



CITY HALL • 100 STATE STREET • BELOIT, WI 53511

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

**Wednesday, March 18, 2015 at 5:30 PM**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 5:43PM by Chairperson Marilyn Sloniker. Present: Commissioners Marilyn Sloniker, Mary Weaver, Joe Hansen, Mike Zoril, Jennifer Perreault and Staff Representative Teri Downing. Excused: Commissioners Mary Weaver and Steve Howland. Councilor DeForest arrived at 6:06PM.

2. Approval of Minutes of the February 18, 2015 Meeting

Commissioner Zoril moved for approval and Chairperson Sloniker seconded. **Motion carried.**

3. Public Participation

No members of the public present when the agenda item was called. Two members of the public arrived at 6:04PM.

4. Update Annual Strategy to Address Impediments to Fair Housing

Staff read the staff report which explained that the Commission develops and annual strategy to respond to the various impediments to fair housing and recommendations that are listed in the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing (AI).

Staff clarified that the Annual Strategy is not a requirement of the AI, but a voluntary action done by the Commission to address obstacles to fair housing choice that were identified in the AI.

Councilor DeForest provided via email to the Commissioners five items she would like to address. Her email was included in the packet and discussed as follows:

**Item #1** was a suggestion that the Commission commit to formally tracking the composition of Boards with regard to membership in protected classes. Commissioner Zoril raised concern that this would be a quota and would exclude members of the majority from Boards and Commissions. Commissioner Hansen raised concern that the EOC already has difficulty filling and keeping seats and if the Commission limits the composition there will be even less of a pool of candidates to serve on the Commission. Council DeForest clarified that it would not be a quota, but more of an educational tool in order for the Commission to advertise and recruit members of protected classes that are underrepresented on Board and Commissions in the City.

Commissioner Perreault commented that it is generally unknown in the community when there are openings on Boards and Commissions and Commissioner Hansen agreed. Both stated that they did not know about this Commission or openings until a current Commissioner approached them to serve.

Commissioners agreed to informally inventory current Boards and Commissions but not to include it in the Strategy at this time.

**Item #2** was a suggestion to request that the City of Beloit's Human Resources Division develop a specific plan for recruitment and hiring of bilingual staff. Councilor DeForest said that this is a very important issue because there are very few City employees who can speak Spanish. There are currently only two City Hall employees who can speak Spanish.

She explained that the Commission would make a recommendation to City Council to direct the Human Resources Division to develop a plan or strategy, or hire a consultant to develop the plan.

There was some discussion about internal postings and filling of positions.

It was suggested to add this to the RFP for development of the AI.

**Item #3** was a suggestion to meet with staff of the Beloit Housing Authority and members of the Community Development Authority (CDA) to discuss housing payment standards and encourage consideration that higher payment is provided, even if this means less vouchers are issued. Councilor DeForest explained that by paying less for housing units it perpetuates segregation in our community, which is concerning. She also stated that she is concerned about the availability of quality rental units because landlords are unable to make a reasonable return on their investment so choose not to participate in the program. Commissioner Hansen agreed and added that with lower payment standards the property owner also cannot afford to adequately maintain the property which creates substandard housing.

Commissioner Zoril said a consequence of this could be that there will be too many people competing for the moderate-higher rentals which could have an adverse effect on the market. He added that he has concerns that the program may become an incentive for people to cut their own incomes in order to qualify for a Section 8 voucher. Commissioner Hansen and Councilor DeForest disagreed.

Commissioner Hansen explained that when there is substandard housing it attracts bad tenants and they flock to that area of the City. He said having a better housing stock will attract better, more responsible tenants which one reason he agrees with the Code Enforcement program. Commissioner Zoril stated that with a higher voucher amount the City will see less of a demand for lower quality deteriorating. Commissioners all agreed.

Commissioner Zoril said that the effect of this may be that the landlords who could not afford or refused to maintain their properties will no longer have tenants and they will walk away from their properties leaving them abandoned and deteriorating. He said

having numerous properties in this condition will cause a mass exodus of people from certain neighborhoods as the neighborhoods is go downhill. Commissioner Hansen agreed that this could happen but that another result could be that those same landlords might realize if they put some investment in their properties, they could receive more rent because the property value has increased.

Commissioner Perreault commented that raising the quality of the housing stock is not only good for the neighborhoods; it is good for the people who are renting the units.

Councilor DeForest requested that Housing Authority staff come to a future meeting to explain what options and limitations the Housing Authorities have regarding payment standards. Chairperson Sloniker suggested not having someone at the next meeting, but perhaps the meeting after.

**Item #4** was a suggestion to include testing in the Annual Strategy. Council DeForest also suggested that testing for housing discrimination be included in the RFP for education. She said she would like to see using this as an educational tool and not to “catch people”. Commissioner Hansen agreed. He said that some landlords are unaware of the rules and he hears from tenants that housing discrimination is happening.

**Item #5** was a suggestion related to inconsistent administration of the fair housing code and whether there is a formal policy for the oversight, training, and documentation of the fair housing code. She said if there is not, one should be developed. Staff explained that there is no formal policy, just what is outlined in the City’s ordinance. In the past, the staff member assigned to the EOC has been tasked with educating themselves and how to administer and enforce the ordinance. Councilor De Forest suggested that development of a policy should be included in the RFP as well.

5. Fair Housing Month Activities

Staff summarized the staff report and asked for suggestions for Fair Housing Month activities.

Chairperson Sloniker said that Blackhawk Bank is willing to perform educational seminars whenever the Commission suggests. She suggested having a smaller Committee including her and Commissioner Weaver to decide on seminar dates and other ideas.

6. Commissioner Comments and Upcoming Events

There were no comments or updates from Commissioners.

7. Next Meeting Date

Chairperson Sloniker announced the next meeting date as April 15, 2015.

8. Adjournment:

Commissioner Zoril made a motion to adjourn, and Commissioner Hansen seconded. **Motion carried.** The meeting was adjourned at 6:57PM by Chairperson Sloniker.

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Date approved by EOC

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Teri Downing,  
Director of Community and Housing Services