



CITY HALL • 100 STATE STREET • BELOIT, WI 53511

**MINUTES
BELOIT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
AND HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

Wednesday, September 21, 2011 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Meeting was called to order at 5:34 PM by Staff Representative Teri Downing.
Present: Commissioners Matthew Finnegan, Mark Spreitzer, Carolyn Lawrence, Ricardo Valdez, and Staff Representative Teri Downing. Planning Division Intern, Michael Lofton. Commissioner Marylyn Ohaegbulem arrived at 5:50 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes of the September 21, 2011 Meeting

Commissioner Valdez moved for approval of the minutes of the regular meeting held on September 21, 2011. Commissioner Finnegan seconded. The motion carried.

3. Nomination and Election of Officers:

Staff notified the Commission that the former Chairperson, Kathryn Ingram and Gretchen Roy

a. Nomination and Election of Chairperson: Staff called for nominations for Chairperson. Carolyn Lawrence nominated Matt Finnegan. Joe Hansen seconded and the motion carried.

b. Nomination and Election of Vice-Chairperson: Chairperson, Matt Finnegan called for nominations for Vice-Chairperson. Ricardo Valdez nominated Carolyn Lawrence as Vice-Chairperson. Matt Finnegan seconded and the motion carried.

4. Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

5. Review of Preliminary Data Sets and Interpretations for the City of Beloit Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing with Comments and Suggestions from Community Leaders

Commissioner Finnegan noted that no Community Leaders were present.

Ms. Downing explained that the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing (AI) is required by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) for all Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) entitlement. The City is required to update their AI every 3 to 5 years to document their fair housing planning. This document must include an analysis to identify impediments to fair housing choice, actions taken to overcome the effects of any

impediments, and records reflecting the analysis and actions in this regard. The City completed its last AI in 2004.

Information was provided to Commissioners regarding the current demographics, economic profile, and housing profile of the City of Beloit. She explained that this is the starting point to analyzing possible discriminatory trends in our community. Once trends are identified, the City can analyze its policies and fair housing enforcement procedures to identify whether they foster these trends. She asked the EOHRC to provide input and direction for further research if needed. Ms. Downing also noted that community leaders were invited to this meeting to provide input and direction as well. She introduced Michael Lofton and explained that he is available for questions, as he did most of the data research. Staff also explained that the Commission has discretion on how to proceed with gaining input from the community and may want to hold a workshop.

Commissioner Mark Spreitzer asked which Community Leaders were invited. Staff said the following people were invited due to their involvement in the community and work with minorities and protected classes: The Alliance group which is an LGBT student organization from the Beloit College, Latino Service Providers Coalition, Marc Perry from Community Action, Rene Bue who actively involved with the Latino Community, Director of the Beloit Housing Authority Cathy Pollard, the local chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), ... Ms. Downing also explained

Commissioner Lawrence suggested that in addition to inviting the community leaders, ask for an RSVP in order to gauge their commitment level and attendance. Discussion then occurred regarding how to reach community leaders, suggestions on who to contact, and the possibility of holding an EOHRC Workshop.

Chairperson Finnegan asked the Commissioners if anything in the data jumped out while reviewing it. Commissioner Lawrence said that there has been systematic discrimination in Beloit from many years ago and there needs to be a community discussion on this issue. She also mentioned that poverty seems to play a large role in discrimination, especially in housing patterns. Commissioner Finnegan agreed.

Commissioner Joe Hansen asked if the unemployment levels near the Merrill Neighborhood, Tract 18, included the College area and college students. It was clarified that this did not include the College. Staff clarified that the data was derived from Unemployment Compensation.

Council Representative, Commissioner Spreitzer, asked whether this information will go before City Council and staff explained that the Council Representative would determine whether it should be presented to City Council.

Commissioner Finnegan asked for clarity on the Section 8 Voucher concentration information. He said that Voucher holders were concentrated in minority and low-income areas because the highest amount Section 8 will pay is still lower than market rent in Beloit. Commissioner Hansen agreed and specifically pointed out that 2-bedroom vouchers are especially low. Staff explained that they will explore whether more research can be done in this area.

Commissioner Spreitzer pointed out that most of the statistics presented here regarding unemployment, low-income, voucher holders, minorities, and high rental concentrations tend to fall in the same few census tracts.

Commissioner Finnegan discussed the difference between Horizon Management and Beloit Housing Authority payment standards, pointing out that Horizon Management vouchers are higher. He explained that he believes that this is due to the difference in administrative costs. He also explained that it is difficult for landlords to maintain a property to the City's Property Maintenance Code and Section 8's Housing Quality Standards, when the market in rental housing is so low. He asked whether it is possible to provide a map that pinpoints specifically where the vouchers are in the City, instead of percentage of vouchers per census tract. He explained that if voucher holders are concentrated in one or two areas of the City, then that would create an impediment to fair housing choice among its recipients.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding how the Section 8 program works and whether the program has been spread too thin in an attempt to help as many people as possible. The discussion focused on the point that giving someone a small amount of help does not ensure success, but perpetuates a problem. That emphasis should be on helping a family with resources until they are successful, so they don't continue to need the system and are less likely to return to the system.

Commissioner Valdez inquired whether there is data regarding the percentage of felons re-entering society. He explained that these individuals are re-entering with their families and are having difficulty finding housing. He also pointed out that HUD issued a memo clarifying that Section 8 program can allow felons onto the program. Commissioner Ohaegbulem noted that Beloit Section 8 programs tend not to allow felons onto the program due to rules regarding criminal backgrounds. Staff explained that HUD allows Public Housing Authorities and administrators of vouchers to create more restrictive rules for admission, and that requirements differ among agencies. Commissioners Hansen and Finnegan noted that landlords also have to balance the public nuisance law with accepting tenants with criminal histories, especially if they are drug related.

Commissioner Spreitzer asked if there could be more precise data regarding distribution of rental amounts throughout the City as well as distribution of unit sizes throughout the City, in order to demonstrate whether there is actually an issue with voucher holders being limited in where they can obtain housing.

Commissioner Valdez asked if there is any data that shows the average amount of income lost due to the economic downturn. Commissioner Spreitzer commented that nationally, unemployment and loss of income hit hardest among African Americans and Latinos, so it is reasonable to assume that these trends would be present in our community, which would compound affordability and ability to obtain housing. Commissioner Finnegan explained that there is also a lack of financial literacy in Beloit. A lengthy discussion followed regarding the different ways that families are dealing with the economic downturn and loss of income. The large amount of rentals and the high vacancy rate within the City.

The Commission directed staff to schedule an October Workshop on the data for the AI and invite the community leaders discussed at the beginning of the meeting.

6. Upcoming Events

There were none discussed.

7. Adjournment

Commissioner Valdez moved for adjournment and Commissioner Ohaegbulem seconded. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 PM by Chairperson Finnegan.

Teri Downing
Grants Administrator