



LEHIGH COUNTY HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
(LCHRC)
MEETING MINUTES
July 8, 2025

The meeting of the LCHRC was held at 6:00 p.m. by Zoom video conference. A recording of this meeting is available at <https://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Community-Economic-Development/Human-Relations-Commission>.

ATTENDING

Joanna Armstrong (JA), Amy Beck (AmB), Michael Blicher Jr. (MB), Liz Bradbury (LB), Tony Branco (TB), Andrew Gildner (AG), Guillermo Lopez Jr. (GL), Joyce Moore (JM), Luis A. Perez Jr. (LP), Christopher Raad (CR), Pas Simpson (PS), Tony Swartz (TS), and Carmen Bell (CB) ex-officio non-voting advisor

County Staff: Catherine Roseberry (CR) Assistant Solicitor, Frank Kane (FK) (absent), Cyndi King (staff) (absent)

Public: Steven E. Hoffman, Esquire

ABSENT – Angela Baio (AB)

AGENDA ITEMS

Call to order at 6:02 p.m. by LB.

Roll call by LB.

LB reminded the Commissioners they must turn on their cameras when there is a vote. Quorum is present.

LB called for review and approval of minutes from June 10, 2025 meeting. Motion to approve the minutes by TB, seconded by LP. Three Commissioners abstained from the vote because they were absent at the previous meeting (AG,

GL, and CR). Voice approval of the minutes.

LB noted that there were 454 “hits” and 155 “unique hits” to the LCHRC website page in June.

OLD BUSINESS

Training Update

LB did a presentation training about the LCHRC ordinance for Chester County solicitors because they are interested in passing the ordinance in Chester County.

C. Michael Robison, the Borough manager of Collingdale Borough in Delaware County, let LB know that the Collingdale Borough Board of Supervisors passed a Human Relations Ordinance based on the language of the Lehigh County Ordinance on July 1st.

Logo Update

No Requests for Proposals (RFP) were received. LB reiterated that the Commission is putting off its RFP logo creation outreach until September when schools are again in session.

NEW BUSINESS

Update on Complaints that have been brought forth

LB reminded the Commission to pay careful attention because there may be cause to vote on two motions dealing with Complaint 25-02.

Motion 1: To consider LCHRC jurisdiction over the complaint and whether it wants to dismiss the matter for jurisdictional concerns on [the Commission’s] own initiative.

Motion 2: The respondents in the complaint have requested the complaint be dismissed on jurisdictional grounds. Their counsel, who is present tonight, requested that he be placed on tonight’s agenda to present the request to the full Commission. However, to give the complainant equal opportunity to reply to respondent’s arguments in front of the Commission, the Commission must provide the complainant notice and the opportunity to respond. To accomplish that, the second motion would be scheduled for argument at the next LCHRC meeting on August 12 meeting.

LB suggested that the Commission hear Motion 2 first which would allow both sides’ positions on the jurisdictional issue to properly be presented to the LCHRC.

LB asked for a motion to schedule Motion 2 argument in Complaint 25-02 at the August 12, 2025 LCHRC meeting and to request written legal memoranda from both parties no later than one-week prior to the argument.

LP made that motion which was seconded by AmB.

LB led the ensuing discussion by stating she would like to give the complainant an equal chance to address this jurisdictional issue by moving argument on Motion 2 to the LCHRC's August meeting and alerting the complainant of their ability to contest the respondent's request to dismiss the complaint on jurisdictional grounds. Then, the LCHRC can evaluate the information from both sides and consider its decision.

LP completely supports that, too, and added that he is a court advocate and [typically sees two sides attend an argument].

CR added she believes the motion is clear and asked for questions.

TB asked whether the argument should be heard in Executive Session since it will be a legal complaint about an ongoing investigation. CR responded that "this is not an Executive Session topic under the circumstances." It is not litigation that would be considered under the Sunshine Act to be a type of action appropriate for Executive Session. CR continued that she understood TB's concern in that he would like to be advised in a separate session but at this point, [the LCHRC] is not in a position to go into Executive Session for this.

LB entertained public comment on this from Attorney Steven Hoffman. Attorney Hoffman identified himself as the attorney for the respondent, the City of Allentown, and stated that they filed the motion to dismiss on May 22, 2025 saying, "A court and an administrative agency always has the obligation to review their jurisdiction, and this commission is set up to review its own jurisdiction. So there is no need to defer this to another date. You have an affirmative obligation to review your jurisdiction in this matter and the filings in this case are clear on the face that the Human Relations Commission does not have jurisdiction over the city of Allentown. The enabling ordinance from the county in Section 705(14) provided that jurisdiction over the city of Allentown and the city of Bethlehem does not take place until 15-months after the ordinance went into effect. The complaint, on its face, alleges the last affirmative action – the termination of the complainant- happened on February 19, 2025 which is prior to the expiration of the 15-month waiting period against the city of Allentown. As such, the 15-months did not expire until May 20, 2025. Clearly on the face of the complaint and clearly on the face of the ordinance, this commission does not have jurisdiction over the city of Allentown. The commission, on its own, on June 5 went to the city of Allentown Human Relations Commission and asked the Allentown Human Relations Commission to transfer the complainant's matter to this commission. There was no complaint, either cross-filed by the complainant with the city of

Allentown or filed on the complainant's own behalf with the city of Allentown. So, there was nothing to be transferred to this body. Additionally, there are no agreements, Memorandum of Understanding, or any type of resolution in which the city of Allentown Human Relations Commission has the authority to transfer any matter to the Lehigh County Human Relations Commission and there is similarly no Memorandum of Understanding, agreement, or any resolution that allows the Lehigh County Human Relations Commission to accept any matters from the Allentown Human Relations Commission. As such, there is no need to incur additional costs and expenses for any party. You should, at this point, do what should have been done when the city filed its original motion to dismiss back in May. Dismiss this matter for lack of jurisdiction."

TB asked CR if she had any comments.

LP did not want to respond to Attorney Hoffman's comments because he did not have the paperwork in front of him and he believed the LCHRC should be having this discussion with its own legal team outside of this [venue] and also because the LCHRC is not [properly] prepared, he believes there is no choice but to defer until the Commissioners figure this out.

CR replied that she has had a few conversations with the chair and has looked at the information that has been presented. CR does believe it is appropriate to have input from the complainant on this issue before the Commission makes a decision and that is the reasoning behind the deferral until the August meeting which would allow both sides to present their positions and to determine whether there is some option that this Commission has not considered before it makes its decision.

TS asked, "And if the complainant doesn't respond?"

CR replied that at that point in the August meeting, there is no contravening information and the Commission would have the opportunity to dismiss the complaint based on the respondent's request.

TB asked CR whether it is possible for the members of the Commission to set some type of [redacted] summary of what's going on?

LB interjected that this matter has to do with jurisdiction and it's not specific to the complaint of discrimination.

CR stated that the LCHRC has requested a legal memorandum which would deal with the technical issues and not have [named] the specific individuals involved in the complaint so that the Commission could determine [jurisdiction] on just the facts without the identities of the individuals. That is why a memorandum from each side has been requested. The LCHRC will have what their positions would be on this and whether there is some jurisdiction that this commission might have as a tribunal over issues that have arisen in the County. Timelines are different for the county's ordinance and its jurisdiction within the city. There have

been some discussions behind the scenes about this and it would be helpful to have both parties' perspectives. CR also noted that the timeframe for the respondent to respond would be suspended; the clock would not keep running on their obligations to respond.

LB asked for further discussion. There being none, LB called for a vote on the motion to schedule argument for the August 12, 2025 LCHRC meeting on the respondent's request to dismiss Complaint 25-02 and to request written legal memoranda from both sides from both parties to be received no later than one-week prior to August 12. That motion was made and seconded. One Commissioner was in opposition; one Commissioner abstained. The motion passed by majority vote.

JM made a motion to defer Motion 1 to the August 12, 2025 meeting. PS seconded the motion. Attorney Hoffman requested assurance that both his previous motion as well as his briefing will be shared and circulated with all of the Commissioners. CR, LB, and LP all made that assurance. One commissioner abstained from the vote; all other commissioners in attendance voted in favor of the motion to defer. TB reminded LB that in order to abstain from a vote, one must state the reason for abstaining. The abstaining commissioner explained that he is involved in a few different other matters with the city along with Attorney Hoffman. PS thanked TB for holding the Commission to the [parliamentary] rules.

LB apprised the LCHRC of the Allentown Human Relations Commission (AHRC) being recently disbanded so there is no longer an AHRC to handle pending complaints in Allentown. The city determined that the AHRC, as it existed under the original ordinance, had to be completely disbanded and that it no longer existed due to the passage of the new AHRC law and the way that [new] law was written by the city which was effective mid-June 2025. The original ordinance was repealed and replaced by the new ordinance which stated [the city] had to create a new Human Relations Commission while [it] already had a commission of 9 people. LB stated that the mayor has 60 days to reappoint commissioners and now has about 35-days remaining to create a whole new Allentown Human Relations Commission.

LB voiced concerns about something she heard from Dr. Jennifer Swan that Mayor Tuerk decided to delay the appointment process of appointing new Allentown Human Relations Commissioners to the Allentown Human Relations Commission. This process could take several months. LB voiced additional concerns about what the city might do regarding the constitution of the AHRC and also about this active complaint that has been filed with the City of Allentown. She told the Commission about all of this because the spirit of [all of] the human relations commission is to deal with human relations and complaints that fall under

human relations ordinances so that people who have alleged discrimination will be able to find redress.

LP questioned what default action will take place if the mayor does not appoint commissioners.

LB responded that under the law, if the mayor does not appoint anybody at the end of that 60-day period, which happened when the law began and went into effect, Allentown City Council is charged with creating enough commissioners to meet the 7-commissioner minimum needed to have quorum and to hear and investigate complaints.

PS questioned whether the County's ordinance would supersede what Allentown may do? LB replied that Allentown has a perfectly good law and they should be responsible to do this.

TS asked if this complaint has been filed against the City of Allentown. Yes, it has.

PS asked what would be the rush to get a new Human Relations Commission in place in Allentown if the complaint filed is against the city?

LB responded again about the 60-day period to appoint new commissioners.

LP reasoned that since a complaint has been filed against the city of Allentown and the Mayor dissolved the AHRC and is now charged with appointing a new commission, wouldn't this be a conflict of interest? What might stop the mayor from putting individuals on the commission [to simply get rid of the complaint.] LP sees a huge conflict of interest in Allentown investigating [a claim against themselves.]

LB pointed out that this is the way the new ordinance has been written and that [is what has] determined that the AHRC had to be dissolved and that the mayor has 35-days to appoint new commissioners or city council will appoint if the mayor does not. LB stated that checks-and-balances ensure things are done fairly and that is another reason why she wants to have complainant and respondent present both points of view on the jurisdiction issue at the next LCHRC meeting.

LB stated that the LCHRC would like to see a Memorandum of Understanding between the county and the city wherein if complaints are filed against the city, then the county will handle the complaint; and if a complaint is filed against the county, then the city would handle it.

TB expressed his views on the evening's discussions taking place in a public meeting. Having a background in local borough government versus how things are handled in a commission, TB went on to observe that since Allentown is a municipality within the county and since there is no commission to administer the city's ordinance, wouldn't it make sense that [jurisdiction] would automatically defer to the county's commission? If the city didn't have a commission and the

county didn't have a commission, wouldn't the complaint automatically go to the state?

LB stated that the manner in which this jurisdictional circumstance has overlapped between the county's and the city's human relations commissions has never happened before in the state of Pennsylvania. It is a unique circumstance.

Further discussions on the ordinance ensued. CR suggested the commissioners allow both parties to file their memoranda; the commissioners will review those memoranda and then to allow [each side] to make their argument so they could respond to each other and then [to have the LCHRC] have a determination [on the motions.]

LB asked for any other questions or comments on this issue. There were none.

CLOSING AGENDA ITEMS

Citizens Input (on Non-Agenda items) - None

LCHRC Announcements

LB asked whether there was anything else to share with the group.

TB questioned the non-agenda citizen input items appearing twice on the agenda. CR explained that the county conducts its meetings having non agenda input at the beginning and at the end of meetings. During the meeting on each agenda item, there is citizen's input. This is a slightly different structure than other entities are used to but it is her bias. LB, TB, and LP like this better, too. CR suggested the LCHRC adopt this model agenda and LB agreed.

LB attended the city's Juneteenth event. CB was also there. PS also had a table at the event. PS talked about his engagement in the community and that he always has something going on at all the [city] events – up to 30 events per year. PS is a member of the Chamber of Commerce's Events Committee and is willing to engage his communities about the work of the LCHRC. He inquired about LCHRC literature.

LB made up little cards that have a QR code that leads to the web page on the county's site along with a logo she made up herself on her home printer with some information about visiting organizations and doing trainings. She held the card up to the camera for everyone to view.

LB will do a presentation in October at Lehigh Valley Active Life Center. Bethlehem Human Relations Commission requested LB do a training on complaint investigations also in October.

CB announced that Pennsylvania recently became the 13th State in the Union to become an Age-Friendly State. The Age-Friendly community in the Lehigh Valley had a lot to do with making that happen. She wondered if the commission

would allow her to share some information via email with them about what that means to the commissioners as leaders and as individuals. She asked for everyone to allow her to utilize their email addresses. LB said it was o.k. with her and asked if anyone had a problem with CB's request. LP, JM said it was o.k.. One of the commissioners did not want to receive any emails.

Discussion ensued again about the jurisdictional timeline of the ordinance.

Motion to Adjourn

LB called for a motion to adjourn; TB made the motion. AmB seconded that motion. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia L. King