

One City for All People

**Full Commission Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, February 1, 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.***

**Commissioner Attendees**: Samar Ali, Tasha French-Lemley, Jeff Gibson, Phyllis Hildreth, Aisha Lbhalla,

Deb Palmer George, Avi Poster, Janice Rodriguez, Frank Trew, Peter Woolfolk

**Commissioner Absentees**: Marcela Gomez, King Hollands, Sharon Kay, Oscar Miller, Abdishakur Mohamed,

Alistair Newborn, Erin Pryor

**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 4:15pm by Board Chair Frank Trew.

1. CONFIRM QUOROM

A quorum was confirmed by Board Chair Frank Trew. Before the meeting proceeded, Board Chair Trew acknowledged the exemplary service of former Board Chair Deb Palmer George, whose term will be ending this year on April 18, 2016.

1. CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioners reviewed Meeting Minutes from December 7, 2015. A revision was suggested on page 4 (“daid” to “said”).

Commissioner Hildreth moved to approve the Minutes; Commissioner Lbhalla seconded. Minutes were approved.

IV. FINANCIALS

Commissioner Poster asked if there were financial concerns. E.D. Fowler-Green said no, because we are over 50% of the budget. She explained that she wants to use the budget wisely to ensure fiscal responsibility.

E.D. Fowler-Green announced that she has requested 20K from the financial analyst for a data assessment initiative. She explained that she doesn’t want to rush the process, primarily because it requires coalition-building—which cannot be effectively achieved within six months. E.D. Fowler-Green also reassured that 20K can be rolled over.

Though most of the Commissioners were pleased by this news, Commissioners Poster and French-Lemley expressed concern that this request may negatively affect the budget. E.D. Fowler-Green said she will follow up to confirm but is pretty certain that it will not. Commissioner Hildreth asserted that it’s important to confirm. E.D. Fowler-Green noted she wants to leverage the 20K allotment for grant purposes—namely finding matching funds options.

Commissioner Trew asked if there are any additional questions or concerns about the Financial Report. All said no. He then said there’s no need to approve.

V. DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Executive Director, Mel Fowler-Green

**A. Update on Recently-Completed Projects/Programs**

* **MLK Day Events**

E.D. Fowler-Green expressed gratitude to Commissioners Woolfolk, Hildreth, and Gibson, and Director of Community Engagement Gunn Lartey, for their contributions to this event.

* **Community Solidarity Statement**

E.D. Fowler-Green noted the Community Statement engendered awareness and garnered significant press. She said she’s received feedback from various entities, including the Mayor’s Office, community agencies, and the *Huffington Post.*

E.D. Fowler-Green also shared an example of how the Solidarity Statement has been used as a teaching tool. In response to the concerns of a community partner’s nine-year old son, the partner referred to the Solidarity Statement to assuage child’s fears that since his family is Muslim they would have to leave the country because of Islamophobic rhetoric. The community partner said they’ve watched the Solidary Statement at least three times as a point of reference and comfort for his family. E.D. Fowler-Green said this is proof that our work matters.

Commissioner Palmer George was emotionally affected by this account. Commissioner Trew wants it on the MHRC website. E.D. Fowler-Green recommended Jordan Bellamy as a phenomenal documentarian. Commissioner Poster thanked E.D. Fowler-Green for pulling this together—given the time constraints.

* **Community (Music City?) Iftar**

The date has been set for June 14, 2016. E.D. Fowler-Green said the Planning Committee is narrowing in on the theme of American values and the American Muslim. The goal is to unpack cultural conversations regarding what it means to be American and Muslim. Commissioner Ali asked if we’d like to consider someone from the White House or State Department as a keynote speaker because she has contacts there. All Commissioners unanimously responded affirmatively.

* **Rabbi Pesner’s Visit**

MHRC hosted Rabbi Pesner with Commissioners Poster and Hildreth. E.D. Fowler-Green said he has done some sophisticated thinking about equality, justice and working with faith communities. Commissioner Hildreth noted that in light of the discussion with Rev. Lawson, and the strategic conversation with Rabbi Pesner, she believes that our leadership has put us on a very strong strategic path and embraces the philosophical tension/dance she’s experienced on the Commission. Commissioner Poster reinforced that he found the conversation with Rabbi Pesner insightful regarding coalition-building to raise a larger voice.

**B. Update on Current Projects/Programs**

* **Language Access Survey**

The Survey has been distributed to Metro Departments who offer services to LEP communities. E.D. Fowler-Green noted that at least two Metro Departments responded to the Survey as having identified “Middle Eastern” and “African” as languages. “We need this study,” she said. MHRC will also disseminate the language assessment to community partner agencies.

* **MNPS Inclucivics**

E.D. Fowler-Green disseminated a first draft of this research—which remains very much in the seminal stages. Immediate observations include that despite the fact that the MNPS workforce is overwhelmingly female, they are disproportionately represented in lower salary positions. This assessment is based not only with general populations but to every school because we have demographic student information for each school.

E.D. Fowler-Green asked Commissioners if they’d like to review a draft of the report before it’s published. Commissioners Poster, Palmer George, and Lbhalla said yes.

Commissioner Woolfolk requested clarification regarding demographics. Commissioner Hildreth said it is our responsibility to offer the community the data and information—not to answer the disparity.

E.D. Fowler-Green plans to design the report so that it will be useful not only to inform our policy position, but to the new superintendent. Commissioner Palmer George noted it will be interesting to get the candidate’s interpretation, as well as insight, on his or her experience as it relates to issues in this report. Commissioner Poster asked how the report will be monitored by Metro—particularly the MNPS Diversity Committee. E.D. Fowler-Green responded that this is an evolving conversation with Human Resources.

* **Private Market Inclucivics**

This report will assess Metro-area industries and job titles. Because we have identified MNPS Inclucivics and the Language Access Survey as immediate reports to complete, we will tackle the Private Market Inclucivics as a priority for the next fiscal year.

* **Mobile Diversity Bus Tour**

E.D. Fowler-Green announced that she is chairing the committee to continue developing the concept to principals—hopefully this Spring. She said Celebrate Nashville (the organization) has asked us to consider coordinating a component with their vision for a diversity tour.

* **Neighborhood Indicator Project**

Metro Planning is on board to build a data infrastructure platform to measure the successes of Nashville Next. E.D. Fowler-Green went to Planning to expand how to measure well-being indicators by collecting data from various entities, *e.g.*, Public Health, non-profits, *etc.* Planning agreed. TSU will assist.

* **Public Statement Regarding Fred Cloud**

To recognize this luminary, E.D. Fowler-Green crafted a statement on behalf of the Commission that appeared in *The Tennessean*.

* **Letter to Rep. Casada Regarding Inclusionary Zoning**

According to an article published in *The Tennessean* on January 19, 2016, regarding legislators’ goal to prohibit local governments from a mandate for a certain percentage of existing or newly constructed private residential units be reserved for affordable or workforce housing, Rep. Casada said, “I would contend that wherever they’re implemented, it drives homebuilders out of that community and thus it drives up the cost of homes. What we’re trying to do is to stop the inflated pricing and structure and let the free market continue to work. The free market can solve the problems, not government.”

E.D. Fowler-Green requested proof of the citations related information on which he relied to support his position.

* **Constituent Request Regarding Religion**

E.D. Fowler-Green shared that a young Nashvillian (12 years old) requested assistance regarding his First Amendment Right to practice his religion—which he specified, among other characterizations, is not fandom. Commissioner French-Lemley asked to be updated. Commissioner Woolfolk said his request would be good for media.

* **Complaints**

Commissioner Hildreth requested a status on MHRC-fielded complaints for the next meeting. E.D. Fowler-Green said she will include this in the next report and noted that we have a new database that captures this information.

* **Paystub Transparency Act**

E.D. Fowler-Green has signed onto this legislation, introduced by Congressman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (VA-03), Ranking Member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, which is designed to protect American workers from the rampant problem of wage theft.

* **First Year Retrospective**

E.D. Fowler-Green will prepare and bring for the next Full Commission Meeting.

* **Commissioner Identification**

Commissioner Lbhalla asked if she should mention that she’s a Commissioner when she’s being interviewed or otherwise in the public space. E.D. Fowler-Green said she should use her best judgment but, essentially, definitely so if the conversations or interviews are aligned with our values.

VI. New Business

E.D. Fowler-Green’s primary concern regarding term limits is that the Metro Code is vague regarding partial terms, *e.g.*, serving someone else’s term. So she queried: Should she advocate for counting or not counting a partial term?

E.D. Fowler-Green said Metro Council revised their Code to clarify this matter when confronted by the same issue. Metro Legal Representative Josh Lee asked Commissioners to explain why they would want term limits. E.D. Fowler-Green said this decision was based on Commissioners’ previous discussions. She also noted there will be resistance from the Mayor’s Office, namely because removal of term limits will trigger a philosophical debase. She’s requesting guidance from Commissioners so that can be prepared to address concerns posed by Metro Council. She said she has no formal position on this issue and is prepared to make a strong argument for partial terms if that’s what they want. She cautioned that eliminating term limits may be more challenging because of the advantages of consistency and continuity.

Commissioner Trew suggested we pick our battles; he’s concerned about how Metro Council might interpret such a position. Commissioner Gibson inquired about the rarity of term limits. Josh Lee (Metro Legal) said that other than Greenway and technical Commissions, MHRC is the only formal Commission with term limits. E.D. Fowler-Green said comparable Commissions don’t have them. Commissioner Gibson requested clarification: Regarding MHRC, were term limits abolished or never existed? E.D. Fowler-Green responded that they never existed. Commissioner Poster said we should be the same unless we want to take a political stand. Commissioner French-Lemley said we should pick our battles but feels strongly about advocating for MHRC because doing so would be consistent with our human rights mission. Commissioner Lbhalla agreed. Commissioner Rodriguez said term limits could ensure diversity.

Commissioner Hildreth asked: If we fail to object will we have waived our ability to do so in the future. That is to say, if we pulled this bill and substituted with clarification, what will we lose? Strategically, can we pull this back, prosecute clarification for this year, and then advocate for universal parity? There was no definitive response to these questions.

E.D. Fowler-Green said if we treat a partial term as a full term, four Commissioners will be affected. Commissioner French-Lemley asked if the four want to continue. E.D. Fowler-Green said they do. Commissioner Trew wants two things: To take the path that has the least angst and a clarification of the amendment.

(Significant conversation ensued about this issue.)

Commissioner Lbhalla noted that she and Commissioner Gibson were appointed to complete other people’s terms and wants to know how they might be affected.

Commissioner Trew asked if there’s a motion. Commissioner Gibson motioned that we amend the current ordinance such that the proposed amendment reflects that for Commissioners appointed for an unexpired term—it will not count against them. E.D. Fowler-Green requested clarification: Any portion of another’s term or less than half—like Metro Council? Commissioner Hildreth said we should mirror Metro Council’s language.

Commissioner Poster said not advocating negatively affects him and asked if Metro Council’s version negatively affects “the four.” E.D. Fowler-Green said she’s not sure. Commissioner Hildreth offered that this is a policy-, not person-based discussion.

E.D. Fowler-Green requested clarification from Josh Lee (Metro Legal). He said there is no template for term limits. So E.D. Fowler-Green asked the Commission: Should we mirror Metro Council (less than half)? Commissioner Gibson said we don’t have to follow Metro Council. Commissioner Woolfolk asked, “Are we prepared to say why we decided not to follow Metro Council’s language if we don’t? Do we have a solid answer?” Josh Lee explained MHRC appointments are staggered so that Commissioners’ terms don’t expire aggregately.

Commissioner Ali inserted that from a good governance standpoint, it's important to be consistent and, consequently, prefers term limits. “Let’s be clear about why we’re making the decisions we’re making,” she said, adding that, “taking a stance may show our strength as a Commission. To make decisions because it’s administratively difficult could backfire.” Commissioner Hildreth agreed, noting that this approach, adopting Metro Council’s language regarding term limits, would be nice, clean, clear, and consistent.

Commissioner Gibson motioned that in the event that a Commissioner is appointed to fill an unexpired term, we shall establish a clarification such that it mirrors the language of Metro Council with respect to unexpired terms. Commissioner Palmer George seconded. All Commissioners accepted. E.D. Fowler-Green said she will follow Josh Lee’s recommendations and that this will be resolved before April. Commissioner Woolfolk reiterated that our positon on term limits needs to be for good reasons.

VII. Pubic Comment

There were no statements for Public Comments.

VIII. Upcoming Commission Events

**February 7th is National HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**

MHRC is co-sponsoring this event with Meharry Medical College, StreetWorks, Ray of Hope Community College, and Vanderbilt’s Vaccine Trial Program to raise awareness about stigma and other HIV-related matters that affect the African-American Community.

IX. Announcements

Commissioner Trew recognized Commissioner Deb Palmer George as a stellar Commissioner and former Board Chair. Commissioner Poster noted her extensive involvement with the conference at TSU and her acumen for guiding the Commission through tough times.

X. Adjourn

Commissioner Poster motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Hildreth seconded. The Motion was approved and carried. Meeting was adjourned at 5:41pm.