

Members Present: Carla Hesseltine (Chair), Heidi Daniels (Vice Chair), Joe Burnsworth, Jamal Gunn, Dr. Virginia “Ginger” Jenkot, Niam Lagoe, Sylvia Nery-Strickland, Emiliano “Jojo” Orenca, Mark Stevens, Frances Knight Thompson, Allison White

Staff Present: Stacy Hawks (Human Resources), Shelley Johnson (Human Resources), Dominique McKinnon (HRC Liaison)

Liaisons Present: Deputy Chief Sean Adams, Rod Ingram (Deputy City Attorney), Dr. Sabrina Lindsey-Law (VBCPS), Lieutenant Lois Thompson

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Hesseltine at 4:07 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll Call of the commissioners was taken. Commissioner Thompson participated in the meeting remotely from her home for the personal reason of a schedule conflict. Commissioners Amberman (excused), Taylor and Zoberman were absent.

III. Minutes Approval

Commissioner Jenkot made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 9th meeting. Commissioner Stevens seconded the motion. The minutes from the June 9th meeting were approved by a vote of 10-0.

IV. By-laws Review

Commissioner Burnsworth stated that the role of the HRC is defined by Council, and City ordinance has domain over membership composition, attendance and terms. These are part of the by-laws that can't be changed. The HRC does have domain over specific practices and procedures like elections, on-boarding, meeting length and leadership structure. Commissioner Burnsworth made a motion that a new set of processes and procedures be developed to address the items over which the HRC has domain and when adopted, the HRC by-laws be suspended from use. Commissioner Jenkot seconded the motion. By a vote of 11-0 the motion was approved.

Commissioner Jenkot suggested adding the election process to the current procedures and recommended not adding language about more than two members of the executive leadership. Commissioner Nery-Strickland stated that City Code does allow for more than two members of the executive leadership. Chair Hesseltine confirmed that the By-laws/Policy Committee will become the Policy and Procedure Committee.

V. Chairman's Report

Chair Hesseltine and Vice Chair Daniels asked for feedback from the Commission on having a Retreat. Vice Chair Daniels suggested dedicating one hour to the Retreat during the monthly meetings to be more considerate of everyone's time without additional meetings. Commissioner Stevens expressed concern that it isn't an adequate amount of time to get the Retreat work done along with the regular HRC business. Commissioner Burnsworth suggested holding the Retreat on August 11th, the set day for the regular HRC meeting and extending the time. Commissioner White suggested hold the Retreat annually in August. There was consensus to hold the Retreat on August 11th from 4-8 p.m.

Chair Hesseltine reported that Commissioner Stevens inquired about the plastic bag tax which City Council recently deferred a vote. Commissioner Stevens expressed his concern about this tax and people who are struggling with the current high prices for gas and food. He stated that this tax does not apply to paper bags, if they are available in grocery stores and reusable bags are not always sanitary when we are still in a pandemic. Commissioner White suggested that the HRC should form a consensus on the matter from a human rights standpoint and send to City Council by August. Vice Chair Daniels suggested looking at the issue from all perspectives and invite Lynnhaven River Now to a meeting about their solutions for the plastic bag tax. Commissioner Nery-Strickland suggested making a recommendation to City Council in support of the deferral and Vice Chair Daniels added that the deferral should be extended through the end of the year to give the City Manager more time to collect the information about the issue per the reason for the deferral. Vice Chair Daniels made a motion to send a recommendation letter to City Council to defer its consideration of the plastic bag tax until February 2023. Commissioner Jenkot seconded the motion. By a vote of 11-0 the motion was approved.

Chair Hesseltine reported that the legislative agenda request process is underway. Staff Liaison McKinnon reported that legislative agenda requests must be submitted to Debra Bryan, the Director of Legislative Affairs for the City, by the end of the August. The Commission would need to vote on the legislative agenda requests to be submitted to City Council during the August meeting. Staff Liaison McKinnon will send to the commissioners the legislative agenda request form, an example of last year's agenda request and the complete legislative package from City Council to General Assembly. Chair Hesseltine stated that all the submitted legislative agenda requests will be sent to the Commission in one email for review prior to the August meeting.

Vice Chair Daniels reported that there will be a National Night Out event on August 2nd at Green Run High School. She said that she can get a table, tent and chairs for the HRC and giveaways can be passed out to attendees. The event is from 5 to 8 p.m. with set up by 4:30 p.m. Commissioner Jenkot agreed to man the HRC table and Commissioner Burnsworth will join her. Commissioner Burnsworth suggested having a flyer to advertise the forum that will be held at Green Run High later this year.

Chair Hesseltine reported that it is time to start planning for the next Annual Awards ceremony to get back on the scheduled of holding it during International Human Rights Day. December 10th is on a Saturday, so Commissioner White suggested holding the ceremony on Thursday, December 8th a time that is already allocated to the regular meeting. Commissioner Burnsworth will be the Chair of the Awards Committee and asked Staff Liaison McKinnon to send out a Doodle poll for a committee meeting.

VI. Committee Reports

Commissioner Jenkot reported that the Mental Health Committee had a meeting and Sheriff Stolle attended with his staff. They discussed the mental health services in the jail and reported that 80% of the population within the correctional center have mental health conditions. She added that a committee member and CIT Officer Andrea Bryk, conducted a faith leaders meeting about mental health called Love One Another – Lunch for Faith Leaders on May 24th. She reported that the 988-suicide line that is part of the Marcus Alert goes live on Saturday and the 911 calls for mental health crises have decreased since the Marcus Alert calling system was started. Chair Hesseltine added that Lt. Lois Thompson can schedule another jail visit for the HRC and Commissioner Stevens suggested having monthly jail visits.

Commissioner Jenkot reported that the Freebee Ride and Ride with Us programs have been implemented in the City as additional transportation options for residents. Vice Chair Daniels shared that she used Freebee and spoke with a driver who said people that are using the service work at the Oceanfront or are using it to travel to and from the grocery store and home.

Commissioner Stevens reported that he observed at the Oceanfront every day during the 4th of July weekend. He stated that this was the best 4th of July at the Oceanfront that he has seen in a long time – Police, EMS, and Fire did a great job. It was clean and everyone seemed to be having a great time. He advised that the bike lanes need to be painted so people from out of town can easily identify the lanes.

Commissioner Burnsworth reported that Green Run High School has been selected as the location for the forum in September. Every Tuesday and Thursday in the month are currently available and once a date is selected Staff Liaison McKinnon will submit a facility use form to the school. Staff Liaison McKinnon reported that she has been in contact with Valerie Myers in the Communications Office, and they will need to know the specific date for the forum. Commissioner Burnsworth will reach out to Committee Chair Amberman to determine a date.

Commissioner Stevens reported on homelessness in Virginia Beach and that there are a lot of homeless people at the Oceanfront. He said it is the worse he has seen in years and wants the Human Rights Commission to keep an eye on the situation across the City. He said the police are doing what they are supposed to, protecting people and not arresting them for being homeless. Chair Hesseltine stated that she would like to work with Commissioner Stevens to figure out what the HRC's role can be in helping with homelessness.

VII. Liaison Reports

Dr. Sabrina Lindsey-Law shared that the School Board retreat is next week, and she will be presenting her office's educational equity update. She will come back to the Commission to share those updates along with information on the mental health task force.

Chair Hesseltine asked Deputy Chief Adams what kind of training the officers have for handling people with dementia or Alzheimer's. Deputy Chief Adams stated that the department has in-service trainings that teach them how to identify the signs and what services are available to help these people. They also have a Project Lifesaver program where families can register their loved ones who suffer with dementia and Alzheimer's. Officers and volunteers are assigned to each individual person registered to check-in with them. The people registered in the program wear a bracelet and if they are lost, there is technology that the department has that can help location the individual. He believes it is a very low-cost program. Commissioner Stevens asked if the department has any information about the CIT program that the Commission can hand out to people in the community. Deputy Chief Adams will check to see what information is available. He added that with the CIT program and the Mobile Co-Responder Team, the department's interaction with mental health has changed dramatically for the better since the start of his service. Commissioner Stevens asked if 911 dispatchers decide to send an officer and a social worker out to a call or does a person have to make that request. Deputy Chief Adams stated that both incidents may occur.

Commissioner Nery-Strickland reported that the Citizen Committee on Boards and Commissions submitted their final report to City Council. She stated that a lot of the processes of boards and commissions are going to be automated and simplified. Deputy City Attorney Ingram added that the recommendations from the report included directives for staff liaisons, best practices for the Chairs and training modules for members or potential new members. Another recommendation was that boards and commissions do not need by-laws. He suggested that once City Council votes to adopt the recommendations, that adopted report can be distributed to the commissioners.

VIII. Staff Update

Staff Liaison McKinnon reminded commissioners to submit their volunteer hours monthly as they are very important in the annual reporting for the HRC and the Volunteer Resource Office.

IX. Adjournment

Chair Hesseltine adjourned the meeting at 5:49 pm.

Next Meeting:
HRC Retreat
August 11th @ 4pm