



HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Thursday, January 14, 2016

Community Meeting Room

Palo Alto Civic Center

250 Hamilton Avenue

7:00 PM

REGULAR MEETING

ROLL CALL:

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

Absent: Stone

Council Liaison: Council Member Wolbach

Staff: Minka van der Zwaag, Mary Constantino

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Gordon Gray made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2015 Human Relations Commission (HRC) meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Alhassani AYES: Unanimous.

AGENDA CHANGES, REQUESTS, and DELETIONS:

The sequence of the items were changed to the following: Item #3, Item #2, Item #1, #4

V. BUSINESS

1. Speaker series “An Immigrant Experience in Palo Alto”

Chair O’Nan stated at the past annual retreat the HRC explored what topics to have speakers come and talk over a series of months or over a course of a year and the topic everyone was interested in was the immigrant experience in Palo Alto. The demographics of the city has changed a lot because there have been a lot of people moving to Palo Alto over recent years, and the HRC wanted to learn more on how they integrated into and engaged in the community. The first group of speakers who emigrated from China was arranged by Commissioner Chen. The two speakers are Karena Li and Qi Ping Cai and they are going to talk about their immigrant experiences living in Palo Alto. Karena Li stated that she came to Palo Alto in July 2015 from Hong Kong but before living in Hong Kong she lived in Beijing, China. She left Hong Kong due to pollution problems and wanted to find a community where the air is clear and people are friendly to Asian people. When she first arrived she was met with a lot of difficulties due to language and her family experienced hard times especially her children because they wanted to go return to Hong Kong. Ms. Li and her children have made a few friends since arriving but all of their friends are Chinese. The Chinese community would like to have seminars or community activities to help them get involved. In Hong Kong and Beijing volunteering in the neighborhood and schools were a good way to meet people but in Palo Alto they do not know how to get started. Commissioner Chen asked Ms. Li what the City of Palo Alto could do to help the Chinese community get started. Ms. Li replied that

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she knows there are a lot of resources and her language is fine and she reads the local newspaper and searches the internet for activities such as Enjoy Online for activities for her family but also wants to have activities for adults to help with isolation.. Ms. Li replied that she also volunteers in the school library and has helped with earthquake preparedness to help make friends with local people because it is important to be connected with the community socially and emotionally. Ms. Li added that she can communicate in English but there are a lot of immigrants who have poor English speaking skills and they shut the door from the outside world and do not watch local television or read local magazines.

Qi Ping Cai explained that he came to Palo Alto 2 ½ years ago from Sanya, China. There are three major reasons his family immigrated to the United States; a new experience, educational opportunities for his children, and issues of pollution in China. Mr. Cai explained that he had not been to Northern California before but thinks he is lucky that he chose a good place as his second home because of the weather and the inclusiveness of the community. More than 50% of Palo Altans come from different countries all though he does not consider himself as a foreigner. During the past 2 1/2 years he has lived with the challenge of learning a new language and culture and he tries his best to improve his English by watching television, listening to the radio and reading the newspaper. Mr. Cai takes active participation in the activities in his son's current school and want to participate in Palo Alto's community life but do not know what to attend. Hopefully the Council can help newcomers host events to ease into the participation of community life because the Chinese community can contribute their strengths.

Commissioner Stinger asked if the speakers encountered any surprises when they moved to Palo Alto. Ms. Li replied that everything was very good and after a few months of living in Palo Alto her children considered Palo Alto as a "paradise" because everything is good, people are friendly, do not feel prejudice and life is very easy. There were no personal surprises just did not know how to build relationships with the local people

Chair O'Nan stated the HRC oversees many of the local nonprofits and many of these agencies work with local residents who often are people who need help. She suggested that his could be a good way to meet people and do some good in the community and build connections. Ms. Li asked where she could get this information. Chair O'Nan replied that the HRC and staff can provide the information. The HRC recently did outreach into the community where we needed Chinese speakers and Commissioner Chen had to translate by herself. The HRC wants to reach out to the community but a big part of the community does not speak English.

Commissioner Gordon Gray asked if the city has a "welcome package." Ms. van der Zwaag replied that staff has been in conversation about this, but one does not currently exist, but hopes to have one in the future.

Ms. Li stated that if Commissioner Chen wants to start the welcoming package she could help translate. Ms. van der Zwaag replied that the city knows that much more is need than just translation from English to another language and that it must be more involved to be relevant to newcomers in the community. Ms. Li stated that people from the Chinese community could work on the leaflet, send the leaflet out to the Chinese community to let more people get involved. Commissioner Chen stated that the HRC is working with a county representative planning a welcoming event but the date has not been scheduled. Commissioner Chen added that a woman from China told her that Stanford Hospital needs additional translators. Commissioner Stinger

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stated that the library does many programs such as Chinese story hour and there may be some opportunities for adult discussion groups or forum at the library either organized by the library or by citizens using the conference rooms for a program and inviting a speaker that would be interesting and help with the social aspect, the school community or maybe the business aspect. Commissioner Chen asked where a good place would be to talk to Chinese residents your age who are actively working because she has slides written in Chinese demonstrating how the city works.

Chair O’Nan stated there are often book clubs at the library and people of all backgrounds participate. The group reads the book and comes together to discuss the book. There are film clubs where films are viewed and then they come together to discuss the film and that is where connections could be made with people from all different backgrounds and you will have something in common because you will be reading the same book or watching the same film. Another great place is the YMCA because it is one of the most diverse gathering places in Palo Alto because on a typical day French, Russian, Farsi, Chinese and Hebrew languages are heard. The YMCA is a great family place but also it is a great place for adults to take classes, meet people, have fun and stay in good physical shape and enjoy the recreation options because working at home can cause the feeling isolation and visiting the YMCA to take a class may lift your spirits.

Commissioner Gordon Gray asked the guest speakers if they had tried Meetup.com. It is a website where people type in their zip code and their interests such as hiking and then activities are displayed and it makes it easy to meet people. Ms. Li stated that all of the information is very useful. She heard of the YMCA but did not think of going there by herself not knowing what the YMCA was.

Mr. Cai stated that he came to Palo Alto 2.5 years ago and his son’s bike has been stolen three times. The first time his bike was stolen was in their apartment and the second time was at Safeway, but he did not whether to report the stolen bike. Commissioner Savage explained that Mr. Cai should definitely report the stolen bike to the police. There are many bikes that have not been identified by the owner and the bikes are sold at auctions. It is good to engrave an identification mark on the bike.

Council Member Wolbach introduced himself to Ms. Li and Mr. Cai. He added that they had heard many excellent recommendations today. For business connections the Chamber of Commerce is a good organization to connect with. Council Member Wolbach suggested that the speakers take a look at some of the local organizations that are focused on environmental issues such Acterra, Canopy, Environmental Volunteers as that is where to find people who are involved in the community.

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

Commissioner Stinger reported that a steering committee met that week and confirmed the date, logistics and agreed on the tone and the vision for the forum. There is a meeting scheduled during the week of January 25 where the committee will plan on the key note speakers and participants. The event is on Wednesday, March 30 from 7-9 p.m. at Mitchell Park. Commissioner Savage asked who are the community members involved. Commissioner Stinger replied Pastor Kaloma Smith of University AME Zion Church and Rabbi Emeritus Sheldon Lewis.

Commissioner Gordon Gray asked for a little more elaboration on the event. Commissioner Stinger replied that she wanted to wait until some of the speakers were vetted before bringing the

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information to the HRC more formally. Chair O’Nan stated that it is not too soon to start thinking about the HRC’s other events because the HRC wants to have three events per year; one the summer and one in the fall.

3. Update by the Homeless Veterans Summit

Commissioner Alhassani stated that city staff had submitted an information report to Council in December on homelessness. City staff will be providing more information to Council in the future, including information about several county initiatives and the HRC’s efforts on the landlord education event. Commissioner Gordon Gray asked why city staff provided the report to Council since it is a county initiative. Ms. van der Zwaag replied that staff was interested in giving Council an update on the cold weather shelter in Sunnyvale and thought it was important to also give them an update of other homeless related topics. At a recent Santa Clara County Cities Association meeting, the County of Santa Clara provided information on Destination Home’s Community Plan to End Homelessness and the County’s Housing Task Force report. They also spoke about the “All the Way Home” campaign to End veterans Homelessness. Therefore, the December information report was a good opportunity for staff to inform the Council of what the county is doing and what the county might be looking to the cities for to work in partnership with them on. The HRC’s work on homeless vets fits in perfectly with “All the Way Home” Campaign. The future report to Council will not only be a way for Council to get a broad understanding on homeless programs in the county and see what the implications and opportunities for Palo Alto are, but also to see Human Services staff and the HRC as partners in being able to address the issues that the report brings forth, such as the HRC’s proposed plan to host a north county landlord education event with the County Housing Authority to incentivize housing homeless veterans. Chair O’Nan stated that the HRC had an ongoing learning series on affordable housing and an issue that came up among the speakers was that there are housing certificates such as Section 8 through HUD but landlords are very reluctant to take on those sorts of tenants so even when there is housing there is an implicit bias against those people who are eligible for the program. She thinks a program such as the one Commissioner Alhassani and Vice Chair Stone are proposing to bring to the north county would be very valuable because landlords need to be educated around the hopes, needs, challenges and opportunities of housing veterans because people are caught up in their own prejudices or they may have had a bad experience in the past and are not willing to give someone a chance so education is often the way to break through the barriers. Chair O’Nan stated that it was wonderful that Commissioner Alhassani and Vice Chair Stone have taken the lead on educating landlords because the previous event was held in the south county but the north county often gets over looked so it is important to “put our own stake in the ground.”

4. Follow up and next steps to the HRC’s review of the Comprehensive Plan update

Ms. van der Zwaag stated that the HRC’s recommendations went to the Subcommittee of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) for the Community Services Element, and the Subcommittee was going to look at the recommendations during their next meeting and then report back to the CAC. It was reported that staff went through each of the HRC’s suggestions to see what became of their suggestions. There have been a couple drafts of the Comp Plan since the version the HRC last reviewed and staff reported that it was too labor intensive to go through both versions to point out specifically where each of the HRC’s recommendations were now included in the report, but staff went over each bullet point in the HRC’s recommendations to let them know if it was accepted by the Subcommittee or not.

Approved

a. Subsections C-1.5 and 1.6:

General Comment: The HRC agreed that Palo Alto should continue to take a leadership role across jurisdictional lines

Suggested Change: In subsection C-1.6 the HRC recommended specifying partnerships with both Santa Clara and San Mateo counties

Recommendation Accepted: The HRC asked to have it called out a little more. Changed to “Palo Alto to take leadership roles and working with other communities in the mid-peninsula and greater Bay Area.”

b. Subsection C-1.11

General Comment: The HRC is concerned that this policy places an unrealistic burden on grandparents and other senior caregivers.

Suggested Change: The HRC recommends removing this policy.

Recommendation Accepted: The suggestion regarding childcare providers using seniors as volunteers was removed from the Element as requested by the HRC.

c. Subsection C-1.12.1

General Comment: The HRC supports strong partnerships and collaborations to provide services to families and youth, but are concerned about where the burden of funding and providing that coordination will fall.

Suggested Change: The HRC recommended that this subsection be revised to clarify who will coordinate these agencies and how that coordination will be funded.

Recommendation Not Accepted: There was no change. The HRC’s suggestion was not taken.

d. Subsection C-1.16

General Comment: The HRC supports the coordination of childcare services, but are concerned that the subsection does not specify who will do the coordinating.

Suggested Change: The HRC recommended that the subsection be revised to clarify who will coordinate delivery of these services

Recommendation Not Accepted: The Subcommittee thought the suggestion was digging a little further down to specifics than that was in the scope the Comprehensive Plan to include. Staff thought that the coordination of services will be determined later.

e. Subsection C-1.20

General Comment: The HRC wholeheartedly supports this new policy, but note that it omits identification and treatment of depression, a serious mental illness that is a leading cause of suicide.

Suggested Change: The HRC recommended the subsection be revised to specifically mention depression as a focus area.

Approved

Recommendation Accepted: That comment was accepted and it is now Element C-5.4 and element now also states depression along with serious mental illness as a cause of suicide.

f. Subsection C-1.22

General Comment: The HRC supports the policies and programs included in this section, many of which focus on quality of life issues. However, the basic needs of many seniors are not currently being met, and we believe those issues should be articulated here as well.

Suggested Change: The HRC recommended including senior nutrition, transportation, and mental health as key issues that must be addressed to ensure healthy aging in our community.

Recommendation Accepted: Added senior nutrition, transportation, and mental health issues as key factors that must be addressing to ensure healthy aging in our community.

g. Subsection C-1.25

General Comment: The HRC completely agrees with the policy to support rigorous compliance with the ADA. At the same time, we recognize that not all disabilities are physical. For example, autistic children and adults may have difficulty accessing the city's recreational facilities.

Suggested Change: The HRC recommended that this subsection be revised to call out mental and cognitive disabilities as well as physical ones.

Recommendation Accepted: Regarding disabilities that we call out mental and cognitive disabilities as well as physical ones.

h. Subsection C-5.8 and C-5.81

General Comment: In recent years Palo Alto has undergone a significant demographic shift. Many new residents are Chinese and face significant cultural and language barriers to civic engagement.

Suggested Change: The HRC recommended the development of programs tailored to the needs of newly arrived immigrants to encourage their participation in civic life. This would include providing materials in their native languages.

Recommendation Not Accepted: Sections that talked about integrating new people into the community. The old language talked about newcomers and new arrivals and the language stayed as broad as it was before so nothing was added. A lot of this is digging down into a program suggestion but it does not mean it will not happen.

i. Subsection C5.10 and Program C5.10.1

General Comment: All members of the community would benefit from a wider variety of transportation options. Seniors in particular need better access to transportation, more shuttle routes, increased service, and access to door-to-door (meaning that the driver is available to go into stores, medical buildings, or homes with riders to make sure they have the most convenient experience possible).

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Suggested Change: The HRC recommended that Program C5.10.1 be revised to specify a senior shuttle that addresses the particular needs of this population.

Recommendation Not Accepted: Senior transportation shuttle and transportation routes and adding more specifics about seniors with mobility issues. The changes were not incorporated into the plan. .

Ms. van der Zwaag stated that the Element is going to Council on February 1 and approximately 80-90 percent of the HRC's suggestions were taken.

Chair O'Nan stated that she wished that the HRC's recommendations about the wording for seniors were included because seniors get lumped in with everyone else and they do have special needs and wish that the language would spell out those special needs. Maybe the answer is to have some of the HRC Commissioners to show up at the next meeting and advocate and make a case for seniors especially with limited mobility. The next meeting would be the Council meeting on February 1.

Ms. van der Zwaag added that procedurally Commissioners could individually speak at public comment time and say that the Comp Plan was discussed at a HRC meeting, re-tell the thrust of the conversation, state that you are just one member, but that you would like to say the HRC would like Council to consider a particular suggestion or the HRC would have to take a vote and empower one of the Commissioners to speak on their behalf. Chair O'Nan replied that the HRC should see who could go as an individual and thank the CAC for including so many of the HRC's comments. She asked the HRC if they wanted to vote and empower a Commissioner to speak on the HRC's entire behalf.

Commissioner Gordon Gray asked if the HRC needed to have a discussion to determine what topics the HRC wants to bring forth to Council. Chair O'Nan replied that the HRC would need to discuss it and empower someone so it may be better to see who shows up and whoever speaks will be speaking on their own behalf. Ms. van der Zwaag stated that a Commissioner could attend and recall the gist of the conversation of the HRC, and that they are just one member and there was a discussion on this topic at a recent HRC meeting but you cannot say it is opinion of the HRC because you are not empowered to do so.

Council Member Wolbach asked if the recommendations regarding the Element were passed by the HRC. Ms. van der Zwaag stated that the HRC identified some issues at a meeting about then they empowered a statement to be crafted that was given to the CAC. Council Wolbach added that statement reflected the opinion of the HRC so simply pointing out that this was the position of the HRC and X was accepted and Y was rejected. Chair O'Nan stated that the HRC had approved the statement once and a subset was left out so does the HRC want to say that whoever attends the February 1 meeting speaks to Council that the HRC would like the subset possibly be included.

Commissioner Stinger added that she attended the meeting on December 16 and was impressed with the thoughtfulness of the Subcommittee and staff. She would always want to speak for seniors because of the need in our community but understands why the CAC wanted to make it global and not call out too many specific programs because it is not a program document. She stated that while seniors are very important to us, she respects the process and the amount of care and work that went into this. Chair O'Nan added that the people who write documents like the Comprehensive Plan tend to be active healthy people and sometimes they forget that not everyone in the community is

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not active and healthy because it is really easy to forget people who are in wheelchairs or house-bound and who they do not see out and about. When things are called out in a document it is a reminder that not everyone can jump on a shuttle and get down to a concert. Whoever shows up speaks on behalf on their own individual opinion as a Commissioner, but we can mention the document since it was previously approved.

VI. Reports from Officials – Chair O’Nan

1. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Chen reported that on December 16 there was a meeting with a member from the Chinese community, Commissioner Stinger, Ms. van der Zwaag and Supervisor Simitian’s Policy Aid Micaela Hellman-Tincher to discuss possible ways to welcome immigrant to the community.

Commissioner Chen reported that she attended the Eid Festival at the First Congregation Church hosted by Samina Sundas. Council Member Wolbach and Supervisor Simitian also attended

Commissioner Alhassani reported that the Palo Alto Mediation is having a winter social on January 22 from 6-9 pm. The HRC is invited.

Chair O’Nan reported that the outreach to seniors regarding the shuttle is completed. There were four successful focus groups and thanked staff for their assistance. She thanked Commissioner Chen for translating the survey to Chinese which allowed a more substantial outreach to the Chinese community. There was also assistance from local social service agencies such as Palo Alto Housing, staff at Senior Friendship Day and staff at La Comida. She stated that we were very lucky to have such great partners. Over 200 surveys were completed.

Commissioner Gordon Gray asked what happens next with the survey. Ms. van der Zwaag replied that the City Transportation staff will be having a community meeting in February or March where they will be reporting on the changes to the shuttle. At some point they will bring the results of the survey and the suggested changes and improvements to Council. Chair O’Nan added that the Senior Services Subcommittee will continue to work with the city on revamping and revising the city shuttle service. The Subcommittee still thinks of piloting a door to door shuttle but needs to see the results from the survey, what the budgets look like and what interest there is in piloting the program. For many years there has been a similar successful program in Menlo Park and would really like the city to give it a try because many seniors would love to have the door to door service but sometimes you have to “throw the spaghetti at the wall to see if it sticks.” The Subcommittee will continue to work with the city on the process of revising the shuttle service particularly ways to better serve seniors who rely on the shuttle.

Chair O’Nan stated that several months ago there was a hate crime reported in Palo Alto and the HRC had a member of the public contact them who was very concerned. Lieutenant Reifschneider came to the HRC retreat to speak about the process in which hate crimes are reported, documented, investigated, and how the statistics are compiled. A further development came about and the young man who reported the hate crime has recanted his story. He was not attacked but was in a fight in East Palo Alto. The Palo Alto Police Department took this report very seriously, investigated it very thoroughly and has charged the young man for filing a false police report.. Chair O’Nan stated that we live in a community where police reports are taken very seriously so if members of the public reach out and have questions or concerns the reports will be taken seriously, will be investigated and will be documented.

Approved

Chair O’Nan reported that she talked to Chief Burns about the shooting on Christmas night. This was a very tragic event in our community when a young mentally ill man called the police and then charged the police and was shot. This was the first officer involved shooting in the community in over 12 years. There is audio and video that has not been released to the public because it is very disturbing to the family and the officers who were involved. There are two investigations that are ongoing; one is by the DA’s office which will determine if it was a justified shooting and whether the officers involved will be charged. The second is by internal affairs of the police department. An independent police auditor will be reviewing the incident and taking an independent look. This is going to take several months so there may be members of the public who feel very strongly about the shooting but this a situation that is very delicate and has multiple points of view. Dealing with mentally ill people is very difficult and challenging even for well-trained officers to deal with the situation and Chair O’Nan stated that you have to feel compassion for the officers involved as well as the young man.

2. Council Liaison Report

On January 24, 2015 from 12:30 to 4:30 pm there is a Sustainability Summit scheduled at Jordan Middle School.

On Saturday, January 30 the Council is having their annual retreat. The Council will be setting priorities for the year, and Council will essentially continue the priorities that were set last year and Council Member Wolbach was somewhat confident that Council would be adding some sub focus within those areas; under Land Use and Environment highlighting housing and as a sub focus Healthy Cities and Communities having four subgroups such as youth, seniors homeless and disabled. The retreat will run from 9:00 am to 4:00 p.m. Saturday, January 30 and is open to the public.

CALL FOR AGENDA ITEMS (February 11, 2016)

- a. Selection of CDBG Review Committee Member
- b. Council Study Session scheduled March 7 at 6 pm
- c. Update from Commissioner Stinger on Implicit Bias Community Event
- d. HRC future events
- e. Veteran Homelessness and All the Way Home
- f. Immigrant speaker

ADJOURNMENT

1. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.