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One City for All People

**Full Commission Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, December 7, 2015 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.***

**Commissioner Attendees**: Phyllis Hildreth, Sharon Kay, Aisha Lbhalla, Janice Rodriguez, Peter Woolfolk, Abdishakur Mohamed, Alistair Newborn, Frank Trew, Oscar Miller, Deb Palmer George

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

**Others**: Executive Director Mel Fowler-Green and Director of Policy and Research Samantha Perez—both from the Metro Human Relations Commission, and Josh Lee from Metro Legal.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 4:00pm by Board Chair Trew. Seconded by Commissioner Hildreth.

1. CONFIRM QUOROM

Quorum confirmed.

1. CONSENT AGENDA (5 Minutes)

All consent – motion passes

1. FINANCIALS

Mel reported that we are ahead of our budget and in good shape.

1. NEW BUSINESS

**Executive committee elections**

Several people’s terms are up and the Commission is not sure what the Mayor’s intentions are with reappointments. The nominating committee suggests retaining current officers until May – when we should know what’s going on with Mayor’s office and their decisions on reappointments.

Mel explained that she sent all relevant information to Mayor’s office, but in full disclosure was told that they had not yet made decisions and that there’s the possibility that not everyone is going to be reappointed. She has no information beyond that and explains that these decisions could take a few months.

Commissioner Newbern asked a question about people on the executive committee rolling off. There was clarification about individuals whose terms are ending but who are not term-limited.

Commissioner Hildreth took a moment to thank everyone for their participation and engagement with the nomination process for the executive board.

Commissioner Woolfolk asked whether it was possible to lobby for which direction the Mayor should go in and which individuals to reappoint. It is explained that all positions are considered open and available. Commissioner Hildreth added that while this not something that has been seen, historically, it is under the mayor’s prerogative to treat each term as an opportunity to appoint or decline to appoint. Mel adds that our commission is a popular one but there is nothing to prevent the group from lobbying. Commissioner Mohamed makes the case for experience and continuity. The group agrees that institutional knowledge is important.

Commissioner Miller makes the motion that the current slate remain in place until May. Motion is seconded by Commissioner Lbhalla.

A discussion ensues about term limits and the complexity of accounting for term fulfillment. Mel expresses her agreement with Metro Legal about their suggestion to remove term limits so as to avoid confusion. She mentions that this is their next topic of conversation.

All vote in favor of retaining current executive board. No opposition. Current officers will remain in place until May.

**Proposed Changes to Metro Code Regarding Term Limits**

Mel reached out to legal department and Clerk’s office to figure out what the rule is about term limits, if there is one. Clerk’s office had no answer. John Cooper at Legal pointed out that few other commissions have term limits. Josh drafted a proposed ordinance to remove the term limit – Commissioners would still be up for reappointment every three years but with no term limit. Cooper explained that the Mayor’s Office was fine with the removal of term limits.

Commissioner Kay motions to approve. Commissioner Miller seconds. All vote in favor. No opposition

**IncluCivics**

Mel was approached by MNPS’s Human Resources department and was asked if MHRC was interested in doing an IncluCivics-type analysis for them. Mel enthusiastically said yes to MNPS’s request. She expressed that this is the perfect moment to do this because there is no superintendent (only an interim) and could become part of the conversation during the superintendent interviews to be held in the spring. Additionally, the Community Fund is excited about the brand and offered their financial assistance. There is a draft in progress for the proposal to the Fund. The data analyst is on board and can produce the report by February. The analyst was paid $650 for the first IncluCivics, but it is estimated to be twice as much this time in order to compensate for the extra hours and larger dataset.

Commissioner Trew asks for clarification about the Community Fund providing funding more than once a year. Commissioner Hildreth clarified that it has to be less than 10% in a calendar year. Mel explained that she’s not sure if the analyst will be paid out of this year or next year’s –as she wouldn’t be paid until next year. Mel would like it taken out of this year’s budget. The cost of the analyst is estimated at $1700.

Commissioner Woolfolk motioned to approve. Several Commissioners seconded. All vote in favor. No opposition.

Commissioner Woolfolk asked if any thought has gone into how this MNPS project will be released (e.g. press conference). He followed up with a second question about whether the school board will be included. Mel thought that there may be support on the school board for this but explains that she could be wrong. Commissioner Woolfolk suggested pulling a few people aside to talk to them about the project. Commissioner Trew suggested an individual on the board to contact.

Commissioner Newbern asked about the contribution of MNPS, if this truly is a joint project. Mel explains that their contribution to printing costs as well as the use of their name is lending a great deal to the overall IncluCivics brand.

Commissioner Hildreth encouraged ongoing discussion around what partnership looks like. She also echoed Commissioner Woolfolk’s point to begin to talk to the school board. Commissioner Miller made the point that we want to spread the concept.

Mel added that we’re also starting the work on IncluCivics: Private Market.

Commissioner Kay suggested that the criminal justice system and courts be included. She explained that there isn’t data – lot of narrative but no hard data. Commissioner Newbern asked if this was the direction MHRC envisions IncluCivics going.

Commissioner Lbhalla asked about looking at rates of discipline by race/ethnicity. Mel explained that the neighborhood indicator project might include some of these figures but IncluCivics is exclusively workforce.

Commissioner Trew asks for a vote. All vote in favor. No opposition.

**Liaison to the Fund**

Mel suggested that one of the duties of the secretary’s position be as the de facto liaison to the Fund – working between the board and the Fund board. Fund does not meet monthly, usually only when MHRC makes a proposal for funding or when there’s an informational meeting so the commitment isn’t arduous.

Commissioner Woolfolk requested that the person have all the relevant information and data so there’s no disconnect between the board and the Fund. Commissioner Hildreth explained that because the liaison would already be an officer, that issue would be avoided.

Commissioner Hildreth motioned for a vote. Commissioner Miller seconded. All voted in favor. No opposition.

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

**Updates on current projects/programs**

**Neighborhood Indicators Project**

 Mel explained her goal of democratizing data for creating benchmarks and lines of accountability. She added that having neighborhood indicators can provide a huge benefit to local non-profits that can use data as a resource for their own strategic planning and identifying where to use limited resources. If we can build a project like this, we could bring more money into our community through grants. It could also be useful for neighborhood organizations who don’t have access to the same data that metro departments do. At the table in support of this project are social services, Erik Cole in the mayor’s office, TSU, and the Neighborhood Resources Center who feel strongly that we need to be measuring equity. Mel is open to names of people who might be on board. A coalition is a good idea because we can’t do it alone and don’t have the adequate resources.

Commissioner Mohamed asked if it might be important to get the Office of Refugees on Board.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked about funding sources. Mel expressed that she’s considering (in the future) writing a few grants to support it and explained that with a broad coalition expressing the need for this project, there is the potential to get more money.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked if there are other cities doing similar things. Mel explained that there is:

 King County (<http://www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/~/media/436203776D1D4D5188F231A9746BE197.ashx?la=en> )

Portland’s initiative, which is similar to our NashvilleNext (<http://portlandpulse.org/indicators> )

Boston Indicators (<http://www.bostonindicators.org/> )

Mel explained that we have an open data portal but no mandate. The structure is in place but departments have no obligation to make the data available. Commissioner Trew commented that Mayor Dean had an executive order. Mel explained that it had little teeth. She added that Keith Durbin is also on board with the indicators project.

Commissioner Newbern asked whether police and schools should be in on it because they’re in every part of the community and collect data. Mel agreed that schools should be included but is unclear about what kind of data police collect and whether they’d be hesitant to share. It’s not clear what of that data is public. Mel pointed to the White House’s initiative on 21st century policing and explained that she and Keith Durbin have talked about writing a white paper on data and policing.

Commissioner Woolfolk asked if Chief Anderson would say no to sharing data. Commissioner Newbern asked if it is illegal to refuse. Josh responded that if the data isn’t accessible or nonexistent it is not illegal.

Commissioner Kay explained that she has asked for things in the past and daid that Chief Anderson has not been forthcoming.

Commissioner Hildreth asked the group to consider as an agenda item for next January the potential formation of a data committee to help with the indicators project. Commissioner Trew jumped in, adding that he would like for it to be added as an agenda item. Mel explained that the political muscle of the commission is helpful. Having a committee to think about what we’re asking and how we get the information would be useful.

She also explained that there are a lot of departments that have data and are happy to share it, including Judge Calloway and Juvenile Court. We have not talked to the Public Defender, but will.

Commissioner Mohamed asked what kind of information MHRC are looking for. Mel explained that demographic type of data is of interest to us – information that cannot be tied to anyone individually. In many cases, it is already public information.

Commissioner Rodriguez made a comment about the National Neighborhoods Indicator Partnership and made the observation that the Neighborhoods Resource Center is the partner. Mel explained that she and the Director of Policy and Research had met with Jim Hawk and his office. That office was supportive and is open to MHRC being the partner.

**Mass Incarceration**

Mel explained MHRC’s interest in the issue of mass incarceration and the bail bond system. She directed the commissioners to look at a donation letter from Judge Merritt where he expressed an interest in an examination of the bail bond system. A thank you letter has already been written to express gratitude and inquire as to his willingness to speak on his concern on the issue.

**Southern Foodways Alliance**

Mel explained that this is a project that Mark (Director of Special Projects and Operations) has been working on – they do exciting work around Southern food culture. They are currently doing a project on Nolensville corridor – includes documentary and multimedia exhibit as well as a current project on the Khurdish community. Mark was contacted directly and now MHRC is a full partner.

Commissioner Hildreth asked the group to talk through the connection between our mission and this project. Mel explained that Nolensville road is unique in Middle TN (it encompasses miles of different communities that co-exist in really vibrant ways). It has also become a place of empowerment (e.g. Casa Azafran). Commissioner Hildreth made the connection that there are institutions in place that are products of the populations that we serve. She articulated to the group that while we get the link between the MHRC and this project intuitively, as commissioners, the group should be able to explain the connection. Commissioner Trew added that the MHRC has worked on community gardens projects located in that region as well. Commissioner Lbhalla pointed out that in their mission they mention including oral histories of people through their food. Commissioner Kay also explained that Nolensville Road was also important for the African American community, especially as it concerns food and produce. Commissioner Palmer George added that for a lot of the communities we serve, we are still government. This project is a way of getting involved early on -- being proactive and not reactive.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked what MHRC’s role will be. Mel answered that she’s not sure yet – the project is brand new – but explained that we have signed on as full partners.

**Mobile Diversity Seminar**

Mel reminded the group that we helped host a Diversity Bus Tour that was a tremendous success. Instead of 40 people, there were 100 people and a waitlist. The idea of a mobile diversity seminar seems to be popular and needed. Jacky Akbari asked if Mel would consider chairing the committee to help build the brand. One idea is that the MHRC would consider doing 2 mobile diversity tours a year, focusing on specific sectors (e.g. healthcare providers, or educators).

Commissioner Rodriguez asked about the fee for the tour. Mel explained that government or non-profits paid $50 and the private sector paid more. The cost for the whole day was $10,000 which included buses and insurance.

Commissioner Kay commented that the cost for the bus is too high, and suggested that it is because of the hotel industry here and it may be less expensive to contract outside of Nashville. Others agreed that the total cost for execution is expensive. Commissioner Hildreth reminded the group to consider that as Metro, we need to think about hiring within our local workforce but suggested using other quotes to leverage the price.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked if the cost to attend covered the total cost. Mel explained that it also covered lunch and the printing of a booklet. She added that there were some other sponsors who helped. She’s thinking through how to make it affordable and how to be able to fund it. There’s nothing else like it in the city and the feedback was glowing. It ties into some of Mel’s earlier goals of training and services. It could also generate revenue. Mel didn’t think twice about saying yes – she would like our branding on it.

Commissioner Kay asked about the feedback. Most was positive – the only negative comments were about length of day and advance notice about needing to take off shoes in Mosque. A discussion ensued about length of day and how to make it more manageable. Mel pointed out that we had representation from Water, Police, Fire, MNPS, but also Kroger’s and HCA.

**A Voice**

Mel has joined the steering committee of A Voice and will be engaging in work after the inclusionary zoning policy is resolved. She requested that any ideas or feelings be directed her way. She also explained that our staff sits on various steering committees and boards and that it is beneficial to be involved in existing conversations.

**Additional Thoughts**

Mel mentioned that she’s thinking about producing an end-of-the-year report on what MHRC has accomplished.

VII. Upcoming Commission Events

**Human Rights Day**

Taking place on Thursday, December 10. 15 are tickets left. Our own Commissioner Lbhalla is being honored

**Collaborative Conversations**

Final event being held Tuesday, December 8. There will be a panel talking about the legal and social mandates to welcoming newcomers (Mel, Rev. Judy Cummings, Phyllis Hildreth are panelists).

VIII. CommentS

Commissioner Woolfolk shared a conundrum -- Martin Luther King III will be in town for MLK day but will not be participating in the parade.

Commissioner Newbern wanted to give props to Mel about the expungement case in Nashville and wanted to give credit to Mel for providing reason and heart to the discussion. She’s heard from different people that she was crucial to discussion.

Commissioner Mohamed shared that he had recently received a complaint from an apartment complex where cost of rent is increasing. The immigrant population seems to be singled out, particularly the Somali population. He is looking to collect information – many cases have been solved, but he would like to keep an ear to the ground. The group commented that this is likely happening everywhere because of lack of affordable housing. Mel explained that if they are enforcing things arbitrarily, and that can be shown, this is unlawful. Commissioner Kay suggested the Tennessee Human Rights Commission might be a good resource. Mel suggested Tennessee Fair Housing.

Commissioner Lbhalla brought up an issue that she had mentioned before – the idea of a “know your rights” fair, similar to the small business expo hosted by the Mayor. She asked whether it might fruitful to at least put together an event to distribute the information. The idea comes up to bring different agencies together.Commissioner Kay commented that it is curious that no one inside the community is doing this and considers what we can do. Mel explained that legal aid does a number of clinics that they do throughout the city.

 Commissioner Hildreth suggested that we add this to our agenda for the beginning of the New Year.

IX. Adjourn

Commissioner Trew motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Hildreth seconded. The Motion was, approved and

carried. Meeting was adjourned at 5:45pm.