
**MINUTES
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
Monday, March 10, 2008
5:00 p.m.
Human Resources
Pinnacle Training Room
7575 E. Main Street
Scottsdale, Arizona**



PRESENT: Enid Seiden, Chair
Carol Padwe, Vice Chair
Marty Gendron, Commissioner
Jeff Jameson, Commissioner
Linda Simmons, Commissioner (arrived at 5:15 p.m.)

ABSENT: Michele deLaFreniere, Commissioner
Richard Woerth, Commissioner

STAFF: Linda Walton, Staff Liaison
David Ellison, Assistant City Manager
Pat Dodds, CAPA

ALSO PRESENT: Aubrey Strickstein
Erin Strickstein

1. **Call to Order:**

The meeting of the Scottsdale Human Relations Committee was called to order by Chair Seiden at 5:12 p.m.

2. **Review and Approval of Minutes:**

Commissioner Padwe requested that the phrase "contributions to" in the first paragraph of item 4, be changed to "support of," in the last sentence of item 5, the word "episode" be changed to "incident," and in the first sentence of item 13, the word "serve" be changed to "assist."

COMMISSIONER GENDRON MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 11, 2008 MEETING AS AMENDED. COMMISSIONER SIMMONS SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY A VOTE OF FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0).

3. **Introduction of the New Commissioner:**

Chair Seiden welcomed Commissioner Jameson to the HRC, and invited the Commissioners to introduce themselves.

Commissioner Jameson said he joined the Commission to help ensure that Scottsdale is an attractive place for multi-cultural development, and that people of all backgrounds feel comfortable here.

4. **Movement to Close Aztec Elementary School:**

Vice Chair Padwe inquired why this issue was before the Commission since it has no authority over the School District. Ms. Walton responded that it is similar to their concern on the GLBT issue regarding jurisdiction over businesses. The parents and children of the school are citizens of Scottsdale. If the Commission determines that a diversity-related issue is present, they can advise Council to be aware of it and voice that concern to the SUSD.

Commissioner Simmons felt that the Assistant City Manager sent a clear message at the last meeting that the Commission should stay out of business it has no authority being involved in. There is a process within the School District for complaints to be heard, and that is what makes it different from the GLBT issue.

Commissioner Gendron noted that the focus of the complaint is on the special needs population, which is within the purview of the Commission. Commissioner Simmons responded that the issue is over the closure of the school, and she would feel more comfortable if it were more about supporting or increasing awareness of the special needs community.

Mr. Strickstein explained that as a former Human Relations Commissioner, he is not approaching this request out of ignorance. The Commission was charged with hearing about any discrimination acts that occur or might occur within Scottsdale. His wife and he want to raise awareness about potential discrimination so that decision makers can be properly informed. Their concern is that special needs children could potentially be discriminated against adversely if the Aztec campus is closed. They felt that the Commission was the appropriate place to draw attention to this concern.

Ms. Strickstein said Aztec Elementary is the only integrated thematic instruction school in the SUSD. The Superintendent outlined four cost-cutting options last week. One of the proposals would merge Aztec Elementary into its neighboring Zuni district, and move Cheyenne Traditional School onto the Aztec campus. There is the potential to do great harm to children attending these schools from both equal protection and discrimination standpoints, as the students are part of a protected class.

Aztec's total enrollment is 580 students including 157 special needs children. It was designed as an inclusionary school from the beginning, with nine special needs programs and other services. The school's teaching philosophy is called Integrated Thematic Instruction, which lends itself well to students of all abilities. Other public schools in the District recommend that parents of children with special needs go to Aztec if they are having difficulty learning. A special playground was built last year with the help of contributions from parents. Merging Aztec onto

the Zuni campus would create an over-capacity school on one of the smallest land parcels in the District.

Ms. Strickstein felt that the proposal was discriminatory because a high percentage of special needs children would be asked to compromise their education in order to accommodate a school that has a low percentage of special needs students. These students need consistency, stability and trust in order to succeed. The proposal to switch schools would negatively impact their educational, emotional and social progress. She read a statement from one of Aztec's special needs teachers, reinforcing their arguments. The children that are least able to adapt are the ones required to adapt the most.

Commissioner Padwe said the SUSD overbuilt schools in the north. There are not enough children there and the school age population is decreasing. The special needs program would be able to continue at the new school. Mrs. Strickstein responded that it is not simply a matter of moving to a new school. Aztec was designed as an inclusive model of school, and the special needs children are interwoven into the fabric of the community. They are mainstreamed into the classroom, not separated.

Mr. Strickstein said it is not about a school closure or budgetary concerns. There are forums for that. The SUSD's claim that Aztec is at 50% capacity is in error. The population is capped because there has to be a smaller number of special needs students in each room, by definition. The public needs to be given accurate information. The Zuni campus cannot handle special needs children. Budget cuts are sometimes necessary, but they should rely on accurate information. The proposal is potentially discriminatory against a protected class.

Chair Seiden asked Mr. Strickstein what he was requesting of the Commission. Mr. Strickstein responded that the Commission should make the City Council aware of the situation.

Commissioner Jameson inquired whether the Stricksteins have special needs children. Ms. Strickstein confirmed that they do, but added that she would advocate for children of all abilities.

Commissioner Simmons said the fact of the matter is the SUSD has determined that the school is at 50% capacity, however they define it. The Commission should consider which objective, from a diversity issue, is not being addressed by the SUSD in the proposal to move the children. Are one group of students not being treated the same as other groups are?

Commissioner Gendron suggested that the Stricksteins ask the SUSD Board if they have considered what it would cost to get the Zuni campus up to ADA standards.

Chair Seiden asked the Commission to consider whether to advise Council that they should be aware of parental issues when dealing with the special needs population of children.

The Commission agreed to agendaize the issue for possible further action next month.

COMMISSIONER SIMMONS MOVED TO ADVISE COUNCIL THAT THE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION HAS BEEN APPROACHED WITH THE AZTEC SCHOOL CLOSURE ISSUE, AND UNDER THE VIEW OF RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY, THE MATTER HAS BEEN AGENDIZED. COMMISSIONER GENDRON SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED BY A VOTE OF THREE (3) TO ONE (1), WITH VICE CHAIR PADWE DISSENTING AND COMMISSIONER JAMESON ABSTAINING.

Vice Chair Padwe said she does not understand how this issue is discriminatory. Chair Seiden responded that it is not a definitive right now, but if the needs of these children are not met, it would be a discriminatory situation. The Commission is not acting; it is simply drawing attention to the needs of the students.

Commissioner Jameson inquired whether the Commission is allowed to advise in advance of a potential point of discrimination, versus waiting for it to happen. Ms. Walton responded that according to the mission statement, the action just taken by the Commission was within its purview.

In response to Vice Chair Padwe, Commissioner Gendron explained that special needs students are a protected class by Federal law, and the parents are citizens of Scottsdale, therefore the Commission has the duty to make Council aware of the issue.

5. **Cross Cultural Communication Series:**

Chair Seiden announced that the next CCCS lecture entitled "Islam and the Muslims," will be held on March 25 and 27. In April, there will be a lecture entitled "Out of the Ashes to a New Life."

Mr. Dodds summarized the efforts the City has made to market the lecture series. Scottsdale Pride is a monthly newsletter that goes to about 80,000 homes and 5,000 businesses. Each edition features the lecture series. News about the series is included in the water bills, though there is a time lag between when it is sent and the event itself. There is also a monthly series on City Cable 11 that discusses the next lecture program topic. About 18,000 subscribers receive the City's electronic newsletters, which they can sign up for on the City website.

Commissioner Simmons said given that many people have the opportunity to know about the series. The low turnout suggests that there is not much interest. She asked the Commission to discuss how to better market the series in the future.

Vice Chair Padwe suggested that part of the problem is that the events are held downtown, yet the geographical center is much farther north.

Ms. Walton related some of the ideas that have been proposed in the past. The format itself may need some refreshing. The Commission could play more of a role in the topics, perhaps even taking on hosting duties. Partnerships with entities such as the library, or the SUSD could be created to take advantage of their built-in audiences. Scottsdale Community College could potentially provide classroom credit to students who attend lectures.

Ms. Walton distributed a list of topics that have been covered over the last seven years. There is some interest in learning about the origins of the city from a cultural perspective. There could

be a series of lectures each focusing on one of the different cultural traditions that make up Scottsdale's history.

Vice Chair Padwe suggested the Lost Boys could be the subject of a lecture.

Chair Seiden said the lecture process may start too late for some proposers. She liked the idea of the Commissioners taking a more active role in the series and helping promote it. She agreed that collaborating with the library and bringing lectures further north would help.

Commissioner Simmons suggested working with the Scottsdale Chamber of Commerce to get businesses involved. Businesses face many of the issues discussed in the series and they could benefit from the information. That opportunity is being missed. Chair Seiden suggested a brown bag lunch series.

Commissioner Padwe said the City offers many things that people are unaware of, such as Vista del Camino, which could be part of the series. 50,000 people work in the Airpark, and this could be used as the site for lectures too.

Commissioner Gendron asked whether the actual lectures could be aired on Channel 11 in addition to the preview programs.

In response to Chair Seiden, Ms. Walton said this year's RFP could contain specific requests, rather than the general request used in the past. The mailing list could also be targeted to people who specialize in the subject matters that the Commission is most interested in. Commissioner Gendron suggested personal invitations also be sent out. He noted that there was nothing to announce the lecture at the Senior Center on the night of the event except for a sign on the door.

Ms. Walton discussed how Dr. Burrue and his wife expressed interest in working with the Commission to share their knowledge of Scottsdale's origins.

Chair Seiden emphasized the importance of having the Commissioners attend the next two lectures.

6. **Commission's Outreach to the Community:**

Much of this topic was discussed under the previous agenda item. Chair Seiden requested that this item be agendaized for a future meeting for additional discussion.

7. **Regional HRC Meetings:**

Chair Seiden reported on the regional HRC meeting. With three representatives present, Scottsdale had the smallest contingent there. She implored the Commissioners to attend the next regional meeting because Scottsdale would be hosting it.

Less than ten people from Scottsdale attended the Unity Walk event. Tempe wants to host the event again next year, but wants to start the planning earlier. She felt the event would benefit from having more focus, and a liaison meeting has been arranged to discuss the matter.

Chair Seiden asked the Commission if it still wants to be part of the Unity Walk. The walk is intended to show unity between Gilbert, Chandler, Mesa, Tempe, Phoenix and Scottsdale.

Vice Chair Padwe said it was started with civil rights in mind, but that focus was eliminated.

Ms. Walton said last year's event lost some of its momentum by moving to Phoenix. The planning for this year's event in Tempe was done on very short notice. The decision was made to go ahead with the event anyway, so as not to lose even more momentum. Tempe wants to take advantage of more planning to make the Walk more like it once was, and they want Commissioners to be included in the planning process.

Commissioner Simmons said the Unity Walk should have the purpose of driving some of the HRC's other objectives.

COMMISSIONER GENDRON MOVED TO HAVE THE SCOTTSDALE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION PARTICIPATE IN THE UNITY WALK, PROVIDED THAT IT BE TIED TO CIVIL RIGHTS RECOGNITION. COMMISSIONER SIMMONS SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY A VOTE OF SIX (6) TO ZERO (0).

Ms. Walton said Scottsdale is expected to have a program ready for the regional HRC meeting that would touch upon a topic relevant to all cities. She indicated that Mayor Manross would like to greet the regional HRC representatives. The Commission agreed to tentatively schedule May 12 for the Scottsdale regional HRC meeting, with May 19 as an alternative.

8. **Strategic Direction for the Commission:**

The Commission agreed to table this discussion until the next meeting.

9. **Chair Reports:**

Chair Seiden encouraged the Commissioners to attend the HRC activities beyond the monthly meetings.

10. **Commissioner Items:**

Commissioner Gendron noted that historically, the number of hate groups increase as the economy starts declining, because of increased friction. The Commission should be aware of how that could affect Scottsdale.

He asked the Commission to consider also how it should react if Scottsdale was ever to face an issue such as that occurring at Harvard University regarding Muslim women. He also drew attention to a news story about an 8-year-old boy who is claiming discrimination because he wants to go to school dressed in girl's clothing.

11. **Open Call to the Public (A.R.S. § 38-431.02):**

No members of the public wished to address the Commission.

12. **Staff Liaison items:**

Ms. Walton presented the Diversity and Dialogue Calendar of Events through the remainder of the year. Commissioners may be asked to represent Scottsdale at some of the community events.

She noted that concern has been voiced about scheduling meetings and other events on religious holidays and other diversity-related days. She asked the Commission to consider recommending to Council days that should be avoided for those purposes when meetings are scheduled.

Commissioner Gendron argued that human relations is not about accommodating everyone, it is about being respectful. Accommodation goes too far sometimes.

Commissioner Simmons said the more stakes that are in the ground, the greater the likelihood that somebody else sees it in a different way.

Commissioner Gendron said the preparation of a simple list would enable Council to decide whether to hold meetings on those days, or mark observance in some other fashion. The Commission reached consensus to ask staff to develop a list of celebrations and observances unique to religious and ethnic groups that would be provided to Council, Boards and Commissions to acknowledge as they see fit.

13. **Adjournment:**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

A/V Tronics, Inc.