

Members Present: Sylvia Nery-Strickland (Chair), Beatriz Amberman, David Calliott, Thomasine Cubine, Heidi Daniels, Jamal Gunn, Carla Hesseltine, Emiliano “Jojo” Orenca, Luis Rivera, Teresa Stanley, Mark Stevens, Ron Taylor, Frances Knight Thompson, Allison White, Rabbi Israel Zoberman

Staff Present: Regina Hilliard (Human Resources), Dominique McKinnon (HRC Liaison)

Liaisons Present: Captain Pat Harris, Rod Ingram (Deputy City Attorney)

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Nery-Strickland at 4:17 p.m.

II. Welcome New Commissioner

Chair Nery-Strickland welcomed the newly appointed commissioner, Heidi Daniels.

III. Homelessness and Affordable Housing Presentation

The Director of Housing and Neighborhood Preservation, Andrew Friedman, gave the Commission a presentation on Virginia Beach housing and population conditions as of the 2019 Census. Karen Prochilo, who is also with the department of Housing and Neighborhood Preservation, joined the meeting as well. Andy informed the Commission that Karen would be able to answer any of the Commission’s questions on the presentation after his last day with the City on August 31st.

During the presentation, Andy provided data on the population, households and household composition of the city of Virginia Beach over the last 20 years. He noted that the city is growing slowly, and the household composition is changing with more seniors and less children in households.

Andy reported that Virginia Beach has about 182,000 housing units. The growth of housing units is slowing and as a result there is an aging housing stock. Most of the housing units in Virginia Beach are single family detached and duplexes, but the largest increase in units has been with multi-family rental apartments. Andy reported that between 2005-2019 the affordability of rental housing improved; however, they do not have the most recent data on affordability. Many residents pay more than 30% of their income for rent and the wages needs for a 2-bedroom apartment at the fair market rent of \$1,136 is \$45,448/year.

Commissioner Taylor asked how income drive apartments, like Price Street, factor into the affordability data. Andy reported that Price Street is a rent-based apartment community that makes rent affordable at certain income levels and they are required to rent to people at those income levels. He stated that it doesn’t change the affordability data, but those types of apartment communities happen at the developer’s behest with the city’s support through infrastructure and vouchers that his department gives to citizens at lower income levels. He added that the Price Street developer committed to designating some of the units for people with disabilities. Commissioner Taylor asked what determines the number of units being allocated to people with disabilities. Andy stated that is determined on the state level, but his office assists with getting vouchers for people with disabilities.

Commissioner Zoberman asked if there was an expectation that more people will be moving into the city and how that would affect housing. Andy stated that currently the vacancy rate is very low and only between 1,300 and 1,700 new units are being constructed so that limits the number of new households in Virginia Beach.

Andy reported that the state and federal government are distributing more funding than ever for rent assistance and the development of affordable housing. The strategic challenges that they face are finding locations and developers that can create more affordable housing units and making sure that the people who currently having housing, don't lose their housing. Rent relief, federal mortgage programs and the short-term mortgage assistance program through the Housing department, assists with these challenges.

Commissioner Stevens asked if there was a plan to help the residents who will have to move during the reconstruction of Atlantis Apartments. Andy reported that everyone will be housed during the rehabilitation and there has been discussion about adding services at the apartment community for the residents.

Commissioner Amberman thanked Andy for his service to the city of Virginia Beach. She asked what kind of outreach has been done for those in the community who don't speak English as their first language and what is the process for eviction support under the Cares Act program. Andy reported that for the rental relief program, the state has a contract with an organization that does outreach to make sure people are aware of what assistance is available.

Commissioner Stanley thanked Andy for his leadership with the City. She asked if the health of the city will be affected if it does not continue to grow with some housing availability. Andy stated that the need for more affordable housing doesn't necessarily mean more housing units, but new vouchers for existing housing units.

Commissioner Daniels asked what the city is doing about owners who are selling the homes that they rent, leaving renters with nowhere to go. Andy reported that his department now has a short-term rental assistance program and housing locators, staff that works to find available rental housing. They establish relationships with landlords and search for "for rent" signs to lead people to available housing.

Karen Prochilo added that the department has a mobile housing rehabilitation program to assist those who live in mobile home parks. She also stated that they have informational brochures both in English and Spanish.

Chair Nery-Strickland thanked Andy for his presentation and his years of service.

IV. Roll Call

Roll Call of the Commissioners was taken. Commissioner Calliott, Commissioner Hesseltine, Commissioner Stanley, Commissioner Thompson and Commissioner Zoberman participated in the meeting remotely from their homes for medical reasons. Vice Chair Jenkot and Commissioner Burnsworth were absent.

V. Minutes Approval

Commissioner Amberman made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 10th meeting. Commissioner Rivera seconded the motion. The minutes from the June 10th meeting were approved by 15-0.

VI. Chairman's/Committee/Liaison Reports

Chair Nery-Strickland reported that the HRC Retreat needs to be rescheduled as it was supposed to happen in July. She asked if there was any objection to having the Retreat during the September meeting. Commissioner Gunn stated that he would prefer having the Retreat on a day separate from the September meeting. Commissioner Amberman stated that to have two meetings in a month may be difficult with COVID cases increasing and some members attending virtually. She suggested having the September meeting and the Retreat at the same time. Chair Nery-Strickland stated that Retreat would be just to review the Work Plan as Orelious Walker is not available on the second Thursday of the month to facilitate any team building exercises. Commissioner Amberman asked if the Retreat could be held on a different date to allow Orelious to facilitate. Staff Liaison McKinnon suggested that she contact Orelious to see if he is available to facilitate the Retreat on another day. Commissioner Stevens asked if both the September meeting and the Retreat can be held together on a day other than September 9th to allow for Orelious' facilitation. Staff Liaison McKinnon stated that she will check with Orelious on his availability in September and send out a Doodle poll to the Commission to schedule the joint September meeting and Retreat.

Chair Nery-Strickland reported that the Commission needs to vote on the legislative packet for submission to City Council. Commissioner Amberman made a motion to approve the legislative requests for full funding of STEP-VA and for the virtual meeting option for advisory boards. Commissioner Daniels seconded the motion. The motion was approved by 15-0.

Chair Nery-Strickland reported that she attended the Citizen Review Panel Task force meeting, representing the HRC. She reported to the taskforce that the HRC has not had a formal vote and the recommendations were submitted by individual commissioners. Commissioner Stanley attending the meeting representing the Pastors/Leaders Community Police Relations Table and Commissioner Taylor attending representing the Mayor's African American Roundtable. Rod Ingram reported that he anticipated the task force will have their recommendations at the end of the month and present to City Council during the first meeting in September.

Chair Nery-Strickland suggested that the HRC have a liaison to the Mayor's Commission on Aging considering the Commission has an Elderly Support committee, chaired by Commissioner Hesseltine who is also on a state commission for that population. She also suggested that Commissioner Hesseltine serve as a HRC liaison on the Community Service Board as she is already a member of that group. There were no objections to making requests for liaisons on the Mayor's Commissioner on Aging and the Community Service Board.

VII. Committee Reports

Staff Liaison McKinnon reported that she has a meeting scheduled with MOCA for walk-through and to finalize the rental agreement for the in-person ceremony. Deputy City Attorney Rod Ingram asked that the contract be sent to him for review and suggested she find out MOCA's policy on cancellations. Staff Liaison McKinnon stated that for the virtual format option, Valerie Myers with the Communications Office gave an initial start date for the end of August. She has reached out to Valerie to see if that date still stands and is waiting for a response. She stated that the window to decide between an in-person and virtual program is closing.

Commissioner Amberman reported that she sent to commissioners and liaisons the Governor Northam's announcement of mandatory masking indoors in all Virginia K-12 schools.

73% of adults in Virginia have received one dose of the vaccine
44.3% 12-15 year olds in Virginia are fully vaccinated
51.7% 16-17 year olds in Virginia are fully vaccinated
Children under 12 are not eligible for the vaccination and that is the reason the CDC made the recommendation for masks in schools.

Commissioner Cubine reported that the Mental Health Task Force recommended asking the interfaith communities at the beach to start mental health initiatives in their congregations and to include mental health concerns in their activities. She stated that the task force is working on a proposal with IAB and will be making a presentation to them and the Mayor's African American Roundtable. The task force is still advocating for funding for STEP-VA, and Commissioner Stanley and Jen Williams, with NAMI Coastal Virginia, are working on permanent supportive housing for people with mental health issues.

Commissioner Taylor reported that the Hampton Roads Black Caucus and Men of Faith are pressing for criminal justice reform and part of that is making sure that the courts are diversified. He stated that during the General Assembly Special Session, they had the opportunity to appoint the first African American Circuit Court judge in Virginia Beach, but delegations on both sides of the aisle could not agree and the seat is still vacant. He asked that commissioners reach out to their delegates about this issue as it is a human rights issue. Commissioner Amberman shared in his disappointment, but reported that the state did appoint more diverse judges. Commissioner Talyor made the suggestion for the Human Rights Commission to write a letter to the local delegation supporting diversity in the circuit court.

Commissioner Stevens reported that he sent out a flyer about rent relief program to assist people struggling to pay their rent and he continues to monitor homelessness on the Oceanfront. He shared that the Virginia Beach Police Department would like the Commission to participate in more of their community outreach events. He will send out invites once he gets more information from the department. He reported that the VBPD is doing outreach at the Atlantis Apartments and trailer parks, making sure the residents' needs for housing, food, clothing and education are being met.

Commissioner Gunn reported that he and Commissioner Stanley have been communicating with Dante Strobino who attended the June meeting as a citizen to speak about getting the city to agree to collective bargaining. He stated that Mr. Strobino would like to make a presentation to the Commission, and he thinks it would be incumbent upon the Commission to hear him speak on how collective bargaining relates to human rights. He stated that collective bargaining gives employees a chance to redress and be protected from discrimination, and there are employee concerns within certain departments in the city where most of the staff are people of color. They feel like they are being treated differently from other sectors and wanted to bring that to the HRC's attention. Commissioner Gunn stated that if employees are being treated unfair due social statuses such as gender, religion, race, or sexual orientation then that deals with human rights. Commissioner Rivera asked if getting involved with employee issues that may be handled by Human Resources is within the Commission's purview. Regina Hilliard stated that the city is aware that the ability to collectively bargain has now opened up in our State and City Council has not made a decision on that matter. The Human Resources department has provided City Council with information on collective bargaining. She reported that a certain percentage of employees from a department would have to make a request to City Council to be recognized as a union and that has not happened from any department. Commissioner Rivera asked if there is a grievance process where employees can report issues like the ones that Commissioner Gunn mentioned. Regina stated that yes, there are a few avenues for employees to use – a grievance process and panel for employees to address any disciplines, the Employee Relations division that investigates complaints, and a new R.E.S.P.E.C.T system that allows employees to submit concerns, anonymously if they chose, at any time of the day or night. Commissioner Rivera expressed his concern that to write a letter to City Council in support of

collective bargaining may circumvent what Human Resources is already doing to address employee concerns. Commissioner Amberman stated that any individual can speak with the Commission, but they should be aware of the Commission's restrictions and rules of the city. Commissioner Gunn clarified that he and Commissioner Stanley never promised Dante Strobino anything and informed him that the Commission could only possibly draft a letter. Commissioner Taylor suggested that Dante Strobino connect with community groups that can speak with a City Council member to get the issue in the agenda. Chair Nery-Strickland asked Rod Ingram if presentations can be pre-recorded and then the Commission can watch at their leisure to reserve time with the limited number of meetings left in the year. Rod stated that was permitted. Chair Nery-Strickland suggested that Liaison McKinnon send a Doodle poll asking the Commission if they want to hear a presentation from Dante Strobino.

Commissioner Thompson reported on the School Board workshop that she and Vice Chair Jenkot attended in July where Dr. LaQuiche Parrott did an update on the Educational Equity policy that was passed last year. The Office for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion conducted interviews with 300 city stakeholders. They are trying to implement an equity plan and recommendations were given to the School Board. She stated that herself and Ginger think that the Commission should consider having a presentation from Dr. Parrott on the updates with the Education Equity policy and submitting another letter of support. Commissioner Taylor suggested that Dr. Spence join Dr. Parrott in her presentation.

Commissioner Thompson reported that the Minority Business Council's April conference was very successful, and that they have been on hiatus since June and will resume their meetings in September.

Commissioner Stanley reported that the young people with the Season for Non-Violence Collective have created their own event about teens sharing their voices about bias and it will take place at Slover Library. She will send the flyer for the event to Staff Liaison McKinnon to share with the Commission.

VIII. Citizen Remarks

Niam Lagoe, a perspective student commissioner, was present for the meeting along with her mother to observe the Commission.

IX. Adjournment

Chair Nery-Strickland adjourned the meeting at 6:30 pm.

Next Meeting:
Thursday September 9, 2021 @ 4:00 p.m.
TBD