



City of Virginia Beach

MUNICIPAL CENTER
BUILDING 18
2424 COURTHOUSE DRIVE
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23456-9056

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
(757) 385-1158

VIRGINIA BEACH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION Thursday, November 14, 2019 – 4 p.m. *City Municipal Center, Bldg. 19, Training Room B 2416 Courthouse Drive*

VIRGINIA BEACH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEMBERS:

SYLVIA NERY-STRICKLAND
CHAIRWOMAN

DR. VIRGINIA JENKOT VICE CHAIRWOMAN

BEATRIZ AMBERMAN

JOE BURNSWORTH

DAVID CALLIOTT

THOMASINE CUBINE

JAMAL GUNN

CARLA HESSELTINE

RAJEEB ISLAM

E. FORTUNATO "JOJO" ORENCIA JR.

LUISA RIVERA, MA Ed.

TERESA STANLEY

RON TAYLOR

FRANCES KNIGHT THOMPSON

ALLISON WHITE

RABBI ISRAEL ZOBERMAN

STUDENT COMMISSION MEMBERS

CHERYLL CAALLIM

PEARL RENWICK

CITY COUNCIL LIAISONS:

MAYOR ROBERT DYER

MICHAEL F. BERLUCCHI

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

REGINA S. HILLIARD, HR DIRECTOR

LEGAL COUNSEL:

ROD INGRAM, DEPUTY CITY ATTORNEY

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION LIAISON:

SARA MBANDEN

Members Present: Sylvia Nery-Strickland (Chairwoman), Dr. Virginia Jenkot (Vice Chairwoman), Teresa Stanley, Rabbi Israel Zoberman, Joe Burnsworth, Beatriz Amberman, Tommie Cubine, Frances Knight-Thompson, Allison White, Carla Hesseltine, Ron Taylor, and Jamal Gunn

Members Absent: Cheryl Caalim, David Calliott, Rajeeb Islam, Luis Rivera, and JoJo Orenca Jr.

Staff Present: Regina Hilliard (Director of Human Resources), Roderick Ingram, (Deputy City Attorney), Sara Mbanden (HRC Liaison), and Shelley Johnson (Human Resources); Chief of Police James Cervera, Deputy Chief Pat Gallagher, and Shellie Meister

AGENDA

I. Call to Order/Roll Call/Minutes Approval - Chair Nery-Strickland

II. Chairman's/Committee/Liaison Reports

Chairman's Report - Strickland

- Scheduled Legal Training/Retreat – December 12, 2019
- Scheduled Retreat/Work Plan – January 9, 2020 & February 13, 2020* if needed

Committee Reports

Awards Committee – David Calliott

- Annual Award Lesson Learned Discussion
- By-Laws/Policy Committee – Luis Rivera
- Review and Discussion of Proposed By-Laws Change

Forums/Dialogue Committee – Beatriz Amberman

- Human Rights Day Forum Update

Mental Health Committee – Tommie Cubine

Oceanfront Committee – Strickland/Deputy Chief Zucaro

Public Information Committee – Sylvia Nery-Strickland

Student Human Rights Task Force – Frances Knight-Thompson

- Report on Findings/Discussion

Liaisons

City Manager's LGBT Work Group – Ginger Jenkot

Center for Study of Religious Freedom at Va. Wesleyan – Raj Islam, Teresa Stanley,

Education – Dr. LaQuiche Parrott, Dottie Holtz

Hampton Roads Black Caucus – Ron Taylor

Hampton Roads Legislative Collaborative Table – Teresa Stanley

Minority Business Council – Frances Knight-Thompson

Pastors Leaders Community Police Relations – Teresa Stanley

Princess Anne County Confederate Statue Roundtable – Rabbi Zoberman

Va. Beach Vision Oceanfront Task Force – Teresa Stanley

Va. Association of Human Rights Commission – Ginger Jenkot

Va. Beach Police Department – Deputy Chief Tony Zucaro

Va. Beach Sheriff's Department – Lt. Lois Thompson

III. Staff Report and Updates – Sara Mbanden

IV. Old Business

V. New Business

VI. Citizen Remarks

VII. Adjournment

Next Meeting:

Thursday, December 12, 2019 @ 4:00 p.m.
City Municipal Center (Bldg. 19, STIR 101)

I. Call to Order/Roll Call/Minutes Approval

The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Nery-Strickland at 4:04 p.m.

Roll call was taken of the Commissioners. Commissioners Caalim, Calliott, Islam, Rivera, and Orenca Jr were absent.

The October 10th Special Meeting Minutes were reviewed. Deputy City Attorney, Ingram requested on Page 2 – under the Legislation against Conversation Therapy – third paragraph be revised to state:

By a vote of 14-0 with 2 (abstentions), the HRC Commission has voted that the City of Virginia Beach request that the General Assembly support legislation that would establish reparative or conversion therapy as an unlawful practice.

Commissioner Taylor made a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Amberman seconded the motion. The October 10th Special Meeting minutes will be revised and posted to include the corrections provided by Deputy City Attorney Ingram.

II. Chairman's Report – Nery-Strickland

- Scheduled Retreat/Work Plan – December 12, January 9, 2020 & February 13, * (*if needed)

Chairwoman Nery-Strickland will provide additional information via email related to the upcoming agenda for each of these meetings.

During the scheduled December 12 – HRC Retreat, Deputy City Attorney Ingram will provide the Commissioners with an overview of legalities related to serving on a board or a commission. Before the December 12 meeting, Commissioners are asked to provide via email a list of all committees/boards that they are currently serving on. During this retreat, the Commissioners will be asked to deliberate about the HRC continuation of serving on those committees/boards.

Awards Committee

Commissioner Calliott was unable to attend this meeting and has yet not provided copies of the meeting minutes to his fellow HRC Commissioners. Commissioners Stanley and Amberman, who are currently serving on the Awards Committee provided some insight on what the committee is working on and how they are evaluating changing the criteria for the award nominations. The committee is considering removing the names of categories for each award. Committee members are evaluating a process based on a point system for each of the nominations submitted. Another consideration the committee is reviewing is removing the cost of attending the event. Commissioner Calliott will continue to work with the Awards Committee and provide a formal recommendation to the Commissioners when the recommendations are finalized.

Commissioner Knight-Thompson has asked for the Awards Committee to reconsider providing a dinner to all award honorees.

Commissioner Taylor expressed his concerns about two African American awards that were not included in the awards this year. He suggested that the committee inform the community when changes are made. Commissioner Stanley explained to the Commission that for the past few years there were no nominations submitted for those two awards. She also stated that the awards were not eliminated because there were no nominations submitted to the committee to consider. It was also suggested that the ceremony be held during International Human Rights Week in December.

The Commission also agreed that more publicity is needed to promote the event. The Commissioners will work harder to get the word out and promote the event earlier in the year. It was asked if departments can be provided posters to post in various locations throughout the City to promote the event and use additional social media sites to increase knowledge and awareness of the ceremony.

By-Law/ Policy Committee

Commissioner Rivera was unable to attend this meeting and the Commissioners have agreed to table the By-Law/Policy agenda item to the next HRC Meeting.

Forums/Dialogue Committee

The committee is working closely with members from the Mental Health Committee to finalize details on the upcoming *Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission - Community Conversation Series: HUMAN RIGHTS AND MENTAL HEALTH*, scheduled for December 10, 2019 to be held at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), 2200 Park Avenue, VB 23451 from 6- 9 pm. in celebration of Human Rights Week. Commissioner Amberman, the committee's chair, submitted a proposed outline for the event to the Commissioners for further review/comment.

The committee has invited WVEC anchor, Janet Roach to speak about her upcoming documentary entitled *Mental Health Challenges*. The panelists and keynote speakers have been confirmed. To save money and the environment, a few programs will be printed on paper and the rest will be projected on screen along with the panelist's bio in auditorium. Commissioner Amberman has asked if the HRC can allocate funds for light refreshments.

Janet Roach will have 15 minutes, the panelists will each give a 5 minutes presentation followed by questions from the public. Following presentations, attendees will have the ability to sign-up to receive promotional e-mails for future similar events. At the end of the event, attendees will be able to stop by resource tables to browse and have light refreshments. Sixteen organizations have been contacted and confirmed. Commissioner Cubine will contact more organizations and if additional are confirmed, information's will be sent to Mbanden.

Commissioner Amberman proposed that the next Forum be titled *Race and Racism*, March 21, 2020 at MOCA. The event will partner with the YWCA and other collaborators. Commissioner Amberman will provide additional information as soon as available. The Commission agreed to move forward with this topic. MOCA is also having a display on Race and Racism at the museum at that time. This event will be advertised at the Forum occurring on December 10, 2019. Another topic for a future Forum was "Civility" and will be discussed at another meeting.

Amberman thanked MOCA for working with the HRC to present this forum and their willingness to work on all future events and forums free of charge. MOCA also allows outside food to be brought into the building which helps the city save money.

Mental Health Committee

Commissioner Cubine stated that the Mental Health Committee presented 6 items to STEP VA to advocate to local government.

Oceanfront Committee

Chairwoman Nery-Strickland stated that the Oceanfront Committee will once again be partnering with various other committees on the Something in the Water Campaign for 2020. Further details will be provided soon.

Student Human Rights Task Force

Commissioner Thompson reported that she and Dr. Parrot met with Suzanne Phelps and members from both the Student Leadership Committee and the Mayor's Youth Leaders in Action Committee. One of the main goals for the meeting was to discuss a collaboration of resources and create a natural connection to each group

Commissioners were advised that on October 9, City Council appointed a new Student Commissioner Member to the HRC. This new Student Commissioner is currently a student who attends Bayside High School and will be joining the HRC in early 2020.

Virginia Beach Police Department

Police Chief James Cervera described the lack of diversity in the Police Department and how there are currently 73 openings and on January 1, 2020, there will be over 81 openings within the department. He has offered to provide a hard copy of this year's NAACP report to the Commission.

The Police Department is coordinating two trips each year to the Holocaust Museum in Richmond, Virginia for all new Police Department recruits.

Deputy Chief Gallagher was invited to attend the HRC meeting to discuss a plaque dedication scheduled for the 4th Precinct (Kempsville). The ceremony will be the second one held in honor a fallen black officer in 1953. During the 2012 ceremony, the officer's name was mistakenly omitted from the original plaque. The Police Department will begin providing a plaque to each of the precincts to pay honor to those who have fallen while on duty.

Education

Dr. Parrott provided information on the upcoming Beach Girls Rock event to be held in December. It is an African American Girl Summit. She will provide the HRC Liaison with additional information which will be shared with the HRC. Their work is closely aligned with Human Rights issues. The past event in October was very successful.

Lynette Wilson, Chair, Act-So (part of the NAACP Coalition) shared that their mission is to encourage teenagers of African descent to strive for excellence in STEM, Business, Humanities, etc. The students are supported by coaches and mentors in developmental projects for an Olympics of the Mind competition. This competition is based on criteria established by the National Act-So Committee.

Commissioner Taylor expanded on the subject by stating that technology in the African American Community is very underrepresented (STEM, in general) and overrepresented in art and sports. He stated that we need to meet the demands of the twenty-first century in technology and engineering for our minority youth. This can be achieved by working with Dr. Parrott to promote it within the communities. The more we integrate STEM within minority groups, the more impact we will make in the communities.

III. New Business

Chairwoman Nery-Strickland requested that all Committee Chairs have their mission and goal reports ready for the upcoming retreat in December, and if anyone isn't part of a committee to please sign up because everyone should belong to at least one committee. Chairwoman Nery-Strickland also mentioned that since Mary Graessle wasn't present, we would postpone discussions about the budget until next month's meeting.

Commissioner Taylor shared information regarding a family of May 31st victims feeling as if their rights were violated. The family member brought their family, and attorney to the City's Investigative Report meeting and the family was told to leave. Police Chief Cervera stated that communication was provided to families before the meeting that the session was a closed meeting and only immediate family members were welcomed. Families were unable to bring friends or lawyers. Commissioner Taylor suggested that for future events, we as a city should provide specific meeting details on flyers so there is no confusion.

Commissioner Zoberman asked, based upon the recent event, if a Commissioner was sued by an individual because of their position, would the Commissioner be protected? Deputy City Attorney Ingram responded that if litigations were to arise, he would defend the Commissioners.

Chairwoman Nery-Strickland mentioned that during a telephone call with Commissioner Kendrick El, he indicated that he would no longer serve on the Commission moving forward.

Lastly, Chairwoman Nery-Strickland indicated that the Human Rights Commission 2020 Work Plan planning meetings/retreat will be held during regular HRC meeting times in December, January, and possibly February. Three hours will be scheduled for these meetings.

IV. Citizen Remarks

Alexus stated she is a member of the LGBTQ+ Community and wanted to know what kind of process is or will be put in place to prevent what took place with former Commissioner Kendrick El posting on Facebook to ensure this doesn't occur in the future. She stated she wants to know that people who represent the people, including someone like her, do not pick and choose who or what causes to align themselves with. She asked the date of the next forum to pick a new Commissioner and if it would be open to the public so their voice could be heard. She would like the next Commissioner vetting process to be checked for things like racism and bias against a particular group.

City Council Berlucchi apologized to Alexis regarding the comments that were made. He also stated that the vetting of new Commissioners is a personnel matter and conducted in a City Council closed session. The appointments are voted on for various reasons. The nominees are not published to be scrutinized by the public. If a City Advisory Commission would be created which may be discussed at the next City Council meeting, he invited Alexis to join.

V. Adjournment

Chairwoman Strickland adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.