**Approved Minutes**

Berea Human Rights Commission

Special Called Meeting / Business Session

Wednesday, May 19, 2021, 5:00 PM

Special Called Meetings of the Berea Human Rights Commission held by video teleconferencing per KRS 61.826

This meeting’s video may be viewed at: <https://www.facebook.com/1517107508517416/videos/502562240945225>

**Roll Call**

**Present**: Sharyn Mitchell, Gene Stinchcomb (Chair), Peter Hille (Secretary), Janelle Lakes Davenport; Virginia Bland, Randy Dinsmore, Robert Johnson

**Absent**: None

**Guests**: Juan Peña, KHRC, Daniel Brindley, technical support

Meeting called to order by Chair at 5:08 PM

**Announcements**

KHRC’s Juan Peña conducted a Human Rights Commission Training; copies of his slide presentation will be sent out to all BHRC members and Richmond HRC also; some changes have taken place in responsibilities and interpretations over the past year, so this is a timely topic.

*[BHRC Secretary’s note: video of the training may also be viewed at the link above.]*

**Treasurer's Report**

Chair reports he has not received notice of any expenses charged or changes made from the BHRC budget allocation, name tag cost was picked up by the City Administration. Balance of $500 remains in our line item within the City’s FY 2021 budget.

**Approval of Feb. 17, 2021 Minutes**

Motion, Johnson, second Mitchell, passed as presented by voice vote, none opposed or abstaining

**Old Business**

\* Discussion of BHRC meetings email access

Chair raised the question of whether we need to change meeting times if the City returns to in-person meetings. Upon discussion, decision was made to move the meeting time to 6:00 PM.

Motion Johnson, second Lakes Davenport, roll call vote, unanimous agreement.

Chair notes the Mayor has offered that we can meet in community room at City Hall or the Council Chambers, location to be finalized when we begin to meet in person.

**New Business**

\* Draft of 2021-22 proposed BHRC Budget

Chair notes City Administrator David Gregory has indicate that a $1500 line item has been proposed in the 2021-2022 City budget for the BHRC. Chair has been informally informed that BHRC can ask for more for program activities if needed. No BHRC action required on this, for information only.

In response to question from Mitchell, Chair reports Mayor and City Administrator have indicated that furloughed staff are not being recalled at this time.

Follow up question from Mitchell: Did we request that this position be filled, and it was denied, or do we need to request it on a contingency basis, or how is it handled? Chair indicates that his understanding is that at this point no furloughed, seasonal or part time positions are being brought back without special action. Not likely to be done until after year end finances are reviewed and there is better understanding of Federal funding for the City. Guidelines are not available at this time. Mitchell raised question of whether we should be on the record requesting this.

**Motion** to request funding be allocated for part time BHRC Administrative Assistance for the coming year via letter from Chair to City. Motion Mitchell, second Dinsmore.

Discussion:

Question from Johnson: Whom are they assisting? Chair responds, the position is to assist the commission, make meeting arrangements, deal with paperwork, notes the support for the BHRC has been provided by the Berea Police Department, and this has been challenging for them due to their capacity for this.

Hille: Chair had also mentioned asking City to reactivate our office. Stinchcomb offers friendly amendment to add to the request that our office be re-activated.

**Mitchell and Dinsmore accept amended motion**: Funds to be allocated by the City for a part-time BHRC Administrative Assistant and to provide appropriate office space for the BHRC.

Q from Johnson—who will pick the Administrative Assistant?

Chair—last time it was advertised for, interviewed by and chosen by the BHRC, then hired by the mayor as a City employee. Hille notes it was a BHRC subcommittee last time that did this.

**Roll call vote, approved unanimously.**

\* Discussion of Madison Southern discrimination suits

Two suits have been filed related to alleged discrimination at Madison Southern, one in the summer of 2020, a second suit filed more recently by a recent graduate. Chair indicates his purpose for putting this on the agenda is because there has not been a lot of news coverage of this. There was an article about the first suit in the Richmond Register, second filing was reported in the Lexington Herald Leader. Chair is putting this before the commission for the purpose of discussing whether the BHRC might undertake in the coming year a program sensitivity training on racial discrimination, potentially in partnership with the Madison County School Board and/or the Berea Community School Board. Chair notes that if we want to do this it needs to be part of a work program and would need volunteers to do this. Chair notes this falls within the purview of the HRC per the establishing ordinance.

Discussion:

Johnson notes once complaint filed it goes to police department, and this training would be for the schools, not be directed to those incidents being handled by the legal system. Chair concurs, noting that the BHRC charge includes things like training programs and informational programs, and this would be an ideal time to demonstrate that Berea as a community is concerned about these things.

Mitchell asks for clarification, since the complaints didn’t come to us there is no action for us in this case. Chair notes that it is under investigation, not by us, details are not public information at this point. We are looking at training as a response to racial discrimination that has allegedly taken place in our community, and this is in keeping with our charge.

Chair notes that when the Fairness Ordinance came up, some people said that discrimination just doesn’t happen here, but it does, and it is public knowledge. As part of our responsibility as the BHRC, we should be pro-active in providing training and information for the general public.

Hille asks if this would be focused solely on the schools or more broadly on the community, and whether it would be focused in racial equity or more broadly on diversity, equity and inclusion. Chair noted his intention was to bring it for discussion, not necessarily for a decision tonight, scope and details to be worked out, and address at the next meeting.

Johnson suggests making it a continuing agenda item for when we are able to meet in person again.

Juan Peña, KHRC, notes this is a good opportunity for the BHRC to be active in addressing the issue without being directly involved in the lawsuits themselves.

Johnson raised a question to Peña related to an incident last year in which he was asked to take off a political hat or leave a city building, noting that he was called racist. Johnson inquired of Peña whether that constituted racism. Peña responded that this would not be a civil rights case, that both parties were exercising free speech. Chair noted that this was not an item on our agenda and suggested that Johnson could follow up with Peña if he wished to do so.

Chair noted that we will keep the question of conducting a training on our agenda for the next meeting. Hille agreed and suggested Commissioners consider the focus and scope of a potential training and what we might do, possibly a series of activities.

Chair proposed we move to the next agenda item, adjournment. Motion Johnson, unanimous consent.

**Meeting adjourned at 5:44**

Prepared by Peter Hille, Secretary

Approved at BHRC meeting on July 21, 2021

Gene Stinchcomb, Chair Date