



Human Relations Advisory Council (HRAC)  
County of Lehigh

MEETING MINUTES  
May 1, 2023

The meeting of the HRAC was held at 12:00 p.m. by Zoom video conference. A recording of this meeting is available at <https://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Community-Economic-Development/Human-Relations-Advisory-Council>.

**ATTENDING**

Angela Baio (AB), Carmen Bell (CB), Liz Bradbury (LB), Anthony Branco (TB), Yorman De La Rosa (YDLR), Nagi Latefa (NL) Guillermo Lopez Jr. (CHAIR), Luis A. Perez Jr. (LP), and Paschall Simpson (PS)

Distinguished guests: Diane L. Gordian, Deputy Chief Clerk, Lehigh County Board of Elections, Commissioner-At-Large Dan Hartzell

Staff: Frank D. Kane (FK), Cyndi King (CK)

Absent: Maryanell Agosto (MA), Commissioner Zach Cole-Borgi (ZCB),

CHAIR called the meeting to order.

Roll call. Quorum obtained. Meeting is being recorded. Public will have access to that recording on the department's website (see opening paragraph above).

CHAIR requested a motion to approve minutes from the April 3, 2023, meeting; FK made the motion and AB seconded. TB abstained; the minutes were approved.

**AGENDA ITEMS**

**NEW BUSINESS**

Educational and informational guest speaker, Diane Gordian, from Lehigh County Board of Elections – Lehigh County Voting office. Diane will cover how to vote, where to vote, and when to vote along with answering questions from the HRAC. Election Day is Tuesday, May 16. There are two elections every year. There is an election in May and another in November. May is the primary election which is party-centered and only (registered) Democrats and

(registered) Republicans can vote to nominate one of their party's candidates to move forward on the ballot to the November election. However, if there is a voter referendum question on the ballot, as there is in this year's primary in Whitehall Township, everyone registered to vote in Whitehall can vote. In the November election, it doesn't matter to which political party someone is registered, they can vote and vote outside of their party. Polls open at 7:00 a.m. on Election Day and close at 8:00 p.m.. If someone is in line at 8:00 p.m. to vote, the election site must allow them to cast their vote. Voting does have deadlines and May 1, 2023, is the deadline to register to vote and to make any changes (address or party or any changes). Another deadline of May 9, 2023, exists for anyone who wants to request a ballot to vote by mail. May 1 began "On Demand Voting" so anyone who has not requested to vote by mail can appear at Voter Registration (Basement, Lehigh County Government Center, 17 S. 7<sup>th</sup> St., Allentown PA) to fill out the form and vote at the office – "on the spot".

YDLR asked what the voter referendum question is on the Whitehall Township ballot. Deputy Solicitor Sarah Murray responded that it is to determine whether the tax collector position is elected or appointed.

Diane talked about sample ballots and provided links:

[https://www.lehighcounty.org/Portals/0/PDF/Voter/2023MPSample.pdf?ver=h9obAiTBk\\_mTW3Hwm\\_uXw%3d%3d](https://www.lehighcounty.org/Portals/0/PDF/Voter/2023MPSample.pdf?ver=h9obAiTBk_mTW3Hwm_uXw%3d%3d)

Diane answered the question: What steps are taken to help non-English speaking voters in Lehigh County? Lehigh County has a high percentage of Spanish-language population and is one of three counties in Pennsylvania adhering to Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act meaning that if a certain percentage of the population speaks a language other than English then all voting materials must be provided in that language. In Lehigh County, all the ballots, provisional ballots, advertisements, voter forms, mail-in forms and everything that is put out will always be in English and in Spanish. On Election Day in Lehigh County, 146 precincts out of 161 require a Spanish-language interpreter. The department is always looking for bilingual poll workers. Voters are welcome to contact the office and a bilingual worker can assist them.

NL asked whether demand ballots are available every day of the week. Diane replied that the office hours are Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. but May 6 and May 13, both Saturdays, the office will be open from 9 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.. The deadline for on-demand voting is May 9. Come to the office on May 6 if you want to vote on-demand.

TB wanted it stated whether the person who asked the questions presented ahead of time to Diane and were from Lehigh County. CK replied that LB was the only respondent and that LB is from Lehigh County.

NL asked for the sample links. (Those were sent the day after the meeting.)

GL asked what steps would need to be taken to open-up primary elections. Diane responded it would happen through the State Representatives at the state level. It is not a local rule it is statewide rule.

NL stated that people not associated with either party are disenfranchised in the primary and wanted to know how to help. Diane recommended talking with his state representative. FK interjected that it would be a major law change within the state. NL would like to find reasons to change this. Discussion ensued.

Diane addressed the question: Have there been any accusations of voter fraud that have turned out to be substantiated? No. She assured the council that despite what they might have heard, there are observers and attorneys present and Zoom is running so absolutely no voter fraud is occurring.

LB asked whether there have been any instances in the Lehigh County over the last few years to lessen the ability of people to vote. Diane replied that Lehigh County had been taken to court over drop-boxes and prevailed. No polling hours have been lessened and it is not allowed to stop voters not having identification (i.d.). State law prohibits from asking a voter for i.d. unless they are a new voter. If they are a new voter, the iPad will alert that i.d. is needed. If someone is not a new voter, i.d. does not need to be provided.

GL noted a rise in people exercising their Second Amendment rights to carry arms with some sides of the conversation using it to intimidate people who are fearful of guns. Are the judges of elections trained to deal with those situations? Diane is the poll-worker trainer; she does address those matters by telling the poll-workers to call 911 if they are being threatened or do not feel safe. However, if someone is outside and not within a certain amount of space from the front door, they can exercise their right to bear arms.

Final question: What proportion of votes are mail-in ballots, drop-off ballots, or in-person voting on election day? It is about 70% in-person and 30% is mail-in and drop-off. She emphasized that if a candidate received the most votes at the polls, it does not mean that they won the race because of the volume of mail-in ballots received. Candidates must wait until all the votes are counted and the Board of Elections calls the race.

NL asked when mail-in ballots are counted? Is it in the morning or even before Election Day? Diane responded that the law states the ballots can be opened beginning at 7:00 a.m. on Election Day. Mail-in results are not posted until the polls close at 8:00 p.m.. All the results that the public sees are from the polling sites. That data is uploaded quickly while the mail-in ballot counting takes longer.

AB asked if a voter walking into a voting place feels as though they are not getting the service they need or there is not an interpreter at the site, how do they go about reporting it? Diane responded there is a hotline they can call (1-877-868-3772) or call the office at 610-782-3194. Diane instructs the poll-workers to call the office if an interpreter is not at the voting site because the department is predominantly bilingual and get assist over the phone.

Diane reported the number one primary day problem is voters thinking they are registered with one party when they are, in fact, registered with the other party. She suggests that voters verify their statuses before going to vote.

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

LB updated that the deputy solicitor handling the proposed ordinance is 75% done with the regulations of this whole legislation. [It was discussed at last month's meeting] that this legislation should be introduced to the Board of Commissioners in June because of the budgetary process. Two particular things are of concern to the solicitor; one is the part of the legislation that has to do with allowing a not-for-profit organization that is mission driven to remain so and the other issue was removed at LB's request. Other topics of interest concerning the proposed ordinance were also discussed.

FK suggested a special meeting of the HRAC with CZCB at the end of May to go over the proposed ordinance. The HRAC could use time at the regularly scheduled meeting, June 5, to continue reviewing the proposed ordinance with CZCB who will be presenting it to the rest of the Board.

LB suggested a smaller committee to discuss the proposed ordinance with CZCB.

LB sent budgetary information to CK in an email as follows:

“Potential Budgetary needs of the LC Human Relations Commission:

Personnel:

Intake person -- This could be absorbed by any person who is currently taking complaint concerns from other departments (like housing complaints, nursing home complaints, complaints about other services). Based on Allentown's instances of complaints the number of discrimination complaints per year would be from 0 to 3. The intake person would listen to the complaint, determine if it was a protected class discrimination complaint that one could file under the non-discrimination ordinance and if so, refer the complainant to an on-line or in house intake form to fill out. They could help the person fill out the form if needed. — Since an existing County Employee would be doing this job, this would not add to the budgetary line.

Investigator:

Based on the way Allentown did this most recently - the County would retain a person (often an insurance investigator) to investigate the complaint, who would work at an hourly rate. Since I did these investigations myself as a volunteer for Allentown, I would say that the investigations on actual prima-facie cases took between 3 to 5 hours - this included report writing and presentation of facts to the Commission. In nearly all the 15 years I was on the Commission, we rarely had more than one case a year, once there may have been 2 cases and sometimes there were none.

- Estimated cost:

0 to \$1000 per year.

Printing costs:

Pamphlets or booklets that explain how to file a complaint, small posters about informational meetings or civil rights in Lehigh County... These costs might be \$1000 a year but could be paid for by grants (they were in Allentown, now and then).

Outreach:

Booth fees for community events, especially events put on by minority populations like: The Puerto Rican Day Festival, Lehigh Valley Pride Festival, Basement Poetry, Lehigh Muslim Fun Day, and other events like block parties, community fairs, School District events, etc. Commissioners would volunteer to cover the booths at the events. Cost for booth fees for events that charged for a table: \$400 a year for about 4 events.

Additional outreach or events costs - like perhaps an awards event, business cards for HR Commissioners, a youth event, media spots, support of other events: \$1000 (note - these costs could be offset by participation in the events —for example: in Allentown the cost of the awards galas were covered by sponsorship and cost to attend and actually exceeded the cost of the event - i.e. Allentown made money for the City with the awards event).

So my conservative estimate of the hard cost to the County for this HR Commission would be: \$3400, and more moderate estimate might be \$5000

In Allentown and in many other PA Municipal Human Relations Commissions -- these investigations are done by the Commissioners themselves, but I have to admit that that doesn't work very well. Commissions that have investigators are better sustained by the investigator's work. However, most Pennsylvania Human Relations Commissions (There are 70) do not have paid investigators when they are small municipalities. Lehigh County is a big place, there should be a paid investigator, but there does not have to be."

LB stated many facts and reasons to support having a budget for the HR Commission versus having no budget.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Chair brought up the election of chair and vice-chair positions. FK nominated the incumbents as candidates. TB seconded. Voice vote taken. Guillermo Lopez, Chair, and Liz Bradbury, Vice-chair were unanimously elected to another one-year term each.

All members received an email copy of the yearly report. No changes were raised or made. LB and LP volunteered to appear at a BOC meeting if the HRAC is asked to appear. The report will be sent to the County Executive, Board of Commissioners, and Frank Kane, Director, Community & Economic Development.

Discussions ensued about the roles and responsibilities of the Human Relations Commission. Chair shared his vision for the future of HRAC members visiting municipalities to share information with areas outside city limits. TB suggested HRAC create an outline on 2023-2024 goals. TB will chair a committee that will disseminate information to borough managers. LP suggested a Public Awareness Day for various communities in effect “echoing out to our own communities” the role that a Human Relations Commission has in the County. LP suggested contacting a local college for space to host a “Lunch & Learn”. LP will co-chair the committee with TB. PS offered his help. AB is super-interested on working in communications and getting the word out to the community-at-large.

Commissioner Hartzell made comments on the meeting. He added information to an earlier topic that people experiencing voting place issues can contact the media.

Chair invited HRAC on May 10 to the Hotel Bethlehem for the award ceremony where he will receive the Star of Bethlehem award.

Motion to adjourn by TB; seconded by CB. Unanimous voice approval. Meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia L. King