



CITY HALL • 100 STATE STREET • BELOIT, WI 53511

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

Wednesday, January 18, 2012 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Meeting was called to order at 5:32 PM by Chair Matt Finnegan.

Present: Commissioners Matthew Finnegan, Carolyn Lawrence, Mark Spreitzer, Joseph Hansen, Alexis Siatos, Marilyn Ohagbulem, and Staff Representative Teri Downing. Excused: Commissioner Ricardo Valdez.

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

Commissioner Ohaegbulem moved for approval of the minutes of the regular meeting held on September 21, 2011 with the following corrections:

- Item #1: Commissioner Ohagegbulem's first name corrected to "Marilyn".
- Item #1: Roll Call to include Commissioner Hansen as present.
- Item #3: The first sentence should read: Staff notified the Commission that the former Chairperson, Kathryn Ingram and former Vice Chairperson, Gretchen Roy have resigned from the Commission due to family and employment commitments.

Commissioner Lawrence seconded. The motion carried.

3. Introduction and Welcome of Newly Appointed EPHRC Commissioner Alexis Siatos:

Staff introduced Ms. Siatos and the Commissioners welcomed her. An updated EOHR mailing/contact list was distributed.

4. Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

5. Review and Discussion of the City of Beloit Analysis of Impediments (AI) to Fair Housing

Staff explained that the AI is required by the City of Beloit to fulfill CDBG funding requirements and would like the EOHR to review the draft and provide additional input.

Chair Finnegan asked the Commission if anything significant popped out at them.

Commissioner Lawrence noted that the data was out of date. Staff explained that the City is required to use the most recent data from the Census, which is 2010.

Commissioner Hansen mentioned that most of the data has been reviewed by the EOHRC before, but pointed out that during the period of 1990-2010 almost an identical % of white population left the City as the % of Hispanic population has come into the City. He also pointed out that in 20 years the population has only gone up by 3.9%. Commissioner Hansen commented on the age of Beloit's population has gotten much older over time; that the ages of 85 and older have increased by 51% and the ages between 25-34 has decreased the most. Commissioners Lawrence said that it may be due to the age of the housing stock and people may be moving to newer developments in other communities.

Commissioner Finnegan commented that what was most striking to him is that almost 10,000 people who live in the City, leave to work outside of the City; and just as many people who live outside of Beloit come into the City to work. He said that some of our biggest employers in the City are the School District and the local government. He said that this means that tax money is leaving the City because people are working here but are not living here. He said would like employers to either have a residency requirement or encourage residency in some other form. Commissioner Lawrence commented that her Beloit Minister and family could not find a suitable home in Beloit because of the older housing stock and smaller size of housing, so bought a home in Janesville.

Commissioner Finnegan said that one of the problems he sees is that low-income families tend to have issues with the large older homes because they may not be weatherized properly, so they cannot afford utilities. Commissioner Hansen said that there may other factors driving people away such as crime or the impression that the schooling may be better elsewhere.

Commissioners Finnegan and Hansen discussed the decrease in housing starts and new construction. The Commission then discussed that with so much rental housing at 50-52% in the City, rents stay low, and does not attract higher-income residents. It was pointed out that there are no higher income rental units in Beloit, which affects the lower-income housing because landlords do the bare minimum to maintain the properties. The discussion then turned to how to increase homeownership in the City.

Commissioner Hansen asked Council Representative Spreitzer if the Council would consider implementing a residency requirement for all new City employees, such as Police and Fire. Commissioner Spreitzer responded that there has been some discussion of this issue. Mr. Spreitzer asked if staff had any statistics on what percentage of City employees live in within City limits of Beloit.

Commissioner Hansen commented that Code Enforcement has not helped to improve the market in Beloit, which is evidenced by the small 3.9% growth statistic. Commissioner Spreitzer said that the Commission needs to be sure to compare that statistic in relation to the other Midwest statistics because slow growth has in the Midwest has not been unusual. Mr. Finnegan said that the percentage of rental in other Midwestern cities is much less than Beloit's percentage.

Commissioner Lawrence said that the low education level of Beloit residents stood out to her and feeds the stereotypes that Beloit has. A discussion followed regarding whether the higher educated people work here but live elsewhere. Commissioner Lawrence commented that many years ago a number of Beloit College Professors lived in the Merrill Neighborhood, but

not anymore. Commissioner Finnegan pointed out that there has been recent activity in the Merrill Neighborhood where many homes were purchased and rehabilitated in order generate interest in the neighborhood again.

Commissioner Hansen discussed gentrification and Commissioner Spreitzer explained that the situation in Beloit is difficult because if development activities raise the values of homes, it may attract higher income people but may make it unaffordable to people who are already living there, resulting in displacement. Commissioner Finnegan discussed the importance of financial literacy for people of all incomes and can become an impediment.

Commissioner Spreitzer suggested that the AI be presented at a City Council Meeting in April as a City Manager's presentation.

6. Discussion of Proposed Changes to the EOHRM Meeting Schedule

Staff explained that the Chair had suggested that the Commission decrease the amount of meetings to every-other month schedule rather than meeting every month due to the sporadic nature of the EOHRM duties. Commissioner Spreitzer asked staff whether there would be a special meeting scheduled if there were a hearing or other pressing issue, to which staff replied there would be.

Commissioner Finnegan asked staff for clarification on the average timeframe of the complaint process. Staff explained that it depends on the nature of the complaint; that some have lasted less than two weeks, and others have lasted over a year.

Commissioner Hansen moved to recommend changing the EOHRM regular meeting schedule to the third Wednesday every even month and Commissioner Lawrence seconded. Motion carried.

7. Review and Discussion of Fair Housing Month Activities

Staff explained that each year the Commission recommends activities to promote Fair Housing Month of April. She explained that there is usually a Fair Housing poster contest done by local children, and a Fair Housing Proclamation presented at the April City Council Meeting.

Commissioner Lawrence suggested contacting the Merrill Community Center again to ask if they would like to participate in the State Fair Housing Poster contest. She also suggested contacting the Art Department at the School District. Commissioner Spreitzer suggested emailing all of the principals at each school, and contacting Steve McNeal regarding the essay/poster contest. The Commission also suggested sending it to the Youth Department at the Library as well as Stateline Literacy Council. The Commission discussed having posters displayed at City Hall or the Beloit Library. The Commission also discussed holding a mock hearing every other year during Fair Housing month to bring awareness and offer training to Commissioners since there is so much turn over in the Commission. Commissioner Finnegan suggested having retired Judge Welker assist with the mock hearing because he has experience preparing fact patterns for mock hearings.

8. Upcoming Events

There were none discussed.

9. Adjournment

Commissioner Ohaegbulem moved for adjournment and Commissioner Hansen seconded. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 PM by Chairperson Finnegan.

Teri Downing

Director of Community and Housing Services