



HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Thursday, December 10, 2015

Community Meeting Room

Palo Alto Civic Center

250 Hamilton Avenue

6:30 PM

REGULAR MEETING

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: Alhassani, Chen, Gordon Gray, O’Nan, Savage, Stinger, Stone

Council Liaison: Council Member Wolbach

Staff: Minka van der Zwaag, Mary Constantino

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Savage made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 8, 2015 Human Relations Commission (HRC) meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Stone AYES: Unanimous.

Abstain: Alhassani

AGENDA CHANGES, REQUESTS, and DELETIONS:

None

V. BUSINESS

1. Discussion on the planning of a community forum on “Implicit Bias”

Chair O’Nan stated that the HRC is moving forward on the planning of an event series for next year and Commissioner Stinger has agreed to host the first event during the first quarter of 2016 with the topic Implicit Bias. Commissioner Stinger stated that the HRC has been talking about the event on implicit bias since the HRC retreat in August and wanted to open the discussion to the Commission to get a consensus of the goals of the HRC. Commissioner Stinger added that she wanted to discuss what implicit bias means to each Commissioner and what the Commissioner would like to see as an outcome of a city forum. Commissioner Savage stated that the Palo Alto Police Department (PAPD) is putting on a three-day invitation only program regarding racial bias in early March and all of the HRC has been invited. Therefore she asked if the forum be close to duplication to the police department’s event. . Commissioner Stinger added that the HRC event would be an open forum for the community and that the Commission could learn from the police department’s event so she prefers to have the HRC’s event after the police department’s event.

Vice Chair Stone stated that it will be interesting if the HRC continues on with the theme of Hidden Palo Alto because a lot of people do not believe that implicit bias occurs in Palo Alto since the community is racially diverse and forward minded and see the issues as happening elsewhere across the country. Chair O’Nan added that there are types of biases in the community that can be hurtful and detrimental where people are cast in roles and cannot break out of them so that could be the

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type of event to make people aware that these biases exist and raise consciousness and not assume things about each other. Commissioner Gray added that she was imagining that the forum was going to be related to violence and discrimination but there are subtle forms of discrimination here and pulling back the curtain and enlightening people is a good role for the HRC. Commissioner Alhassani stated that there is a lot of talk of diversity at tech companies and many companies are trying to improve their interview processes and to better train on implicit bias when making hires. Commissioner Chen added that even within the same ethnic background depending where people grow up in different cultures there is implicit bias. Commissioner Stinger added that this discussion is really helpful and the comments that the forum looks at implicit bias more than aggressive or outright violence is very consistent with what she would like to do and be more beneficial to our community. The goal would be to create an awareness of implicit bias on different levels with the outcome that people make a personal commitment not to challenge civic policy or large organizations but make a personal commitment to stand up for equity and civil discourse. Ideas for the panels are civic leaders, religious leaders, student leaders, Stanford first generation students. There is an interfaith conference looking at a similar program that would like to work with the HRC and have one program in March because there is a lot of synergy so if the HRC chooses a Wednesday in March we would have a civic place to have a meeting and a safe place for different genders, religious groups, ethnic groups to come together. The interfaith group has had four events this year with a large attendance. Working together the HRC could put together a good comprehensive look of what our community is made of, what type of assumptions we make, how many of those are valid, and what are some of the lessons we want to take away. Chair O’Nan added it might be helpful to give an example of a widespread implicit bias that is not Palo Alto specific to break the ice to educate the audience upfront on how implicit bias works for and against certain groups of people to set the stage in what goes on in Palo Alto because to tell a story you can engage people. Commissioner Gordon Gray asked if the forum would include break out groups because people would walk away with some kind of commitment and awareness. Commissioner Stinger replied that the planning of the forum has not gotten that granular yet but if the forum has a good moderator breakout groups can be managed but in a two-hour session breakout groups might be difficult. One idea is taking some questions and having people respond on paper on what is there personal commitment and vision for Palo Alto and posting on a board for community artwork as an end result. Chair O’Nan added that if the HRC approaches the Palo Alto Mediation Program to ask for facilitators they would provide volunteers to help the HRC. Commissioner Stinger asked if the Commissioners have suggestions for people of expertise in diversity and program management to pursue them as participation in the panel. Commissioner Gordon Gray added that the Clayman Institute located on Stanford campus and they deal with woman’s diversity and gender equity. Commissioner Gordon Gray added that it is important to keep it on a positive tone and make the forum a statement of growth not challenge. Chair O’Nan stated that the Commission wants people to become aware of something important and feel more enlightened. Commissioner Stinger proposed Wednesday, March 30 for the event. Ms. van der Zwaag reported that all of the dates are available in the El Palo Alto Room at the Mitchell Park Community Center.

2. Discussion on the planning of a speaker series “An Immigrant Experience in Palo Alto”

Commissioner Chen stated that having someone from the immigrant community talk about their experiences when they arrived in the country and what type of challenges they faced. Commissioner Chen added that she spoke to Debra Cen, founder of Chinese Parents’ Association for School Students, and she indicated that Ms. Cen could find the three speakers at varying ages; seniors, professional and a high school student to present to the HRC and will approach other members of the Chinese community to talk to the HRC as well. Commissioner Chen suggested that

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the HRC expand to other ethnic groups in the future but she does not have resources on other immigrant communities. Ms. van der Zwaag stated that the other Commissioners and staff can help provide leads to follow up with some of the other immigrant communities.

Commissioner Chen stated that she and Commissioner Stinger and Debra Cen met with Micaela Hellman, Supervisor Simitian's aid, to discuss a program to welcome immigrants into the community. A second meeting is scheduled on December 16 to further discuss the program. Chair O'Nan stated that with all of the negative publicity on Muslims it would be great to reach out to Palo Alto resident Samina Sundas, American Muslim Voice and past Santa Clara County Human Relations Commissioner to share her experiences living in our community. There are also a number of Eastern Europeans that live in Palo Alto Housing Corporation properties so the Commission could reach out to Kate Young to talk to someone who has had a very different experience to share. Commissioner Chen asked how long should the speaker talk. Ms. van der Zwaag added the speakers could have 40 minutes in total with 5-7 minutes to each talk and then ask the speakers 2 to 3 questions and then open up the dialog. The speaker series should start with the first meeting having three speakers and then the Commission can determine how many speakers will make sense for the next HRC meeting. Chair O'Nan added that the HRC might want to have a family to share their experience or a single person who came to the community as a student. Commissioner Gordon Gray asked whether the HRC should let the public know about the speaker series or contact the Weekly to publicize the discussion. Chair O'Nan stated that the series has been to educate the Commissioners but this is an opportunity to also educate the community. Ms. van der Zwaag asked the Commissioners if they had 2 – 3 questions they would like to ask the speakers. Chair O'Nan replied that she would like to know what are the main challenges the immigrants faced to assimilate in the community, if they feel they could fully participate in the community, do they feel like there were language and cultural barriers, what are the things they like most in this community as opposed to settling somewhere else. Commissioner Stinger asked if there are there things immigrants hold back because they are concerned about assimilating or appearing to be part of the community. Chair O'Nan stated that she has spoken to some Russian immigrants who participate very little in their community because they grew up in a country in which the government was frightening and corrupt so they kept their head down and did not get involved because they did not want to end up disappearing or something happening to their family. When they come to another country they are afraid to participate in public life and fearful of the government and that is an unfortunate legacy and it is part of the mission of the HRC to do some outreach and say now you have the opportunity to participate. Ms. van der Zwaag suggested to use integrates into the community instead of assimilates because as an immigrant feeling that you need to assimilate you become absorbed and lose your identity. Vice Chair Stone added that he would like to know if the immigrant feels connected to the community or do they feel like an outsider and do they feel safe on the streets. Chair O'Nan stated that skin color in America is very important because people are racist in a race-conscious society and someone who comes from South America might not feel safe as compared to someone who is a Polish light-skinned immigrant. Commissioner Stinger added there are so many languages here but there is not a lot of interaction because we do not speak the same language so do they feel isolated. How is it for them? Chair O'Nan stated that former Human Relations Commissioner Claude Ezran would be a great speaker because he and his wife emigrated from France and raised their children in this community. He could speak about his experience of coming from Europe and trying to maintain his family's European identify.

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3. Update by the Homeless Vets Subcommittee

Commissioner Alhassani reported that on Veterans Day, Destination Home and the County of Santa Clara rolled out the All the Way Home campaign which targets ending veteran homelessness in Santa Clara County. The City of San Jose is putting \$6 million toward housing 100 veterans, the Board of Supervisors is committing \$1.5 million in housing veterans and the Housing Authority has \$7.5 million to house veterans. On December 2 the Housing Authority and Destination Home along with Santa Clara County hosted a Landlord Education Session which would be a good event for the Palo Alto HRC. The event is to educate and encourage landlords to rent to veterans who have vouchers because there is a guarantee of rent, security deposits, renters insurance and vacancy payments. On December 2, 40 San Jose landlords attended and 10 of the 40 committed 45 units for veteran housing. It is currently being planned to have the same education session in Palo Alto and north Santa Clara County and in Palo Alto it is required that landlords register their rentals so there is a list of landlords that can be reached out to. Chair O’Nan stated that it is important to make small steps forward because trying to solve the whole issue all at once is not realistic and a good way to get veterans into housing is to make the veterans more attractive as tenants because landlords have a lot of explicit biases and there are certain types of tenants that landlords do not want to house so if the landlords are made aware that veterans could be an attractive tenant with secure financing that could swing the pendulum in the right direction. Commissioner Alhassani added that the most powerful message is to have a veteran who was previously homeless tell their story. Commissioner Gordon Gray asked how you make sure veterans have some structure or support when they move in. Commissioner Alhassani replied that based on their “vulnerability score” on an assessment survey the veteran will have a case manager who will check up on them making sure they have drug treatment and their alcohol abuse is not coming back. Ms. van der Zwaag added that is one of the big reasons that the county and City of San Jose, and Housing Authority are working together to create these guarantees which is a real collaborative effort on their part and the outcome is really interesting. The collaboration is looking at what are some of the barriers and how can we address it. If the veteran has a “VASH” Voucher the voucher is from a case manager from the VA or if they are under the auspicious of any of the nonprofit homeless agencies those case managers will follow them.

4. Follow up to the HRC’s review of the Community Services Element of the Comprehensive Plan

Commissioner Chen stated that during the first part of the meeting the participants were divided into subcommittees and the Community Services Subcommittee consisting of three members reported their revisions on the Element. The first item discussed was the removal of the barriers to services. The subcommittee felt the Element needs to consist of stronger language in the formal mechanism on how the services are going to be delivered. The second revision was the wording on the relationship between the city and PAUSD. The subcommittee was worried about where is the formal mechanism to strengthen the relationship and additional language was needed to clarify the mechanism for the relationship and collaboration. The third point the subcommittee did not like the customer service terminology because it does not match the services of the city staff to the community as the language was too businesslike.

During Oral Communications at the Community Advisory Committee review of the Community Services Element a member of a local nonprofit spoke about their goal in helping adult autism patients. The adult autism patients are still living with their aging parents who are too old to serve their adult children. There is a need for community services to provide a service.

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All subcommittee members had strong opinions for establishing an intergenerational program between young children and the mature population. There was also a discussion on early childcare development that programs are needed for children before preschool.

Ms. van der Zwaag reported that Planning Manager Jeremy Dennis informed her that the memo the HRC provided was well received further revisions on the Community Services Element will take into consideration the memo the HRC provided.

5. Discussion on outreach to seniors regarding the Citywide Transportation Survey

Chair O’Nan stated that in January the HRC had a Senior Summit and one of the key learnings was that transportation is a big issue for seniors in the city. Throughout this year the HRC has been trying to figure out the goals to help ameliorate the problem and the HRC formed a Senior Services Subcommittee consisting of Vice Chair Stone, Commissioner Stinger and Chair O’Nan. . When the HRC was made aware that there was an opportunity to meet with the City’s shuttle manager where it was brought to their attention that the citywide shuttle survey was going to be closed out after extensive outreach to many demographic. But after speaking to many seniors, the HRC was made aware that the survey was only available online which works for many people but Chair O’Nan stated that “having worked with lower income seniors and 80-plus seniors they do not have computer access and may have fallen through the cracks.” The HRC worked with the city to have additional time for some on-the-ground outreach to fragile or disenfranchised seniors. For the past two weeks focus groups were scheduled with seniors where the survey was provided in paper format to make it easier for the seniors and the survey was also able translated to Chinese thanks to Commissioner Chen and with this outreach there is much more feedback that would not have been captured. Next year all of this data will be taken onboard and some substantial changes will be made on the shuttle services and hopefully with this information and input from the Chinese community and other communities that the shuttle services will be much more flexible and the routes will be optimized and there will be able to get around and have access to the city amenities Ms. van der Zwaag added that it has been a wonderful collaborative between the HRC and the City of Palo Alto Transportation staff who was very pleased to work on this effort because the survey is very important because the city will be making important changes in the shuttle service in the coming year. Chair O’Nan added that in addition to the hard data, soft data was accumulated including comments and life stories that the seniors are sharing that there are people struggling with transportation needs because they are housebound and they are so excited about the possibility that they can do their own shopping again.

VI. Reports from Officials – Chair O’Nan

1. Commissioner Reports

Chair O’Nan announced that Vice Chair Stone is now an attorney and the three day exam is considered the most difficult Bar Exam in the country and this year there was a 30-year low pass rate. Vice Chair Stone replied that it was a long road and an instant relief and thank you for the kind words.

2. Commissioner Gordon Gray announced that it is Human Rights Awareness Day.

3. Council Liaison Report

Council Member Wolbach thanked the HRC for taking the initiative to providing thoughts on the Community Element and asked if the HRC individually or as a body had any thoughts about providing thoughts on Land Use, Housing or Transportation because those all seem to overlap with

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the purview of the HRC. Transportation relates to the senior transportation, housing is a major interest of the Commission and the Housing Element may be reopened to expand the Element and Council is looking into adding housing to the Council priorities in the coming year. Keeping the Land Use and Design and Natural Environment as a priority but having housing as a sub focus. There is a colleague's memo regarding adding accessory dwelling units. During the November 2 Council Meeting during the discussion of the Land Use Element there were a number of items relating to housing and one motion was to direct staff and the CAC to maintain and strengthen the existing language supporting housing supply for diverse family sizes, ages, ability levels and income levels. Council Member Wolbach stated that the city is pro-housing and is a good step towards codifying recognition on how important housing is in the community and your continued inputs on the various Elements of the Comprehensive Plan on Land Use, Housing and Transportation would all be very useful. Chair O'Nan asked that it seemed like it was too late for the HRC to weigh some of the Elements. Council Member Wolbach replied that even if the CAC had already discussed the Elements, Council has not finalized them except for the Housing Element but the Housing Element may be reopened and Council will be working on the Comprehensive Plan for the next year or more. Input is very welcome. Chair O'Nan stated that the Commission will discuss with staff because we have to have a certain lead time to discuss it as a body and put everything together as one set of recommendations as the Commission did with the Community Services Element. The Commission will discuss if they want to jump in on some other Elements. The Commission wants to provide feedback in the most productive way possible. The Commission will take a look at that to see if the timing works for the Commission to weigh in and if the timing does not work and it cannot be done as a body, Chair O'Nan encouraged the colleagues to do it as individuals.

CALL FOR AGENDA ITEMS (January 14, 2016)

- a. Update from Commissioner Stinger on upcoming community forum
- b. Update from Commissioners Stone and Alhassani on Homeless Vet Subcommittee
- c. Discussion on Comprehensive Plan Update
- d. Speaker Series – An Immigrant Experience in Palo Alto

ADJOURNMENT

1. The meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.