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CITY OF  
**PALO  
ALTO**

**HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

**Thursday, January 8, 2015**

Council Chambers  
Palo Alto Civic Center  
250 Hamilton Avenue  
6:30 PM  
SPECIAL MEETING

**ROLL CALL:**

**Commissioners Present:** Alhassani, Bacchetti, Chen, Morin, O’Nan, Savage, Stone

**Staff:** Minka van der Zwaag, Mary Constantino

**ORAL COMMUNICATIONS:**

None

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

**Commissioner Stone made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 13, 2014 meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Chen. AYES: Unanimous.**

**AGENDA CHANGES, REQUESTS, and DELETIONS:**

None

**BUSINESS**

**1. Determine HSRAP & CDBG Selection Subcommittee - Action Item – Chair O’Nan**

Ms. Van der Zwaag stated that we are looking for 2 to 3 HRC members to review the HSRAP and CDBG applications. The commitment will include minimally 2-3 meetings each 2 to 3 hours each. The subcommittee will discuss CDBG first with the Planning Staff leading the meeting and move to HSRAP. Ms. Van der Zwaag explained that the applications can be provided electronically or binders will be given to the subcommittee at the end of next week. The subcommittee will be given a 10-day period to review the applications. The subcommittee will meet in late January or early February. It is the hope that the recommendations would come to the HRC at the March meeting and scheduled to go to the Finance Committee in April. Chair O’Nan stated that it is a two-part process first reviewing the applications for CDBG and HSRAP and then meet with the Subcommittee, which is very productive because everyone is familiar with the applications. Chair O’Nan asked which Commissioners were interested in which program. Commissioners Chen, Stone, Alhassani and Bacchetti volunteered to be on the Subcommittee. Minka stated that four would be a quorum so there can only be three Subcommittee members. The Commissioners volunteered for the following Subcommittees.

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HSRAP Subcommittee - Stone, Bacchetti, Chen  
CDBG Subcommittee - Stone, Alhassani, Chen

Chair O’Nan explained when the recommendations come to the full HRC in March the Subcommittee would be the vanguard in explaining to the rest of the HRC their thought process, how the applications were prioritized and how the Subcommittee came up with the recommended allocations so the recommendations can be communicated to Council.

**Chair O’Nan made a motion that the HSRAP Subcommittee consist of Commissioners Stone, Bacchetti and Chen. Seconded by Commissioner Savage. Ayes: Unanimous.**

**Chair O’Nan made a motion that the CDBG subcommittee consists of Commissioners Stone, Alhassani, and Chen. Seconded by Vice Chair Bacchetti. Ayes: Unanimous.**

Chair O’Nan stated that if any of the Subcommittee members had a conflict please let the HRC know because there is a cycle that must be met.

## **2. Follow-up on Affordable Housing Report – Commissioners O’Nan, Bacchetti and Chen**

Chair O’Nan stated that over the past year the HRC had a Learning Series on Affordable Housing and from that series Commissions Chen and Bacchetti developed a report about the problems facing our community in regards to affordable housing. The report also posed the question as to what type of role the HRC can play in helping advocate for changes in the Comprehensive Plan, ways to advocate for more housing in the community or ways to partner with other commissions, Council or agencies in the community. Chair O’Nan reported that she and Commissioner Chen met with Hillary Gitelman, Director of Planning and Community Environment (PCE) and Tim Wong to discuss the HRC’s desire to be involved in a productive way. Affordable housing is a controversial and contentious issue in the community. The HRC does not want to be ineffective and write reports that do not go anywhere so we are trying to figure out a constructive and productive role for the HRC. Chair O’Nan explained that at the meeting PCE understood the mission of the HRC and why the HRC is interested and discussed many angles of involvement from helping to manifest housing for low or extremely low income people, veterans, families in need. Ms. Gitelman’s prospective is that the HRC has a lot that it is interested in and must prioritize because there are too many agendas to be involved in a broad sense. Chair O’Nan stated that tonight the HRC needs to figure out where and how does the HRC want to be involved in affordable housing and where and how do we want to partner with some existing players in the conversation so we can make a role for the HRC.

Commissioner Chen stated that Ms. Gitelman wanted the HRC to prioritize on one of three issues: renter’s rights, senior housing or homelessness. They are presenting to Council on May 15 on the affordable housing issue. Hilary Gitelman and Tim Wong will come to speak in to the full HRC during the February HRC meeting and hope that the HRC will have a clearer idea on what the HRC wants to focus on.

Vice Chair Bacchetti asked to what extent is the Comprehensive Plan a vehicle for dealing with housing issues. Commissioner Chen said that the Housing Element is finished and has been submitted to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). Vice Chair Bacchetti asked that the Housing Element does not produce housing? Chair O’Nan stated that the Housing Element is aspirational and regulatory. Vice Chair Bacchetti stated that having the

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Comprehensive Plan presented to the HRC is different than participating in what is produced and whether there is a role for the HRC. Chair O’Nan explained that there is not a role for the HRC now because it has been on an accelerated schedule and has been driven by government requirements.

Chair O’Nan explained that she would like the HRC to take a role in the forefront of helping to engage the community in the discussion around alternative housing solutions since there has been resistance to new developments and it is such a controversial issue but if the community is better educated about what the plans are there may be some solutions that will work for all sides. Chair O’Nan asked what is the role of the HRC? Does the HRC help the city or independently engage the community or focus on certain types of housing? The renter’s rights aspect is very interesting because rent control is practically a taboo concept in Palo Alto but some communities are coming up with a hybrid solution called Renter’s Rights that is a safety net to try to help people transition without disappearing through the cracks and becoming homeless when rents go up. That is something that hasn’t been explored in Palo Alto, and we could do some research on how other communities are crafting renter’s rights manifestos and see if that is something that we could propose here. Chair O’Nan would like to have something actually to move the community in a positive direction even if it is a small step instead of something that would not have an impact. Chair O’Nan asked the Commission if they had any thoughts.

Vice Chair Bacchetti stated how do we as the HRC express ourselves in ways as to add value to the larger conversation, and I do not view that as fully abstract because it can be attached to specific housing proposals or programs. It would be nice to add the notion of caring about the relations among humans in respect to housing and how it can be manifested into actual programs.

Chair O’Nan stated that one aspect of renter’s rights that has intrigued her is many of the seniors have been long time renters and then for various reasons are priced out of the community, and they do not have any options as to where to go and it is very stressful. They are not people who are low income by federal definitions but often people who could not afford to buy here. It may be an area that we can focus on to help to ensure that they can stay in the community or making a better transition out of the community. Chair O’Nan explained that Ms. Gitelman mentioned that there are social service providers who help them pack up to move out of their home to move into a smaller place. There are a lot of seniors being impacted by the housing issues whether they are low income or not who are struggling. There is a perception that seniors are well to do but they are struggling. That is one area that has not been addressed that the HRC could take on and adds value to the city.

Chair O’Nan said it is a two-way process to get housing built in Palo Alto. A developer comes to the Planning and Transportation Commission and wants to build a project with a lengthy negotiation. A city does not proactively go out and say we want XWZ who is the developer who can provide the XWZ and start the conversation instead of waiting for an outside stimulus. Can the HRC be a movement to flip the conversation and be proactive? It is a very different role for the HRC and Planning and Transportation Commission because they wait for developers. We want it to be meaningful and productive and partner with existing agencies. Chair O’Nan shared that she was struck by Haven House which is a community in Atherton where families who have been homeless or in transition are living there for 90 days until permanent housing is found. Haven House is beautifully designed and set up with all support services. There is no place in northern Santa Clara County for families to go so they have to go to other counties. Chair O’Nan stated she would love to partner with a builder to build a worthwhile facility in northern Santa Clara County. No one in Santa Clara is

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leading that charge.

Chair O’Nan stated that if the HRC would like to be involved in the policy level than the HRC would need to be involved in the Comprehensive Plan. With the Comprehensive Plan’s accelerated schedule, the HRC may not have caught the current cycle. Is it better to do tactical projects or meaningful ways in to engage with the city at the policy level?

Chair O’Nan stated that there are questions the HRC needs to ask: 1. What are our housing priorities? 2. How much time, energy and commitment do we have, and as a Commission, we would have to step outside of our comfort zone and partner with the city or other agencies? We can come up with a short list of possibilities for Ms. Gitelman and Mr. Wong when they come to the HRC next month of what type of role the HRC would like to play. What aspects of affordable housing are most meaningful to them and the city and most crucial to address?

Commissioner Stone reported that the HRC can make the most progress on the veteran homelessness but also the issue of the population who are struggling to maintain their homes. Keep Palo Alto residents as Palo Alto residents. Going forward what is politically savvy and what will be respected by Council and supported by the residents of Palo Alto.

Commissioner Alhassani would like to focus on homeless veterans. Santa Clara County has the highest percentage of veterans in America. A lot of services serve San Jose and there are not as many resources in Palo Alto. According to Community Technology Alliance reporting there are 41 homeless veterans in Palo Alto.

Vice Chair Bacchetti stated that he is interested in low-income housing and diversity because Palo Alto has become very homogeneous in socioeconomic, racial and ethnic terms and that is a long-term issue that needs to be addressed at the root level so whatever is the explanatory cause of lack of diversity is understood and we work on what some of those roots are. For example, if you take the Housing Element as not producing any housing but satisfying a requirement of the state that is an empty circuit. Nothing is going to come of it and nothing has come out of it. How do we step outside of it and how do we produce some housing?

Commissioner Savage stated that homeless veterans are worthy to address. The other proposal on how to keep people struggling in their homes is noble and ambitious cause how can HRC do that? Is that in our purview? Chair O’Nan stated it is tough due to property rights and rents but if we do not help provide some kind of safety net we run the risk of people who are not homeless becoming homeless and increasing homelessness is not what the city wants and people do desperate things as crowding in an apartment with a relative or living in their cars. The HRC does bare the cost of some of these issues and addressing them proactively and with the huge disparities of income in Palo Alto, people slip through the cracks. InnVision Shelter Network has emergency funds for power and rent but InnVision Shelter Network runs out of funds by March. Can we think about a program where we have these emergency funds available?

Ms. Van der Zwaag stated to look at what is the appropriate role for the HRC as an advisory body to the Council. To look into what policies it wants to recommend to Council and how it may influence funding recommendations for the funding programs the HRC has purview over.

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Commissioner Savage stated that she would like to focus on families with children in the Palo Alto Unified School District who are in danger of becoming homeless. It is a more targeted approach.

Chair O’Nan stated that the HRC might want to pilot some solutions and start to carve a role in a small way now and in a few years if the HRC is effective in forming partnerships that role may potentially grow into something that does become a little more ambitious. Commissioner Chen stated that Ms. Gitelman suggested partnering with non-profit organizations in terms of affordable housing and in keeping families in their homes we could speak to InnVision Shelter Network. Chair O’Nan said that in speaking with Philip Dah of InnVision Shelter Network that they have a good relationship with the school district and if a teacher or counselor hears that families are homeless they do reach out with the families. The HRC can come up at the policy level that children cannot live on the street. San Mateo County does have a memo that has been in effect for over a decade that families cannot be homeless in their county because any family in need can receive a hotel voucher. There is no equivalent in Santa Clara County. Santa Clara County does not have a policy that families cannot be homeless. If we cannot do it at the county level maybe we can put a stake in the ground and make Palo Alto the first city in the county to not allow families to be homeless.

### **3. Review HSRAP Site Visits – Chair O’Nan**

Chair O’Nan asked the Commissioners to visit the current HSRAP sites and wanted the Commissioners to report on their experience. Commissioner Morin and Commissioner Chen visited Senior Adults Legal Assistance (SALA) in San Jose. Commissioner Morin reported that they had a meaningful meeting with Georgia Bacil and Michele Schroeder which included learning about the history of SALA who have been active for 31 years. SALA comes to Palo Alto three times a month and Avenidas sets up the appointments for low income seniors. SALA currently has two senior staff members and one full time employee along with volunteer law students who have passed the bar. SALA assists with up to 1,500 wills per year. SALA is in need of volunteers that speak different languages and they need assistance with the language translation of their literature.

Commissioner Alhassani shared his experience visiting InnVision Shelter Network (IVSN) with Chair O’Nan and Commissioner Chen. Mila Zelkha and Philip Dah drove the Commissioners in a van to three facilities. First they went to the Opportunity Center, which is considered ground zero for the rehabilitation program and basic services and then they went to the Haven House for families with children. Commissioner Alhassani stated that they could see that IVSN does it well to get support from the community. There was a toy donation for the holiday season taking place, the Stanford Football Team had built a teenage room, there was a kid’s room where they were taking naps, and then they visited a veteran hostel for out of town guests who have appointments at the VA but cannot afford a hotel. Chair O’Nan shared that IVSN provided a wonderful tour that showed them many aspects of their work. Through the help from the county, IVSN has social workers sign up families and individuals for food stamps at IVSN facilities so in one day they have their Snap Card that accelerates the process.

Commissioners Morin and Alhassani and Chair O’Nan visited Dreamcatchers which has Stanford students tutor and mentor middle school students at Palo Alto High School. Dreamcatchers provides nutritional snacks and engages them in exercises. Stanford students do a really good job and are great role models.

Chair O’Nan visited three agencies Innvision Shelter Network, Dreamcatchers and Peninsula

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Healthcare Connection. All three visits were really eye opening. The agencies do great work but they are hampered by lack of funding and lack of staff. Peninsula Healthcare Connection has a number of doctors who want to volunteer but do not have enough exam rooms. There are people with a need and people to address the need but do not have the space.

Commissioner Stone reported on his visit to Adolescent Counseling Service (ACS) and how he was fascinated to see the office and meet the counselors who are dedicated to their task. It was great to talk to them about handling a very heavy load. Their Executive Director, Dr. Philippe Rey showed Commissioner Stone around the facility. Dr. Rey addressed their concern that the rent is so high and away from the schools which is not convenient. Dr. Rey asked Commissioner Stone to see if there is room at the Mitchell Park Community Center to meet youth afterschool.

Commissioner Savage reported on her visit to Peninsula Healthcare Connection and was very impressed with their professionalism. Commissioner Savage wanted to add that the examination rooms are postage stamp size and the nurse/receptionist is between the two small rooms. It gives you food for thought. Commissioner Savage also visited Abilities United with Commissioner Morin. Abilities United is for adults and children with developmental disabilities and just the activities they offer art and cooking and take out for outings the dedication and enthusiasm is just amazing. Commissioner Morin said it was an extraordinary experience. They were first in their central office where they train people to have jobs. Their mission is to help physically impaired and developmentally disabled which includes autism but no other forms of mental challenges. Then they went to another facility where they help families with preschool children with disabilities and it was extraordinary.

#### **4. Review Workplan Items – Chair O’Nan**

Chair O’Nan is on the HSRAP workplan and we have a number of things coming up in that arena. First we have the Study Session coming up on March 2 so she will be preparing some HSRAP items for the Council. Chair O’Nan will be preparing to meet with the Policy and Finance Subcommittees to discuss the need for regular increases to the HSRAP budget. Previously they were in place for many years but were suspended 11 years ago. For the last couple of years the Council has generously added to the HSRAP budget but it has been one-offs on an ad hoc basis and I think we need to make a case for regular increases and also a rainy day fund. In case there are budget cuts in the future we would like to preserve our HSRAP programs so the most vulnerable residents take that kind of hit when the economy turns down again.

Commissioners Alhassani spoke to former Council Member Gail Price about the homeless veteran project and asked her for some ideas. Ms. van der Zwaag provided some organizations which he has begun researching: Home First which has a program enhanced shelter and 20 beds for up to 24 months housing. Destination Home is another program he is researching.

Commissioner Chen reported that Debra Cen, Palo Alto Chinese Parents Club informed her that she had proposed a video production project to the city. The City Manager’s Office connected her with a videographer.

Commissioner Alhassani, the liaison to the Palo Alto Mediation, was informed by a member of the Palo Alto Mediation that a Council Member was not aware of the work the Palo Alto Mediation was providing, and he requested the HRC highlight their work to Council. Ms. van der Zwaag stated that

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she will check to see if Council is giving non-profits and partner agencies 5-10 minutes to give a presentation at a Council meeting.

## **5. Update on planning for the Civility Roundtables and Senior Summit- Chair O’Nan**

Chair O’Nan explained that she had been speaking to different social service agencies and many have overlapping issues and some have relationships and collaborations but she thought it would be a good idea to put everyone in the room and have a Senior Summit. The purpose of the Summit is to identify some of the pressing issues facing seniors and to look for opportunities for potential collaborations among providers and figure out some items that are missing from the solutions that we can approach the city and county for funding. Chair O’Nan stated that she will facilitate and wants all HRC to attend. The Senior Summit is on Thursday, January 15 from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. at the Lucie Stern Community Center Community Room.

Chair O’Nan announced the first Civility Roundtable has been scheduled on February 26 at the Mitchell Park Community Center. The student film created by Dami and Titi, *Living in Silicon Valley* will be shown along with a roundtable discussion about some of the issues posed by the film. Cory Wolbach, a new Council Member would like to attend. A panel will be put together that includes young people, representative from different agencies and city leaders. Some of the format of the Mountain View Roundtable will be borrowed. Chair O’Nan stated that she will be reaching out to Palo Alto Mediation for facilitators and meeting planning. Chair O’Nan asked all HRC members to be there either as a facilitator or spectator.

## **6. Update on the possible collaboration with Santa Clara County Human Relations Commission to feature social justice movies – Commissioner Morin**

Commissioner Morin reported that the Human Relations Commission of Santa Clara County have been in great flux in the past 2-3 months and changed staff and commissions. They had a retreat today and will get back to Commissioner Morin when they are ready to plan the event.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **CALL FOR AGENDA ITEMS (February 12, 2015)**

- 1. Discussion with Planning and Community Environment regarding affordable housing**
- 2. Debrief on Senior Summit**
- 3. Civility Roundtable**
- 4. CDBG and HSRAP subcommittees**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.