

City of Tampa
Human Rights Board
Meeting Minutes
October 9, 2013

The City of Tampa Human Rights Board held their regular bi-monthly meeting on Wednesday, October 9, 2013 at 8:30 a.m., in the 2nd floor conference room of the Department of Neighborhood Services, Division of Community Affairs, 2105 N. Nebraska Avenue, Tampa, Florida.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anthony Carswell, Chairman
Amy Mandel
John Perry

Anna Ramos
Reginald Tim
Elias Vazquez

CITY OF TAMPA REPRESENTATIVES IN ATTENDANCE:

Rebecca Cortes
Margarita Gonzalez
Deborah Marshall

Allison Singer
Karen Sinnreich
Jake Slater

GUESTS:

Ruth McAfa, RN, James Haley VA/BSN
Julie Luong, RN, James Haley VA/BSN

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairman Anthony Carswell called the meeting to order and took the roll. He then asked members present if they received the minutes for August 14, 2013. The Chairman then asked members to review the minutes for corrections (minutes had been mailed to members and copies were also available at this meeting). **Motion** was **made** by John Perry and seconded by Elias Vazquez, to accept the minutes as submitted. The **motion** was **accepted** unanimously by all members present.

Regular Reports

Administrator's Report

Mr. Slater informed members that the City of Tampa Hispanic Heritage Committee 25th annual celebration would take place at 11:00 a.m. on October 29, 2013, at the Tampa Theatre. He provided members with copies of the flyer which had additional event information. He also announced that the Mayor's Alliance for Persons with Disabilities' annual awards luncheon would take place on October 18, 2013 and asked Ms. Sinnreich to provide event information along with her report.

Mr. Slater then spoke on the Mayor's Neighborhood University & Landlord Training program, which was modeled after Leadership Tampa. He provided two booklets (1 on Neighborhood University and 1 on Landlord Training) for members to view and stated that in the first inaugural class, about 200 persons attended, mainly property managers and agents, and about 145 persons at the landlord training class.

The sessions are to be held at the Greater Tampa Association of Realtors (GTAR) facility, and the next class is scheduled towards the end of October 2013. With all the things happening with vacant, foreclosure and rental properties, the Mayor felt it was a good idea to have a sit-down with landlords and City of Tampa representatives regarding zoning and code issues.

Mr. Slater attended an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) national conference on legal issues in Denver, Colorado. He brought back a booklet which he passed on to the Community Affairs staff to view. About 300 persons attended. The speaker was Ms. Lillie Ledbetter, and Mr. Slater was very impressed, because she maintained the attention of the audience for about 1 ½ hrs. The conference included a video on the history of ADA, and covered discrimination as far back as the 1940's and 1950's. He would like to know on how to obtain a copy of the video to show some time in the near future.

Mr. Slater informed members that his department budget was passed for \$10.5 million dollars, and that Code Enforcement staff will increase by two.

Mr. Tim asked if Code Enforcement generated any revenue. Mr. Slater said that his department does not generate revenue and that \$800,000 is collected from fines and liens. He expects more personnel. Code Enforcement's annual case average is 25,000 and they have partnered with the Tampa Police Department, who has about 100 officers to provide assistance as it relates to code violations. There are about 6,100 foreclosed properties in the City of Tampa.

EEOC/Employment, Public Accommodations and /Fair Housing/HUD Reports

No report provided at this time, since Ms. Betancourt did not attend.

ADA Disability Rights Coordinator

Ms. Karen Sinnreich informed members that she was steadily working on the Mayor's Alliance for Persons with Disabilities 25th annual awards ceremony luncheon. The event is scheduled for October 18, 2013 at the Doubletree Hotel. The speaker will be Eric LeGrand, former football player, now a quadriplegic, and who has started a foundation to help persons with disabilities. Tickets are \$25 each until October 10th, then \$35 after this date. The award winners will be determined this week. Artists with disabilities will present an exhibition from 10:45 a.m. to 12:00 noon, followed by the luncheon from 12:00 – 1:15 p.m. At this time, there are 160 persons registered.

Ms. Sinnreich attended a one-week housing training that was presented by Stella Adams. She also attended an ADA Coordinator and Safety training. She continues to update information on Accessible Tampa and refer persons to appropriate agencies according to information, need or service requested.

The Chairman acknowledged two guests at this time, Ms. Ruth McAfa and Ms. Julie Luong, both Registered Nurses (RN's) at James Haley VA/St. Pete College Bachelor of Science and Nursing (BSN) program. They attended this meeting to see what the Human Rights Board is about.

Old Business

(Closed Board Business) Update on Reasonable Cause Case – Ms. Singer stated that one party elected judicial remedy. She is waiting for the next step, as the case unfolds.

The Chairman asked for an update on the Fair Housing Consultant, Mercury Productions, Inc. Mr. Slater informed members that filming will begin in the next couple of weeks with different scenarios, and updates will be provided at the next meeting.

New Business

Further Discussion on Ordinance and Board “Definition” – The Chairman asked members if they felt strongly about the way the board conducts meetings and on Robert’s Rule of Order, such as calling meetings to order, how the board captures information, how things are voted on, and how there’s a conciliatory yes for the board when voting on issues using Robert’s Rule of Order. Ms. Singer said that the Human Rights Ordinance allows the board to create their own rules. Since the board does not have by-laws, this could go into by-laws, rather than in the ordinance, that is, if the board were to adopt a set of by-laws, which could be adjusted at any time, rather than the board voting on it. Mr. Perry suggested contacting other boards to review their by-laws. The Chairman asked Ms. Singer if a request could be made and she said that a public record could be made. Mr. Perry said there are about eight boards in the county and Ms. Singer said some are in the city and some in the county. Ms. Singer recommended that City Council Members look at the board’s composition.

Mr. Slater asked for a status on changes to the Human Rights Ordinance. The Chairman said that possibly, at the June meeting, when first looking at the changes, the board said to look at what is a quorum, who’s on the board, (the positions), and seeing if it’s not too rigid. After this, the board members looked at the ordinance. Ms. Robin McKinney (former City of Tampa Assistant Attorney assigned to Community Affairs) conducted an exercise about 1 ½ years ago, and the board re-visited to see what the board’s real function is and what the board should be doing. Because the board knows the work Mercury Productions is doing, should board members either by themselves or in conjunction with staff, position themselves as a watchdog group or look for ideas to bring to staff to work on, or is the board a mediation board and support board?

Discussion followed. The Chairman said that one of the things that came up when looking at the ordinance was how conversations are held with staff members and Mr. Slater, specifically, with the way the ordinance is set up, without encroaching the Sunshine Law. An example, what if something came up next week, would the board have to wait till December to talk about it, because meetings are public? While the board has run smoothly under the guidelines of Mr. Slater’s and Mr. Dinkins (former chairman) for the past few years, the board wants to make sure folks and City Council members are looking at it that the board solidify a little bit more of “here’s what the board is, how they communicate and provide support from the board to the staff. As far as who ex-officio officers are, communication back and forth, the Chairman wants to feel everything is fine, should someone else look at it. He is taking input from staff and existing board members, and mentioned to Mr. Slater to share concerns and thoughts with the board. Mr. Slater then asked if the new overall slots were on hold. Ms. Singer added that the new slots are off of the agenda. This may/may not be put back on the agenda, because when presenting the two proposed changes last time, City Council members approved one which was intended to be presented a second time. What has been past and is now part of the code is what a quorum is. However, the pertinent budget for composition of the board in terms of the number of board members and the fields, industries which they represent, was not approved by City Council members. If the board members recall, some of the things that were expressed were about both, increasing the number of board members like this. There were major concerns. Anything else that goes before City Council will be because one of them decided to bring it back or because the board asks them to take as a recommendation.

The Chairman would like to use the target date of April 9, 2014 for Mr. Perry's recommendation with the by-laws. It is something that will help the board legislatively. With regard to establishment of the board, the Chairman would like to continue discussion, because he feels a fair goal would be to have clarity in 2014, probably at the April 2014 meeting, for any adjustments or input and possibly putting things into writing that members want to amend for the board.

Status - Proposed Amendment Changes to Human Rights Ordinance – The Chairman feels that the Ordinance is in place, but vague. He does not want the board to be rigid. The board is not functional, but at the same time, wants the board to be effective and speak clearly as to who the board members are, purpose, the authority of the board, and even an administrative perspective. He does not want issues on communication with both board members and staff. If the best way to take care of that is to define a communication person for the board and a communications person from staff, we would not have to worry about the Sunshine Law being encroached upon. He would rather have that in place, so that no third party would look at it and ask, what's going on and propriety, etc. He wants the board to have flexibility to move forward and quickly on issues, should there be a need for emergency meetings, or have conversation about certain things and getting everyone involved. The Chairman referred to the top portion of page four of the meeting minutes for August 14, 2013 regarding Robert's Rule of Order. There's nothing in the ordinance that the board has to adopt Robert's Rule of Order. The Chairman asked for Ms. Singer's input. Ms. Singer stated that the ordinance gives the board the power to do all of that, create their own rules, whether they call them by-laws or rules. Because if the board likes it that way and the next board does not, and the board makes changes that make sense to them, then the board would have to go through the amendment process. She advised thinking about amending the ordinance where they want it to be a legislative impact, first how they want to run the board. The by-laws are rules which the board already has authority to promulgate and adopt, as the board sees fit. The Chairman said that the by-laws would encompass what the board is trying to do. Ms. Singer said with the exception of the board composition and recommends that City Council members take a look at. The Chairman would like to have in place by the next meeting in April 2014.

Discussion/Approval of 2014 Meeting Schedule – Copies provided to board members for review. No changes were made. The Chairman informed members that Ms. Cortes is working on information and details for the annual meeting with the Mayor on December 11, 2013. He would like for all board members to attend, since the Mayor has this on his calendar.

Mr. Tim said that the board is being more proactive. Mr. Slater said that the board can take steps necessary to get involved with the neighborhoods and community groups, such as attend meetings. It depends on the direction the board members want to take. He would support any proactive approach such as explaining the board's purpose, asking for input from the community at various neighborhood watch and neighborhood association meetings. There may be a lot of folks who do not know about this board. There has not been a lot of discussion about the purpose of the board, unless there is a particular case presented to the board that would generate some type of media attention. There has not been a lot of notoriety or exposure in the last 10-15 years. He thinks it would be useful for the board to explain the board's purpose to the community. The Chairman said to that point, in the board's support of Mercury Productions, with Community Affairs staff and putting something out there to let citizens know that there is a mode available to them, should there be any issues. The Chairman wants the board to support methods like that to move the process forward. Mr. Slater said that outreach had been curtailed, due to reduction in staff. Mr. Tim asked if the board could provide public awareness. The Chairman would like for the City to see the diversity in the board's composition. Mr. Tim said that once production is in place,

people could take advantage and the case load could increase. It would be a good thing and staff would handle the best way possible. Ms. Mandel asked if cases generated revenue. Mr. Slater said that settlement money is awarded to charitable organizations that work in the areas of employment and housing. Ms. Mandel asked how is money generated to get more staff. Ms. Singer said that there are not too many City departments that generate revenue. These are good points and are things that the Mayor and the administration are always working on to balance with non-profit agencies and make sure the needs are met. If you make more folks aware, more work comes.

Ms. Sinnreich added that she attended a fair on October 5, 2013, and provided a display for Community Affairs. There were about 200 vendors and about 1,200 persons in attendance. She provided a slip for persons to indicate they would like to receive information on topics such as the Mayor's Alliance for Persons with Disabilities, Accessible Tampa, and Discrimination. The outreach was done, however Ms. Sinnreich said she was not sure what the outcome would be.

The Chairman said that he would have more information on the by-laws. The Chairman will work with Ms. Singer to find information on other existing boards, what to use, what their by-laws look like, and bring back by the meeting in February 2014.

The guests requested meeting with someone after the meeting regarding issues presented to the board. The Chairman asked Ms. Singer if this could be done outside of the meeting. Ms. Singer said any board member could talk to any member of the public but not to each other. The issue with Mr. Slater is that the code makes him an ex-officio member as opposed to her, that she's not a board member and cannot act as a liaison. The Sunshine Law prohibits communication among board members about issues that would most likely go before the board. Ms. Singer confirmed that board members could always meet with members of the public.

Next Meeting

The next meeting has been scheduled for December 11, 2013, at 10:00 a.m. It is the annual meeting with the Mayor, board members and staff. It will be held at City Hall in the Mayor's Conference room on the 1st floor, 306 E. Jackson Street. He asked staff to share topics they think would be appropriate.

Adjournment

A **motion** to adjourn the meeting was made by Elias Vazquez, seconded by Anna Ramos, and the **motion passed** by all members present, to adjourn the meeting. This concluded the business of the Board at 9:15 a.m.

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