wants to volunteer. Commissioners Newbern and Rodriguez volunteered.

**New Commissioner Orientation**

E.D. Fowler-Green discussed the need for orientation folders. She said the office staff can help prepare. CBC Trew said that they should be designed and come from the MHRC Board. Commissioners Woolfolk and Lbhalla volunteered to assist with this task.

**LGBQ Self-Identification**

E.D. Fowler-Green announced that we are working with the Mayor to craft a policy similar to the Federal Employee Self Satisfaction Survey. She explained that beyond anecdotal information, there is no reliable data to measure the status or well-being of this community. She also noted that such a survey would include various metrics, including sexual orientation, disability, other. Lisa Howe, President of the LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce, has offered to consult with us on this by co-creating a white paper.

Commissioner Hildreth suggested we consider aggregating smaller offices to ensure higher probability of anonymity, such as a voting model whereby with one person-one vote we can ensure anonymity.

Commissioner Woolfolk offered the observation that Southern states are creating their own legislation to protect organizations from religious infringement. Commissioner Newbern referenced the “cake legislation,” whereby bakeries are not obligated to bake wedding or other special event pastries for gay clientele. E.D. Fowler-Green said that the state of TN State Legislature has already passed measures preventing municipalities to discriminate based on sexual orientation.

**VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**IX. UPCOMING COMMISSION EVENTS**

* MNPD Mobile Diversity Seminar-- Tuesday, June 7th
* Iftar – Tuesday, June 14th, 6:15pm, OZ Arts **(tickets required)**
* Fisk Community Festival – Saturday, June 25th,12:00 noon-8:00pm **(FREE admission)**
* Nashville Pride – Saturday, June 25th , 10:00am-5:00pm **(FREE admission)**

**X.    ANNOUNCEMENTS**

E.D. Fowler-Green reminded Commissioners about the joint meeting with the Community Foundation and Public Defender Dawn Deaner on Thursday, April 14, 2016, from 4:00p-6:00p, at the Downtown Library (referred to handout in packet).

Commissioner Rodriguez announced that there will be a Cherry Blossom Festival on Saturday, April 9, 2016, sponsored by the Japanese Consulate. She said that TFLI will have a table.

**XI.   ADJOURN**

CBC Trew motioned to adjourn; Commissioner Hildreth seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 5:28.

**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.**