



HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Thursday, October 8, 2015

Community Meeting Room

Palo Alto Civic Center

250 Hamilton Avenue

7:00 PM

REGULAR MEETING

ROLL CALL:

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

Absent: Alhassani, Stinger

Council Liaison: Council Member Wolbach

Staff: Minka van der Zwaag, Mary Constantino

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Stone made a motion to approve the Minutes of the September 10, 2015 Human Relations Commission (HRC) meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chen AYES: Unanimous.

AGENDA CHANGES, REQUESTS, and DELETIONS:

Chair O’Nan reported that Commissioner Alhassani was absent from the meeting so Commissioner Stone will be reporting on the Veterans Summit.

BUSINESS

1. Digital Leaders, Palo Alto Housing Corporation. Film Screening

Chair O’Nan stated that one of the HSRAP grantees, Palo Alto Housing Corporation, has a program called Digital Leaders and over the past few years the program has been focused on filmmaking. Chair O’Nan added that she was asked to be one of the judges in last spring’s Digital Leaders film contest, and a sponsor provided prize money so the participants were able to win money awards and everyone who participated was acknowledged and honored. The first place winners wanted to show the HRC their film because the topic is very important to the community. Kate Young, Director of Resident Services explained that Digital Leaders is one of their youth programs that focuses on grades 9-12 and the purpose of the program is to allow young people the chance to express their voice without adult intervention. Digital Leaders uses filmmaking as the digital medium for teens to learn the technical skills of filmmaking and through the process they learn about expressing themselves and finding out about issues that are important to them. The next few years the program will be looking at different digital mediums to be used for youth expression. Ms. Young stated that she was excited to introduce the three filmmakers who won the contest with their film entitled *Suicidal Thoughts*; Patricia Valbuena, Jazmine Jackson and Stefany Rodriguez ,all sophomores at Palo Alto High School.

Ms. Rodriguez shared that during their 9th grade year there were a few suicides in the community so

suicide was the topic they chose. Ms. Valbuena added that suicide is a topic that is hard to talk about but cannot be ignored. Ms. Rodriguez added that first they interviewed people about how they felt about suicide and whether they knew anyone that had “committed” suicide.

(The showing of the film)

Commissioner Stone expressed that the film was well done and applauded the students for making a powerful film. He asked if there was an emotional journey in making this project and what was learned during the project? Ms. Rodriguez replied that everyone has felt down sometime in their lives so it is very important to build each other up. Ms. Jackson added that she knows some people who wanted to commit suicide and the thought of losing a friend is very painful so making the video made her feel better because it shows that there is another way to go.

Commissioner Gordon Gray asked if more kids talk about suicide or feel depressed since there have been suicides and has it fueled more people to talk about suicide? Ms. Jackson replied that kids do not talk about suicide around school but they talk to close friends. Ms. Valbuena added that people realize that there are resources that can help them so it is more in the open.

Council Member Wolbach stated that high school is not an easy time of life for many teens. There is a movement called Life Gets Better which is targeted for LDBGQ youth but it applies to all teens in many situations. He stated that the video explicitly talks about that. It could save a life.

Chair O’Nan expressed that what she liked in the video was that people were different age groups who had friends or family members who had committed suicide and are still grieving decades later. Chair O’Nan asked the filmmakers found this cross section of people. Ms. Valbuena replied that the middle schooler is her sister, the kids are from their school and the woman works at their middle school.

Ms. Young stated that Palo Alto Housing Corporation will be having a brainstorming session on how the program can be reinvented. The program might continue as filmmaking or the teens have other ideas such as coding, App making, music with computer programs or digital photography. The Digital Leaders program wants to explore the options and get some expertise to learn new technology to allow teens to express themselves.

Council Member Wolbach asked if the students had connected with Project Safety Net (PSN). Ms. van der Zwaag explained that she is the co-lead of PSN which is a suicide prevention and youth welling-being taskforce and PSN is trying to promote youth voice, suicide prevention, hearing the prospective of what is going on at the high schools and hearing the youth perspective in spreading the message of hope, resilience and help seeking. At Palo Alto High School there is a new Mental Health Awareness Club with 100 teens and their main point is de-stigmatizing mental health issues by letting kids know that it is okay to seek help for mental health issues , just as people seek help when they break their arm. Our teens need to be empowered with the principle of “*see something, say something*” because that is the culture we want to have in Palo Alto among the kids and adults. If one sees a friend in distress tell a teacher or counselor because you were not getting them “in trouble” you were getting them “out of trouble.”

2. Opportunities for the HRC to participate in the Comprehensive (Comp)Plan update

Ms. van der Zwaag reported that she had given some thought as to how best the HRC can participate in the Comp Plan update by reviewing the information provided by Mr. Rob de Geus, Community

Services Department Director, and Mr. Jeremy Dennis, Planning Manager, at the September meeting. She stated that she wanted to provide a scenario on how the HRC can be involved in the Community Services and Transportation Element review. The Transportation Element is the next Element that is going to be looked at by the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) on October 20 at Rinconada Library. There are a lot of goals in the Element and the Committee has reviewed up to goal five out of the nine goals. On the city's website there is a Peak Democracy tool that is part of Open City Hall and it is a way to be involved in the Transportation Element by commenting on each area from your home computer. There is an option to comment on every Element of the Comprehensive Plan or answer an abridged series of questions on transportation. Another way for the HRC to be involved is with the Community Services Element which is going back to the Community Advisory Committee on November 17. The CAC will be reviewing the draft document including all comments from the public before the report goes to Council in January. The Commissioners can review the document individually and speak at the CAC meeting on their own behalf or the HRC can collectively review the document and empower a spokesperson for the November 17 meeting. There is time for the HRC to meet individually or as a subcommittee before the November HRC meeting and with a consensus empower one member of the HRC to deliver the comments on November 17. If the HRC cannot make the deadline they are welcome to provide their comments in January when it goes back to Council. The HRC can individually sign up on the Comprehensive Plan website which will send you updates. The Commissioners can also sign up under the Peak Democracy site and when an Element of the Comprehensive Plan comes up for review it will be sent to you for comment. Those are some specific ways or cursory ways to start the conversation and share ideas.

Vice Chair Stone stated that a subcommittee would be nice since some Commissioners are busy planning the Domestic Violence Forum. Chair O'Nan added that a subcommittee would be limited to three and it would be helpful if every Commissioner reviewed the Element and provided input. Ms. van der Zwaag replied that the subcommittee could give a report at the next HRC meeting and then all of the Commissioners can discuss the Element and come up with a common recommendation.

Commissioner Chen asked if when Commissioners make comments online if it is done as an individual or as a Commission. Ms. van der Zwaag replied that they would be commenting as an individual with the knowledge and opinion that you have as a Commissioner. Chair O'Nan added if the HRC is to weigh in, it should be more official and formal by the entire Commission, and she would rather comment online separately

Ms. van der Zwaag stated that she could review the key Elements that would be of interest to the HRC including Community Services Element number C3 which concentrates on the services to the most vulnerable populations. It would be helpful to read the document and ask if it reflects the goals and visions the HRC would like the community to use as their guiding document. Ms. van der Zwaag added that she could write a staff report to help the HRC efficiently review the Community Services Element of the Comp Plan. Vice Chair Stone suggested that Ms. van der Zwaag create a staff report and continue this great push putting the HRC in the forefront.

Ms. van der Zwaag stated that the Community Services Element is going to the Citizens Advisory Committee on November 17 and will be presented to Council in January. The HRC could skip the Council Advisory Committee and go directly to Council but it would be much more inclusive to discuss at the next HRC meeting since there is a one month lead time. At the HRC meeting on November 12 the HRC must agree upon what they would like to discuss regarding the Community Services Element at the November 17 Council Advisory Committee meeting and the HRC needs to

empower a Commissioner to speak on their behalf.

Council Member Wolbach stated that speaking personally it would be valuable to have comments whether orally or in writing, individually or as the HRC. The comments could be specific comments regarding specific language in any of the various versions or previous drafts of the Comprehensive Plan or also more general or a higher level or even a suggestion that something be included that the HRC does not see. He suggested that the HRC not feel constrained individually or as a body in giving advice to Council in wordsmithing the language.

Chair O’Nan stated that she does not want Ms. van der Zwaag to do all of the “heavy lifting” on the Commission’s behalf and the HRC should be working in concert with Ms. van der Zwaag and come up with the report for the Commission on November 12 to make sure the HRC is ready for November 17. Leadership will work with Ms. van der Zwaag to craft something to bring back to the HRC on November 12 and a Commissioner will go to the Community Advisory Committee meeting on November 17 to participate in oral communications. Ms. van der Zwaag added that it would be helpful at the next meeting to be prepared. . If the HRC is thinking of a subcommittee, staff would step back and the subcommittee can step forward to look at the Element and then bring something back.

Chair O’Nan asked if the HRC is interested in the Transportation Element because the next Citizens Advisory Committee meeting is Tuesday, October 20 and then the draft Element recommendation is going to Council on January 19 and Council will be reviewing it on March.15. Ms. van der Zwaag stated that the Element is on Peak Democracy for five more days and as individuals the Commissioners can go on Peak Democracy to make comments.

3. Recap of the Veterans Summit and discuss next steps

Commissioner Stone reported that the event was a great hit and there were approximately 100 people in attendance. There were two White House Officials; Colonel Malachowski, Executive Director of Joining Forces and David Wilkinson, Director of the Office of Civic Participation and Social Innovation and a nine-person housing and healthcare panel. There were “moving stories” from veterans who had lived on the streets and suffered from substance abuse and were able to rise above with the help of different services. He stated that it was exciting that Mayor Holman, who gave the introductory remarks, committed the city to the Mayors’ Challenge initiated by the First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden.

Commissioner Gordon Gray thanked the HRC for raising her awareness and stated that the summit opened her eyes to the fact that people who live on the streets were human beings and had the same needs that she does. Commissioner Chen asked whether in working to solve the problem of homelessness how agencies work together. She asked if Commissioner Stone had any insight on the collaboration between health and social service to solve the problem. Commissioner Stone stated that he spoke with the panelists and the common theme was the concern of gaps in services. Different agencies do “amazing incredible” work but do not share what they are doing and their infrastructures. One of the goals of the summit was to bring everyone together to recognize these gaps.

Ms. van der Zwaag added that in the past the county had a separate countywide homeless taskforce, , but it has morphed under the direction of an agency called Destination Home with the introduction of “coordinated assessment.” There are other monthly meetings where the providers talks about the cases that they are working on. When you get into a subpopulation as veteran homelessness some of

the agencies that work in homelessness may not be as well versed in veterans' homelessness because they may have another area of focus. Are there opportunities for the HRC and the City of Palo Alto to raise awareness or close up some gaps? Council may or may not have some direction for the HRC. Vice Chair Stone and Commissioner Alhassani took a big step in raising awareness in the community on this very important issue.

Chair O'Nan added it was exciting to have an event in which Palo Alto was connected at the top levels of government in the country with a directive that came from the White House.

Council Member Wolbach stated that he was curious is it fair to depict as the big takeaway that this is a solvable problem that requires resources of three types: money, land or buildings for housing and really good qualified people as well as well political will. Commissioner Stone replied that as far as the big takeaway is that the issue could be solved if we have the courage of everyone, especially those at the top level of government, stand up and say "this is not right, this is shameful in this county where we have the highest proportional rate of homeless veterans in the country." He thinks it is time for everyone especially key discussion makers to stand up and say we are not going to have this in our backyard, and he thinks those three points "nailed it" and if the community addresses the three points the problem can be solved.

Chair O'Nan stated that it was an incredible feat. There was some press in the Palo Alto Weekly and the San Jose Mercury News and with the Mayor Holman signing the Mayor's Challenge there will be next steps so the will see how it can participate.

4. Discussion on the Planning of the Domestic Violence Awareness Event

Chair O'Nan reported that October is Domestic Violence Awareness month and it was ambitious of the HRC to have two events in one month but it was important to have the event before the holidays. Commissioner Gordon Gray stated that she started publicizing the event with flyers, public service announcements, an interview on KBAY, sending through data bases, Facebook, a press release with a quote from the Mayor, and the Palo Alto Weekly is interested in writing an editorial piece before the event. One of the challenges in terms of Palo Alto itself was the fact that last year there were one hundred 911 calls and 36 cases. She stated that the numbers are not staggering, but to keep in mind that 99 percent of domestic violence cases go unreported.

Commissioner Savage stated that 36 court cases is one case every other week and she would call that significant. Commission Gordon Gray replied that one of the panelists, Palo Alto Police Lieutenant. April Wagner, said that domestic violence calls are the most dangerous calls because there can be a weapon involved. The police department has protocols on how to respond to domestic violence calls.

Commissioner O'Nan stated that she is interested in using polling buttons but is concerned that since it is a two- hour event with a keynote speech and seven panelists, she really wants time to engage the audience. She asked whether the polling was going to take too much time and then people will not have a chance to ask questions. Ms. van der Zwaag stated that people like to give their opinion anonymously especially questions such as how many people have experienced violence in a relationship. The key issue is the number of questions that will be asked and the importance of testing the equipment in advance to make sure it works. Chair O'Nan added that she is meeting with Becky Beacom of Palo Alto Medical Foundation to have a conversation and make sure that the polling does not distract the event.

5. Discussion on the selection of topics for an upcoming speaker series.

Chair O’Nan explained that the HRC had a long-term learning series on housing with very informative speakers from different county and city agencies with different perspectives. HRC leadership wants to provide the entire HRC the opportunity to brainstorm together on what kind of topics they would like for future learning series.. Chair O’Nan referred the Commissioners to the list of topics that were brainstormed at the retreat.

Commissioner Chen stated that she strongly advocates bringing in representatives of different cultures to talk about their culture and the challenges of living in the community integrating into society. Chair O’Nan stated that it would be a “fascinating” topic. Commissioner Chen asked if she would have the responsibility to invite the speakers. Ms. van der Zwaag replied that it would be Commissioner Chen’s responsibility but that in the past she did invite the panelist but in this case it is more of a personal invitation on Commissioner Chen’s behalf to identify and invite people. If the format works, it might be nice to use it for other large immigrants groups to Palo Alto to tell their stories.

Commissioner Gordon Gray reported that she spoke to Commissioner Stinger about the idea of having Pastor Smith of University AME Zion Church come and speak to the HRC. Vice Chair Stone added that he feels a speaker series about racism and hate crimes would be beneficial. Chair O’Nan added that she is interested in the topic of homelessness but it is a very complicated issue because it encompasses several layers and it might be helpful to learn more about the housing, mental health, and addiction aspects. Chair O’Nan reported that the topics for the speaker series are cultures, racism and hate crimes, and mental health homeless and addiction.

Commissioner Gordon Gray stated that she likes the topic of gentrification because so many people cannot afford to live in Palo Alto. Ms. van der Zwaag added the topic could be added with income inequality.

Ms. van der Zwaag asked how soon the HRC would like to start the speaker series. Chair O’Nan reported that it would be a good idea to kick off the New Year with the speaker series and Leadership will work with staff to put the series together.

Reports from Officials

1. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Gordon Gray reported that she attended the California Association of Human Rights Organization and the main takeaway was there were laws on the books that many legislators, politicians and government officials were unfamiliar with. These are human rights laws that were initiated by the United Nations and ratified by the U.S. that people have the right to invoke the laws in different situations and they could be applied at the local level.

Chair O’Nan reported that she attended a seminar at the Palo Alto Medication Foundation (PAMF) about a new program called Linkages, which is a new social media platform for seniors. PAMF is taking a new approach to healthcare for seniors such as issues of loneliness and isolation being health problems and using technology to link older people with younger people who were able to trade services or simply interact as human beings. PAMF has developed a “time bank” to trade services and the program is being piloted in Palo Alto and other communities. The HRC has been concerned about the lack of services for seniors in proportion to the growing demographics. The HRC could possibly get involved to help publicize the program or in some other way.

Chair O’Nan reported that she went to the Parks and Recreation Stakeholder Meeting which is a cross section of the whole Palo Alto community. Peter Jensen the city’s landscape architect, outside consultants and various stakeholders in the community shared feedback that many of the parks are underutilized and many are over utilized. The stakeholders would be invited back. Hopefully the Palo Alto parks will continue to improve as Palo Alto takes a fresh twenty-first century approach to make its green space accessible to everyone.

2. Council Liaison Report

Council Member Wolbach stated that the Mountain View Human Relations Commission is exploring the idea of making the City of Mountain View a “human rights city” so the HRC might want to touch base with the HRC in Mountain View.

Council Member Wolbach added that on the subject of housing, which has been a major focus of discussion by the Commission, that is was interesting to see the public comment during the Council meeting. The Council thought they were going to talk about the land use section of the Comprehensive Plan but there were a number of speakers representing diverse groups and diverse sentiments of the community who rallied around affordable housing in Palo Alto.

Council Member Wolbach reported that he traveled to Washington DC, Boston and Austin, Texas and talked to people from a number of cities and states who are in similar positions regarding housing. It is interesting the way Palo Alto has experienced housing and gentrification challenges and the struggling around growth and traffic. The problem is not unique to us but to every urban areas in America.

3. Staff Liaison Report

Ms. van der Zwaag reported that the Andy Goodman Storytelling Workshop is scheduled for Friday, October 16 and Commissioners Chen, Stinger, Stone, Gordon Gray and Chairs O’Nan are attending.

Another topic that related to the work of the HRC is the senior transportation issue. There is a link to the survey on the city’s homepage about the shuttle system. Chair O’Nan will be bringing back the report the summer intern wrote which has very good suggestions to improve the shuttle system.

On October 19 there will be the second reading of the ordinance that changed the ending of the term of the HRC Commissioners to April 30 to May 31 as well as the second reading of the ordinance implementing the local minimum wage to \$11.00 by January 1, 2016 and a tentative colleague’s memo regarding accessory dwellings.

CALL FOR AGENDA ITEMS (November 12, 2015)

Tentative Agenda

1. Sex trafficking resolution for increasing awareness on human trafficking.
2. Pay for Success-Mila Zelkha
3. Debrief on the Domestic Violence Summit
4. Community Services Element

ADJOURNMENT

1. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.