
**MINUTES
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
Monday, April 14, 2008
5:00 p.m.
Human Resources
Pinnacle Training Room
7575 E. Main Street
Scottsdale, Arizona**



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- PRESENT:** Enid Seiden, Chair
Carol Padwe, Vice Chair
Jeff Jameson, Commissioner
Kuros Lamé, Commissioner
Linda Simmons, Commissioner
Richard Woerth, Commissioner
- ABSENT:** Marty Gendron, Commissioner
- STAFF:** Linda Walton, Staff Liaison
David Ellison, Assistant City Manager
Neal Shearer, Assistant City Manager
Luis Santaella, Assistant City Attorney
Rita Hamilton, Director of Library Services
- ALSO PRESENT:** Carl Goldberg
Morton Chaffy
Elaine Langsner
Frank Langsner
Joel Bramoweth
Aubrey Strickstein
Paula Henry
Ray McClain
Karen Cather
Terry Basha
Debra Callon

1. **Call to Order:**

The meeting of the Scottsdale Human Relations Commission was called to order by Chair Seiden at 5:03 p.m.

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

Ms. Walton corrected the spelling of Pat Dodds name.

COMMISSIONER WOERTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 10, 2008 MEETING. COMMISSIONER SIMMONS SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY A VOTE OF SIX (6) TO ZERO (0).

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

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

4. **Definition of Terms:**

Chair Seiden tabled this item for a future meeting.

5. **Cross Cultural Communication Series:**

Chair Seiden noted that part of the Commission's goal is to provide various mediums that create or encourage discussion and promote the understanding of the dimensions of diversity through civil dialogue. The Cross Cultural Communication Series has addressed a variety of topics in furtherance of that goal over the past eight years. The series focuses on eliminating discrimination and prejudice. Chair Seiden said the series is open to any group that has a desire to present their diversity issue in a public forum.

Every comment on the feedback surveys from the recently concluded presentation on Islam was positive. Some negative e-mails were received, but there was no indication whether their authors actually attended the presentation or not.

Chair Seiden said the next presentation is set for April 29 and May 1, and will focus on the Holocaust.

Chair Seiden invited public commentary.

Carl Goldberg questioned whether the City of Scottsdale should be promoting religion of any kind. Islam is not a culture; it is an ideology. When a state-supported forum is provided to representatives of a religion, it violates the basic principle of the separation of church and state. Taxpayers do not need to attend the series in order to express discontent over the violation of this principle.

Chair Seiden said invitations are sent to the Arizona Interfaith Association each year, and every religion is welcome to make a presentation. The series does not promote anything; it aims to educate the public.

Mr. Santaella said the City Attorney's Office has reviewed the matter and is confident that the series presents no violation to the establishment clause of the United States Constitution.

Morton Chaffy said at the event he attended, the imam made an erudite educational presentation about the fundamentals of his religion. Afterwards, the questions from the audience progressively became more pointed, to the point where the moderator effectively ended the discourse by announcing that the presentation was not meant to be provocative or confrontational. He asked how something could be considered educational if confrontational questions could not be asked of the presenter.

Elaine Langsler said the presentation she attended was very different from what has been described. On controversial issues, both sides should be represented.

Chair Seiden explained that the Cross Cultural Communication Series event was separate from the imam's presentation. Mr. Ellison added the City is aware that the two different lecture series were conducted differently in terms of the way the question and answer portions were handled. He agreed that there could be some operational consistency around diversity issues.

Vice Chair Padwe clarified that the HRC was not involved in the library series, which featured the imam. Mr. Ellison said that from a practical standpoint, the community saw similar topics. It was by coincidence that the same topic was addressed at two different lecture series within a week of each other.

Chair Seiden noted that Phoenix and Tempe also have upcoming events related to Islam.

Frank Langsner sought clarity on the two series. Mr. Ellison explained that the Cross Cultural Communication Series was planned last year. This season's series focused on five different topics. By coincidence, a similar topic, designed to promote a broad understanding of diversity around Islam and faith, was being conducted at the library, just days apart. The same people did not organize these two events.

In response to Mr. Langsner, Ms. Hamilton, Director of Library Services, explained that the library conducts programs of all different types. The library focuses on topics of current interest. March's program of events is broadly focused on the Middle East. Four programs were arranged for the Mustang Library to discuss various topics about the region, which is of interest now because of recent events, as well as its historical and cultural significance. The first of the lectures was entitled, "Understanding Islam." The other three programs will focus on the region's geography, women, and a general look at what life is like there.

Joel Bramoweth said anything that promotes communication and leads to understanding is good. There is nothing wrong with programs like this. People can choose to come or not. The organizers should be prepared to keep the discourse at an appropriate level.

Vice Chair Padwe said the Commission is trying to bring people together. She pointed to a national effort between synagogues and mosques to jointly combat anti-semitism and islamophobia. Unlike the Pope with the Catholic Church, there is no one person who can speak out on the behalf of all Islam.

6. **Regional HRC Meetings:**

Ms. Walton said the date of the regional HRC that Scottsdale will host has been set for May 12. It has been proposed that the meeting feature a presentation on the role that Hispanics have played in the history of the Valley's development. Harry Garewal, of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, has been contacted about the possibility of making a presentation.

Commissioner Jameson said the discussion is timely, considering the press that has been generated on immigration and its related issues. Commissioner Simmons felt Mr. Garewal's presentation is very well rounded, and would offer something for the broader group.

By consensus, the Commission agreed to make this the topic of the May 12 meeting.

Ms. Walton suggested tabling the HRC's regular business until the June meeting. Chair Seiden noted that a decision is needed on the list of topics for the Cross Cultural Communication Series for next year, and requested a meeting to discuss it and anything else that might arise.

VICE CHAIR PADWE MOVED TO HOLD A REGULAR MEETING OF THE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION AT 5:00 P.M. ON MAY 12, PRIOR TO THE REGIONAL HRC MEETING, IN ORDER TO DISCUSS ANY NECESSARY BUSINESS. COMMISSIONER LAMÉ SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY A VOTE OF SIX (6) TO ZERO (0).

7. **Unity Walk:**

Ms. Walton said the first planning meeting for the 2009 Unity Walk is scheduled for April 23. The idea has been raised to use a festival of nations as the theme. Vice Chair Padwe volunteered to be Scottsdale's representative to the planning meeting.

8. **Impact of the potential closure of Aztec School to the special needs population:**

Chair Seiden asked the Commission to discuss possible courses of action on the Aztec School issue.

Vice Chair Padwe noted that the Superintendent for the Scottsdale Unified School District has said that the closure of Aztec School is just one possible option being considered out of many, and that no decision has been made. She felt that as the SUSD is a separate entity from the City, it would not be appropriate for the Commission's to make recommendations to the Council on the matter.

Mr. Shearer said the process that is underway has the potential to affect the entire district, and is intended to address the significant financial and facility-related concerns that the SUSD is facing. Currently there is a vetting process underway that includes a series of public forums. Hundreds of e-mails have been received representing a variety of views. Dozens of options are on the table to be considered. He felt it would be premature for the Commission or the City Council to wade into this issue at this time, as it is still in progress and no conclusive decisions have been made.

Commissioner Simmons felt it would be appropriate to let the Mayor and Council at least know that citizens have approached the Commission to express their concerns. The group of students they are trying to speak for would fit under the definition of a diversity group. Commission Jameson agreed.

Mr. Shearer noted that the SUSD has due process available to all members of the district relative to the special needs population. If district members are dissatisfied with that response, they could appeal to the Arizona Department of Education. There is no formal purview for the City of Scottsdale to address matters regarding the special needs accommodation for facilities and programs within the SUSD.

Mr. Santaella summarized the options that the Commission could take to include tabling the item, taking no further action, or voting affirmatively to advise Mayor/Council.

COMMISSIONER SIMMONS MOVED THAT THE COMMISSION AFFIRM THAT MAYOR AND COUNCIL BE ADVISED OF THE AZTEC SCHOOL ISSUE. COMMISSIONER JAMESON SECONDED.

Chair Seiden invited public commentary.

Aubrey Strickstein referred to a document explaining the Commission's purpose. In regards to non-City entities, the HRC can decide whether to pursue an issue or provide referral information. The HRC is within its authority to utilize the advocacy process to mediate alleged complaints and encourage tolerance and peaceful resolution between parties. He suggested that Mr. Shearer has a conflict of interest, as a member of the Blue Ribbon Advisory Council (BRAC) that came up with the recommendations for the SUSD. A blueprint was presented at the last public forum, showing the consolidation of Aztec and Zuni.

Paula Henry said she has two children who attend Aztec. The school's inter-thematic teaching methods coincide with the therapy that has enabled her autistic son to communicate. The merger plan would divide the special needs community into several schools. She asked the Commission to represent the special needs community whose needs are not being taken into consideration.

Ray McClain said she has a son with severe learning disabilities who benefits from the structure that Aztec provides. If the special needs community is divided, it could lead to years of regression in the development of the kids.

Karen Cather said the broad level of experience that the Aztec faculty has enables them to meet her son's needs, allowing him to function in a mainstream classroom. If the faculty is split, that would not be possible any longer. The ADA mandates that children are entitled to the least restrictive alternative.

In response to Commissioner Woerth, Mr. Shearer said City Council is aware that the SUSD is going through this assessment process, though he was not certain to what extent City Council has been made aware of some of the individual issues.

Commissioner Woerth inquired about Mr. Shearer's alleged conflict of interest. Mr. Shearer responded by saying that he was providing the Commission with information as the Assistant City Manager. A variety of options will be available for the SUSD to consider. BRAC's options

have been supplemented by dozens of suggestions and concerns from the public. His participation in BRAC is as a volunteer. He is not before the Commission to influence any judgment regarding the merits of those options, but felt it was important for the Commission to have information that puts the issue in perspective. It is an emotional issue for all families in the school district.

Vice Chair Padwe expressed sympathy with the families that have had to deal with changes in their district. She cautioned, however, against the Commission setting a precedent by interfering with a decision that is beyond its purview.

Chair Seiden felt it was a human relations issue. The Commission can give an opinion to Council, regardless of what decision is made by them later on.

Mr. Ellison requested clarity on the Commission's intention. Commissioner Simmons amended her motion.

COMMISSIONER SIMMONS MOVED TO INSTRUCT THE CHAIR TO SEND A LETTER TO CITY COUNCIL MAKING THEM AWARE THAT THE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION HAS BEEN APPROACHED BY CONCERNED CITIZENS REGARDING POSSIBLE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS BY THE SUSD. COMMISSIONER WOERTH SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY A VOTE OF FIVE (5) TO ONE (1). VICE CHAIR PADWE DISSENTED.

Terry Basha said she moved into the Aztec boundary because it was the only school that can provide the services her son needs. The move cost her thousands of dollars that she would have gladly spent in tuition, if given the choice. School choice is not an equal option within the district. Aztec provides a nurturing environment that has an impact on special needs children. By placing those children in different schools, it would have a negative impact on them emotionally, socially, and academically. The Superintendent is not hearing parents.

Debra Callon said the accepting environment at Aztec allows special needs children to function without fear of ridicule. These children will be discriminated against when thrust into schools where the staff does not have the specialized training and the other children will lack tolerance for special needs kids.

Joel Bramoweth said the City Council would want to hear about matters that affect the citizens of Scottsdale. The Commission's motion was justified.

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

Chair Seiden tabled this discussion for a future meeting.

10. **Chair Reports:**

Chair Seiden reported that a film about a hate crime that occurred in Arizona in the wake of the 9/11 attacks would be screened at SCC on April 16, as part of the ADL series.

11. **Commissioner Items:**

Vice Chair Padwe said she will be attending the first meeting of the Hispanic Heritage Committee next week.

Commissioner Jameson said the Mayor's State of the City address touched on diversity issues several times.

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

No members of the public wished to address the Commission.

13. **Staff Liaison items:**

Ms. Walton distributed copies of the proposed budget for the Office of Diversity and Dialogue that will be presented to City Council on April 22.

Mr. Shearer added that as this is a tight budget year, every department has been asked to look at areas where they might be able to realize savings. The Department of Human resources budget, of which the ODD is a part, has been reduced by about \$300,000. The decision was made to have no reductions in the ODD budget this year.

14. **Adjournment:**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

A/V Tronics, Inc.