



Human Relations Advisory Council (HRAC)
County of Lehigh

MEETING MINUTES
March 4, 2024

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

Carmen Bell (CB), Liz Bradbury (LB)(Vice-Chair), Tony Branco (TB), Nagi Latefa (NL), Guillermo Lopez Jr. (CHAIR), Luis A. Perez Jr. (LP), Paschall Simpson (PS)

CK: Cyndi King (CK)

Absent: Maryanell Agosto (MA), Angela Baio (AB), Commissioner Zach Cole-Borghgi (ZCB), Frank Kane (FK),

Public: No one

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 asked for a motion to approve the 2/5/2024 meeting minutes. TB made the motion; motion seconded by LB. Unanimous voice vote approval of minutes.

OLD BUSINESS

Update on the non-discrimination ordinance: Chair spoke with FK; the County Executive, Phillips M. Armstrong, (County Executive) signed the ordinance into law. LB remarked that she saw that information on WFMZ news.

NEW BUSINESS

LB covered the next steps: it is up to the County Executive to appoint people to be commissioners on the Commission so the responsibility for those who want to [serve] on the Commission or know people who would be good [to serve] on the Commission is for those people to fill out the application form and send it in. LB sent her application; TB sent his application; several other HRAC members said they had not but would be doing so [immediately]. CB will ask to be appointed as an advisor and will send that application to CK. LB said the Commission [itself] will appoint people in advisory roles. It is written in the Ordinance that people will apply [to serve on the Commission] and the County Executive may also urge people to apply. The County Executive will forward applications/applicants to the Lehigh County Commissioners and they decide whether or not to affirm his appointments. The Commission can be comprised of 7 to 13 people; LB hopes it is a large number of people so there can be more diversity. These appointments must [take place] in 90-days; once the Commission begins to function, the Commission will have some things it must do right away, for instance, it must create the complaint form that will be posted to the website. After the Commission is formed, it can begin to do things that the Ordinance allows for and one of them is to appoint advisors. LB reiterated that the Ordinance is a law [right] now and if someone is discriminated against now, it is against the law. CB questioned how to let [the constituency] know that the law exists. LB suggested that once the Commission is in place, it should hold a press conference to [announce] that [it is] functioning now, that the complaint form is available [and where it is available] and the Commission can begin to create a short, 40-minute informational training and [present it to] the governing bodies[/municipalities]. LB said she hopes to be appointed to the Commission. LB summarized that the Commission should hold a press conference to notify the press [that it is operational] and if someone has been discriminated against, they can file a complaint by going to the County's website and filling out the complaint form or come into the County's office if the person does not have access to the Internet and fill out the complaint. After a complaint has been filed, it goes to the Commission and it is evaluated. CB suggested more transparency around [the newly enacted law and Commission]. CB commented that the HRAC has been meeting for 2-years and this [law] is what they created. The Ordinance was approved by the Commissioners, signed by the County Executive, so it is the law, right now, and within the next 90-days, the permanent Commission will be established and we'll come back to explain how to file a complaint; CB felt there should be some "stair step" for the [entire] process. NL wholeheartedly agreed not only to say that it has passed but also to solicit people to apply. NL questioned how [the Commission] would be created if there isn't more ensuing 'hoopla'. CB and LB agreed that there should be more hoopla. Conversation continued about who could have been invited to the signing. GL previously spoke with FK and [a ceremony or event] is in the works. LP suggested an on-line information session. NL stated (and received overall consensus from the HRAC) that [signing this ordinance into law] happened without the CHAIR [or VICE-CHAIR] being notified.

Conversation ensued about ways to commemorate the event. CB suggested the Ordinance be posted on the website along with instructions to people who may want to apply to serve on the Commission. CB added that once the Ordinance is law [after 90-days from signing] the applicant pool will already be further along [than if there were no advertising]. NL and CB discussed whether the County typically celebrates signing ordinances. TB interjected that CHAIR should have been notified that it was being signed. However, having been a municipal executive himself, he assured the HRAC that multiple ordinances are “passed, signed, and then moved on to the next one.” TB said there are too many items to move through and [it isn’t typical to make a show] out of it. LB added it is her impression that the Commission will be charged with every part of publicizing what this commission does and the Ordinance. LB suggested the HRAC involve everyone who is willing to serve by sending in their applications now. LB reiterated the importance of attending the meetings and not missing meetings and also that the work done on the Commission can be as simple as just coming to the meeting once per month. The Commission can decide what time the meeting will be held to make attendance more convenient for everyone. Once a person is nominated and appointed to the Commission, if they want to do additional things, for example, creating a committee to bring information to people or [speaking in the community] about the Ordinance, they can [do that] but initially all it has to be is attending the monthly meeting. CB has a question about once the Commission is official, and formed, and people are submitting complaints; LB explained that once a complaint is filed, it goes to the investigator who investigates whether or not it is within the jurisdiction and brings the complaint to the Commission. It is not the job of the Commission to do additional investigation. The main focus of attending meetings would be to review complaints. CB clarified that [someone serving on the Commission] would have to read the complaints to become familiar so there is more than simply attending a meeting to serve on the Commission. LB agreed. LB served on Allentown’s Commission for 15-years and the instances of having to review a complaint were low. Most of the work done by the Commission was other work, such as outreach and support. It is the law that keeps people from being discriminated against. So, if someone has been discriminated against, they may be in a position to say, “you just broke the law” [and that might be enough to resolve an issue]. Typically, the complaints are not complicated; it is not the job of the Commission to be detectives. It is the job of the Commission to review the information and evidence that is brought by the Complainant and also the investigator. That is why it is so important that people [who serve on the Commission] come to the meetings; it is stated within the ordinance that if [someone on the Commission] misses three meetings, they are no longer on the Commission. LB cautioned to be careful of just having meetings that are relegated to only one-hour long once per month because there may be something that may [require the meeting to] be longer. The Commission can figure out exactly how it wants to approach those [points] following the framework set by the ordinance. The investigator will make a report and present it to the Commission and as often happened, [the investigator] speaks to the parties and discovered that the respondent did not understand

that they were discriminating against [someone] and the complaint was resolved. The investigator includes all of this information in their report to the Commission. GL inserted that under ideal conditions, the complaint process will work in this manner. CB reiterated that [someone serving on the Commission] cannot simply show up for meetings but instead must be prepared. NL asked when the Ordinance would become law; LB replied 90-days after the County Executive signing. CB suggested the HRAC invite the public to the next meeting to educate on what the ordinance is and so that the next meeting will provide education on the ordinance which was signed into law. CHAIR recognized TB who had his hand raised. TB noted that once the Commission has been appointed, it will need to spend the first few meetings appointing officers and writing by-laws (which he observed will be difficult) and putting together the complaint form (which will also be difficult). The Commission will have to be organized in order to be prepared to immediately respond when a complaint is filed. CB summed up her point by stating that at this point in time and as an advisory group, she sees the HRAC's role as one of providing education. PS questioned whether one of the remaining scheduled HRAC meetings could be held in the evening or perhaps in-person during the evening to celebrate the passage of two-years of work by the HRAC. TB suggested GL and LB (CHAIR and VICE-CHAIR) send out a joint press release and also post it to the County website stating what day and time the next Zoom meeting will be held and that the proposed ordinance was signed into law. Use the points that CB made and include those points in a press release. CB would like CK to schedule a time and date for an in-person announcement of the law. CB suggested that the HRAC decide what days and times everyone would be available. CB suggested that at the April HRAC Zoom meeting, in real time, CK uses the computer to see what dates the Public Hearing Room (PHR) is available in the evening so the public and the press can come and ask questions. LP noted that the PHR has Zoom capabilities so people can attend in-person or via Zoom. TB earlier supplied CK with a spreadsheet of municipal contacts which GL and LB (CHAIR and VICE-CHAIR) could use to send (through the County) a brief [email] statement about the ordinance and how to file a complaint. TB says this is a great way to notify the municipalities that the ordinance is law and that it will go into effect by mid-June; every municipal manager would appreciate being notified of this newly enacted law. CB suggested letting the County Executive know the HRAC's plans for education and building awareness [within the communities]. TB suggested adding Ed Hozza (Administration) to the HRAC distribution list for the HRAC minutes; CB suggested adding Jill Orosky (the County Executive's secretary), too; CK agreed. LB followed up by stating that anyone currently on the HRAC who is not comfortable filling out applications but who would like to serve on the Commission, please ask someone in their family or circle of experience to assist; LB wants the Commission to have inclusive representation. LB pointed out that [a previous argument against the proposed ordinance] was that not enough people would want to serve on such a Commission. LB does not believe that to be true and she wants a good group of people to serve. LB addressed a recently published Morning Call article. LB pointed out that the

Morning Call did not interview or talk with anyone from the HRAC or any legislator such as Commissioner Zach Cole-Borghi or the County Executive but it instead [used] an advertising blog by a group of attorneys which stated the ordinance was a big deal because it was different and [these attorneys] should be hired to explain what the ordinance does so that a large corporation won't be surprised by the new provisions in this ordinance.

CLOSING AGENDA ITEMS

GL thanked everyone for attending and called for any other input (none) and any other announcements (none) and asked for a motion to close the meeting. TB made the motion which was seconded by LP. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia L. King