



Human Relations Advisory Council (HRAC)  
County of Lehigh

MEETING MINUTES  
June 5, 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**

Liz Bradbury (LB), Tony Branco (TB), Commissioner Zach Cole-Borgi (ZCB), Yorman De La Rosa (YDLR), Nagi Latefa (NL), Guillermo Lopez Jr. (CHAIR), Luis A. Perez Jr. (LP), and Paschall Simpson (PS)

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

Absent: Angela Baio (AB), Maryanell Agosto (MA), Carmen Bell (CB)

Guest: Commissioner Dan Hartzell

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 minutes of the May 1 meeting; TB made the motion; seconded by LB; with no questions received and upon unanimous voice approval, the minutes of the previous HRAC meeting was approved.

**OLD BUSINESS**

ZCB updated the group on the meeting held last week with Attorney Catherine Roseberry, LB, and himself to discuss the entire proposed ordinance (po). ZCB voiced his continued support and his desire to present an ordinance to the rest of the Commissioners that will pass. His plan is to present the po to the Commissioners and begin to analyze their feedback. ZCB believes passage of this po will be a great thing for [Lehigh] County. LB reiterated that there is nothing

in this po that forces an employer to give a job to a person who can't do the job. What this po does is what civil rights legislation has been doing in the U.S. since 1965 that is treating people, who are traditionally disenfranchised simply because of who they are, in a fair way. There are significant parts of the po which are not ground breaking because every part of the legislation is in other parts of legislation throughout the country, state, and other parts of the Lehigh Valley which already have significant anti-discrimination legislation in Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton, and Reading. One of the reasons that this HRAC is proposing an anti-discrimination ordinance is in response to a Supreme Court who has said that unless civil rights are legislated, people can take [those rights] away because [they] can't just be an interpretation by the court. Therefore, this is legislation for the County of Lehigh to say "we don't believe people should be discriminated against for things that have nothing to do with their jobs, their ability to rent an apartment or buy a house. to use public accommodations or get services with regard to education or health care". It isn't forcing anyone to do anything that anybody on this council or this commission would make it harder to do business. In reality, every place that has passed non-discrimination legislation in the U.S. has enhanced its attraction for employees, young people, and creative class people to come to a space to be able to live, work, pay taxes, and enjoy the circumstances of their community. No drastically significant changes to the po have occurred during the discussions with Attorney Roseberry. Mostly, the attorney has cleaned up the circumstances of definitions so that they don't conflict with federal or state guidelines or, in most cases, so that they follow state and federal guidelines.

FK had discussions with the County Solicitor concerning the breadth and costs of this po. The Law Department understood the po to affect the County's relationship with its constituents and employees. It may become part of the discussion that more structure would need to be created to monitor the relationships between employers and employees and also landlords and tenants. FK agrees with ZCB to obtain feedback from the Commissioners.

LB offered that Allentown has had a similar law in place since 1965. It isn't costing Allentown any money right now because there is not an acting Human Rights Commission in the city but the law is in place.

NL supports ZCB's thoughts to not produce [legislation] that would not pass the commissioners and to "go big or go home". NL would like to know how to reconcile these two ideas and is there anything to do create awareness in the community that [the po] has been drafted and is going to the BOC for review.

TB asked FK why the HRAC went through the entire procedure for the last year if Law isn't sure about the po. FK responded that he is reminding everyone of the starting point and perhaps the elected officials will have a different view [than Law does] of the po. Franked joked that every time you have a lawyer, they tell you that you can't do whatever it is you wanted to do. He is attempting to contain expectations to realistic outcomes.

CHAIR thanked FK for his input.

TB asked FK, because of his extensive experience working in government, for his recommendation on how to get everyone on the same page at this point. FK commended ZCB on his idea to share this legislation with his peers and get a sense of where [they stand]. No one knows whether everyone loves or everyone hates [the po]. Like every other public policy, we will end up somewhere in the middle with no one getting everything they want and we will come away with a piece of legislation that protects people's rights better than they were protected before – same process as any other piece of legislation.

ZCB offered that if the Solicitor comes back and says [the po] is illegal and won't pass for these reasons, he will not continue to push for it. However, if the main argument is that it will be hard to implement, he offered that many things are "hard" and that "great minds" can put their heads together to find the most cost-effective, great way.

CHAIR reminded everyone that the HRAC wants to impact the future and to be on the right side of history. We want to be able to market Lehigh County as the most welcoming County in the state of Pennsylvania [or] the whole USA. This is Economic Development – how the barriers are removed and the harm from the past is repaired. He said it is a "heavy lift" but "it is the right thing to do."

FK offered that if the HRAC is able to make clear that costs will be nominal then most of the po is passable unless people specifically have issue with the age portion.

LB offered that [age] has been removed [from the po]. LB offered that since Allentown passed the law in 2002, 54 other communities have passed [similar legislation] with very minimal, if any, financial commitment. LB said it is currently written [to create] a department. However, she does not know that it is necessary but is willing to take a look to see how it could be done in the most effective way. If [one has] commitment to people's rights in the community then it is important to take a little bit of a step toward some level of financial commitment but not to the point that hiring a full-time person to do anything is necessary at all. LB offered that the law's effectiveness is because the law is in place and not because there is a large number of investigators or police presence implementing the law. If the law is in place, then [one] follows through as the employer, or renter, or landlord, or whatever. Many of the things represented in this [legislation] are already in place in federal and state law and there are a few additional things that we see are important that other communities have already implemented in various parts of the state and the U.S. that are also effectively positive protection for people who are workers or residents or citizens of a community. It isn't saying that now, suddenly, something is going to be implementing a very significant immigration law... just reminding people that you can't discriminate against people based on sexual orientation and gender identity, height, weight, what can be asked of an applicant during an interview... and the reason this is being legislated is that if suddenly the state or the federal government removes all the rights for

everybody, we still have it legislated in our county. We never thought that could happen and then we got a Supreme Court who did that and took away rights that people had for 60-or-70-years... and that is why we are talking about legislating these things. If you asked the average person in the state of PA, “Do you think that LGBT people should be able to do their job without being fired simply because they are LGBT? 87% of people say “yes” so... are we just going to “hope” that the other 13% that don’t believe that are never going to act on it or are we going to pass a law that really protects people?”

ZCB observed that when someone hears “anti-discrimination ordinance” or “creating a human relations commission” the immediate reaction is “[t]his is so radical!” Education is key. ZCB acknowledged NL’s idea to get information out to the communities. ZCB offered to begin speaking at different organizations to raise excitement rather than have people read about legislation being passed with no idea that [the ordinance] is was coming along. ZCB would like to have more people know about this before it comes to a BOC vote.

CHAIR noted that certain businesses are friendly to this but have not been approached for their public support.

NL expressed his support of the previous discussions.

Commissioner Hartzell (CH) agreed that communication and timing are important. Perhaps before ZCB sends the “finished product” to the BOC, he could, as Committee Chair, or Geoff Brace might do it under Chair’s Review, ask LB to be available for a meeting to discuss concerns the BOC might have in addition to having ironed out the concerns brought forward by FK so the commissioners do not get the wrong impression from simply receiving [the po] through an email or included in the commissioners’ meeting packet. CH suggested ZCB contact David Barilla, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners, to make sure proper protocol is followed. LB volunteered to speak in person or via Zoom and to assist in any possible way. PS also offered to speak to people as he is always out-and-about in the community.

CHAIR thanked LB for all the hard work, depth, and passion that she has for this [cause] and said that “everyone benefits”.

LB reminded everyone that she is available to answer questions and can be contacted at any time.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

CHAIR praised the May speaker from Voter’s Registration Department and asked any one with suggestions for other speakers to make those interests known. Chair suggested inviting Norman Bristol Colon, Director of PA Diversity Equity Inclusion, as a guest speaker. Members agreed. CHAIR also recommended inviting the Executive Director of Learning Networking Inclusion Community (LINC) to speak at a HRAC meeting and explained his reasoning.

TB made some phone calls and reported that Senators Boscola and Laughlin introduced Senate Bill 400 which would further voters rights for people registered as independents especially in the primaries. As of May 3, this bill was in the state government committee.

ZCB reminded that Saturday, June 10, from 9 – 1, is “Community Outreach Day” with the Lehigh County Office of the Public Defender partnered with the Pardon Project of PA providing information and resources to individuals on sealing criminal records, expungements, and pardons along with free hot dogs, pasta salad, cake, and free clothing in many sizes. For federal matters, State Representative Josh Siegel’s and Congresswoman Susan Wild’s offices are also planning to attend. YDL emailed the flyer to HRAC members. The information is also available on the County’s social media sites and main web page. Last year, NARCAN was distributed. LP added that mental health and drug-and-alcohol providers along with shelters and other non-profit organizations revolving around criminal justice also participate in this event. North Penn Legal Services will also provide attorney advice on evictions.

PS brought up the Celebrity Softball Game at Coca Cola Park also taking place on Saturday. Empower 610 is also holding a free hip hop event at Allentown’s West Park as the kick-off to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of hip hop on Saturday from 6-9 p.m..

TB created a contact list of municipalities and offered it for when it is time to do a “meet-and-greet” and perhaps hand-out a short summary of what this [legislation] is. CK has a copy and can send it whenever it is requested.

PS reminded everyone of the upcoming Juneteenth event(s), basketball tournaments, August 11 at Jordan Park (Allentown) is another 50<sup>th</sup> celebration of hip hop, Allentown School District is partnering for small pocket events which he says can be opportunities to disseminate information about and rally support of the legislation.

LB offered that after the passage of the ordinance, commissioners appointed to the Human Relations Commission, might utilize those opportunities to bring information to the community.

CHAIR called for citizen’s input (none) and any other announcements (none) or anything for the good of the order with there being none, he called for a motion to adjourn. Motion to adjourn by TB; seconded by PS. Unanimous voice approval. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia L. King