



**Human Rights Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
Community Engagement Committee  
December 7, 2021  
Virtual/Electronic Meeting  
4:00 pm**

Public link to meeting rebroadcasts on Boxcast: <https://boxcast.tv/channel/vabajtzeuyv3iclkx1a>

Public link to HRC documents on Box: <https://app.box.com/s/xy3wnn2s1tj8h7trkknvd79bipyxezy>

**1. WELCOME**

- a. CALL TO ORDER
  - i. Chair, Jessica Harris, called the meeting to order at 4:06 pm
- b. ROLL CALL
  - i. Jessica Harris
  - ii. Jeanette Abi-Nader
  - iii. Ernest Chambers
  - iv. Andrew Orban
  - v. Lyndele Von Schill
- c. MISSION (recited by all): *Act as a strong advocate to justice and equal opportunity by providing citywide leadership and guidance in the area of civil rights.*

**2. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC**

- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
  - i. None
- b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
  - i. None

**3. MINUTES**

- a. None

**4. WORK SESSION**

- a. Town hall meeting planning
  - i. Goal to open dialogue with the public
  - ii. Committee Chair expresses it is important to articulate the Commission's limitations and what it is capable of
    1. Can't open dialogue without being able to respond
    2. Suggests formatting the town hall like a needs assessment in which the Commission hears from the public, identifies resources, and creates a plan that may be made short-term or long-term
  - iii. Commissioner says she thinks of town hall as a larger part of the community engagement process
    1. When Charlene was Director, she did many community events that have not been possible since COVID, so there is not only an aspect of needs assessment, but also getting out in the community

2. It is difficult to effectively engage with the community due to the Commission's formality and meeting infrequency
  3. Suggests a quarterly Zoom outreach call during which people can share thoughts and the Commission can respond
    - a. More informal; one quarter, committee could hear responses, then respond during the next quarter
    - b. May reach more people than a one-time in-person town hall
  4. Doing some kind of research project is also part of the goals for next year; could take questions from these meetings to inform potential research, as these are what the community finds important
- iv. Chair values direct feedback and expresses wanting to support OHR staff with his direct engagement with the community
    1. Summarizes Commissioner's points about the quarterly outreach call
  - v. Commissioner agrees that frequency of meetings is important for community engagement; wonders if there is a way for Commission responses to be sooner than the next quarterly meeting
  - vi. Commissioner mentions Hollaback! bystander training and compares personal experiences in focus groups with what the Commission could do; asks how the Commission could both hear concerns and provide information, perhaps in a workshop format
    1. Information workshops about the complaint process
    2. Some people are intimidated because they are unsure of the next step
    3. Commissioner wants to prioritize education, responding to immediate needs, and accessibility
  - vii. Commissioner says that having information up front about the timeliness of Commission's response is important
  - viii. Commissioner asks what influence/ability the Commission will actually be able to have with the current structure
    1. This community initiative is different from the Dialogue on Race—it encompasses even more of the community
    2. Questions what issues the Commission wants to take on and what the Commission is able to influence
      - a. Commission's attempts at influencing are often long processes
      - b. Many people expect prompt action, but this is not how City government typically works
  - ix. Commissioner suggests focusing during meetings on something the Commission knows it could move forward on, such as annually putting forth recommendations for legislative priorities
    1. If the education piece was inserted, this is something the Commission knows it can move forward on
    2. There could be other discrete issues the Commission chooses to pursue, as well
  - x. Commissioner says these meetings could also be a way to keep pressure on City Council on certain issues such as Midway Manor

1. Important for Commissioners to listen to City Council meetings and stay informed
  - a. Another Commissioner suggests shifts for keeping up with entire Council meetings
- xi. Chair asks OHR staff if it is possible for the Community Engagement Committee members to rotate shifts to speak at City Council meetings
  1. OHR staff replies that this is possible; the HRC Chair would just have to designate who will be speaking on behalf of the Commission
- xii. Commissioner's concern is setting expectations appropriately
  1. Possibly by having part of the meeting dedicated to a particular topic, then the rest of the meeting as listening
  2. Suggests starting each meeting with what the Commission *can* do and *will* do
    - a. Says it is helpful to acknowledge that HRC's limited power can be frustrating
- xiii. Commissioner suggests setting a target for a "pilot" meeting
  1. Would need to ask the City what is possible
  2. OHR staff adds that every HRC meeting could be like a town hall meeting with the opportunity for public comment; asks how to advertise and format meetings using City resources to garner as much participation as possible
- xiv. Commissioner asks about the status on continuing to hold virtual meetings
  1. OHR staff says there is no new information
  2. Reminds that the Commission is on the list of organizations that would have hybrid setups so that members of the public could still attend virtually
  3. Commissioner says that always having a virtual option would be beneficial for those who cannot make it in person
  4. Another Commissioner suggests asking Communications about how easy or difficult it would be to get hybrid setups to work effectively, as it is important that things run smoothly
    - a. Suggests establishing time limits and other limits early on during the meeting in order to respect Commissioners' time and outside lives
    - b. Recommends having 2-3 specific topics and not opening the net too widely
- xv. Commissioner suggests a format like a town hall discussion in which she participated: 15min discussion with overview of the issue at hand with ground rules, then breaking out into smaller groups
  1. Discussion may be more effective in more intimate settings
  2. Leading with questions would be helpful to focus on a specific topic
  3. In a hybrid format, Zoom attendees would have to stay on Zoom for breakout sessions and in-person attendees would have to stay with each other
  4. OHR staff reminds committee to check in with Communications' current capabilities given their recent changes

- a. Will follow up with Communications about this
- xvi. Commissioner adds that breakout rooms would allow specific people to lead discussions on topics they are passionate about
  - 1. Could help discussions stay on track, as well
  - 2. One Commissioner could stay in place to help with Zoom operations
- xvii. Commissioner adds that it is important to acknowledge what the Commission is able to do and offer support despite its limited capabilities
  - 1. Could even put blurbs in the newspaper every month about what the community has reported as concerns
- xviii. Commissioner emphasizes the “what happens next” or “white paper” piece; expectation should be that there will be some effect that comes out of these meetings
  - 1. There should be some expectation setting, but there should also always be some kind of outcome at the end of meetings, even if it is not some large action item
- xix. Commissioner says there is power in saying what needs to be said
  - 1. Community art pieces or other creative visual ways to represent the community’s concerns
  - 2. It is essential to make sure the community feels heard
- xx. Target topic for February
  - 1. Commissioner asks if community members have reached out about specific topics already besides about homeless shelter situations
    - a. OHR staff says at the Midway Manor meeting, Tanesha Hudson asked the HRC to look into subsidized housing conditions citywide
  - 2. Commissioner summarizes current community concerns that have come up in HRC: motel/hotel treatment of those with mental illness, Midway Manor long-term subsidized housing, legal counsel for individuals facing eviction, loss of Black staff at the City level, and disability access
  - 3. Commissioner suggests putting a poll out at the next regular meeting to ask the public about what they most want to talk about first
    - a. Perhaps try to put it out more publicly than at the regular meeting in order to reach more people—the City’s Twitter account?
      - i. Todd can ask Communications about this
- b. Public and subsidized housing conditions meeting planning
  - i. OHR staff asks if this is a topic the committee would like to bring up during the meeting
    - 1. Commissioner asks if Todd and Mary were going to reach out to Midway Manor to have its own town hall
      - a. This is not what the residents asked for, but the Commission decided this style of discussion would be a good course of action
- c. Time frame on town hall

- i. Commissioner says if town hall is in February, Commission could public poll in the next couple weeks and leave it up for a month and make a decision at the January meeting
- ii. **Jeanette offers to draft the poll to present for approval at the next HRC regular meeting**
  - 1. Can also look at most recent legislative recommendations and add some of these in addition to other topics
  - 2. Commissioner asks to add not only low-income housing, but also affordable housing
    - a. Affordable housing is different from subsidized and public housing
  - 3. Commissioner adds that framing exact topics is not necessary at this point; it is more important to frame expectations
  - 4. OHR staff adds that there are currently City and non-profit discussions happening concerning the development of a definition for affordable based on AMI, HUD definitions, etc.
    - a. Whether or not this is a topic to consider for the town hall, wonders if it would be helpful to hold a panel where people explain the situation and terminology about affordable housing
    - b. Think about who to invite to highlight the education piece
- iii. Commissioner asks OHR staff if OHR has FAQ information
  - 1. There is a small FAQ section on the Human Rights webpage
  - 2. There are many common questions about the complaint process, and explaining it often takes intensive individual conversation
  - 3. Commissioner says that it may be nice to have a topic at hand in addition to some kind of information flyer or other kind of workshop/resource
    - a. Lyndele offers to help with some kind of writing or visual information source (with a plain language focus)
- d. OHR staff asks Chair about timeframes, especially with turnover and new Commission members—asks when she wants to host the town hall in relation to the composition of the Commission
  - i. Should it take place after training new Commissioners and/or having gone through the retreat?
  - ii. Chair would like to move forward the meeting for February, but recognizes the training process can be intensive; asks if February is too soon and town hall should be pushed to April
  - iii. OHR staff replies that this is just a thought to keep in mind—this Commission has been working together for a long time to hear concerns in February and may be overwhelming for new Commissioners in March; or perhaps this would not be an issue
  - iv. Chair expresses that it is sometimes frustrating how the Commission comes up with actions but is not able to follow through on them, so it would be good to push forward the town hall
    - 1. May be easier if the town hall is already established in the beginning

2. Can adjust if circumstances change
- v. Another Commissioner clarifies with OHR staff when terms expire
  1. February 28<sup>th</sup> is the end of all Commissioners' terms except Jessica
  2. OHR staff says to apply before the term expires—unsure of the exact date
  3. Jeanette says she was thinking about not applying again, but if this town hall concrete action is established, she may reconsider to feel like she is making a contribution
  4. Committee members agree they want to be on the Commission to make a difference in the community, and holding the town hall may invigorate some Commission members to stay on
- e. Chair recommends keeping the same timeframe for the poll and aiming for February for the town hall; Commission can pivot as needed

**5. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC**

- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
  - i. None
- b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
  - i. None

**6. COMMISSIONER UPDATES**

- a. None

**7. NEXT STEPS**

- a. General next steps
  - i. Move forward with town hall
  - ii. Release poll to public about what the target topic will be for February
- b. Jeanette
  - i. Draft poll about town hall topics to present for approval at December HRC regular meeting
- c. Todd
  - i. Follow up with Communications about their current capabilities
    1. Also ask how HRC can release a poll on City platforms to reach as many people as possible

**8. ADJOURN**

- a. Meeting adjourned at 5:00 pm