



CITY HALL • 100 STATE STREET • BELOIT, WI 53511

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

Wednesday, February 20, 2013 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Meeting was called to order at 5:32 PM by Chair Ricardo Valdez.

Present: Commissioners Rick Valdez, Joseph Hansen, Lexi Siatos, Matthew Finnegan, Marilyn Sloniker, Councilor Charles Kincaid, and Staff Representative Teri Downing.

Commissioner Lawrence arrived at 5:39 PM. Absent: Commissioner Marilyn Sloniker.

2. Approval of Minutes of the January 16, 2013 Meeting

Commissioner Hansen commented that a portion of the minutes on the second page seemed to be missing or had been deleted. Chairperson Valdez requested corrections be made to the minutes and that approval of the minutes be held over until the next meeting. Commissioner Hansen moved to table the minutes until the next meeting. Commissioner Finnegan seconded. Motion carried.

3. Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

4. Update on EOHR By-laws and Possible Commission Name Change from EOHR to Fair Housing Commission

Staff explained that a high level of detail and legal assistance is needed to revise the bylaws regarding some of the technical legal processes such as discovery and hearing procedures. For this reason there has been no further progress related to the EOHR bylaws at this time. Chairperson Valdez requested that this item be discussed at the next EOHR Meeting.

Staff suggested that the EOHR consider changing its name to the Fair Housing Commission or something similar in order to clarify the Commission's purpose to the public. Detailed discussion followed regarding the pros and cons of the name change. Commissioner Lawrence asked why we would consider changing the name. Commissioner Valdez explained that a name change would help the public understand the purpose and duties of the Commission. Commissioner Lawrence expressed concern that a name change would imply that the only focus of the Commission is Fair Housing, when the Commission has other duties regarding race relations in the City.

Commissioner Lawrence asked why the Commission only has authority to enforce the Fair Housing Code and not employment discrimination. Staff and Commissioner Valdez explained that the EOHR duties were changed in the ordinance over ten years ago by City Council.

Commissioner Kincaid asked if the Commission could do anything regarding employment discrimination. Staff explained that the Commission is allowed by ordinance to perform outreach, education, and provide recommendations regarding discriminatory activities, but the Commission's funding and enforcement is limited to Fair Housing activities.

Commissioner Valdez asked how many employment discrimination complaints on average the City receives per year. Staff explained that a few years ago the City would receive two or three complaints per year that involved employment discrimination or discrimination in public places, but has since provided education to City staff regarding where to refer people for these issues.

Commissioner Valdez requested that the City track employment discrimination complaints received by the City, and to contact the State to request information about how many complaints they receive for the Beloit area.

Commissioner Valdes also suggested that we discuss proposed name changes during the next meeting.

5. Review and Discussion of Fair Housing Month Activities

a. Poster Contest and Fair Housing Proclamation

Staff discussed participation in the annual Fair Housing Poster contest and acceptance of the Fair Housing Proclamation at City Council during the Fair Housing Month of April.

Commissioner Lawrence suggested nominating the Merrill Center for the City Diversity Award through the National League of Cities, but the Commissioners informed her that the nomination deadline had passed.

Commissioner Valdez asked if we have ever done any local contests, or whether the City just participated in the State's Fair Housing contests. Staff explained that the City has only participated in the State's program due to lack of interest by the School District and local agencies. Chairperson Valdez requested that staff contact Merrill Community Center, Stateline Literacy Council, and the Beloit Public Library to coordinate a local Fair Housing Poster Contest.

The Commission reviewed the Fair Housing Proclamation. Commissioner Siatos moved for approval of the Fair Housing Proclamation as written and Commissioner Hansen seconded. Motion carried.

b. Possible Mock Hearing

Staff explained that Chairperson Valdez had requested discussion of whether to conduct another mock hearing in April of 2014. Preparation of a mock hearing must begin at least six to nine months in advance so the law professor can work the hearing into his curriculum and syllabus. Chairperson Valdez added that the bylaws would be completed by then, so it would be a perfect opportunity to give the new procedures a "dry run". Commissioner Finnegan suggested that the fact pattern pertain to domestic

violence or mental illness because these laws are ambiguous and confusing to landlords, especially when landlords do not have knowledge of the mental illness.

Commissioner Hansen mentioned that retired Judge Welker drafted a fact pattern for a mock hearing conducted on tenant landlord training. Commissioner Kincaid suggested asking Judge Henderson. The Commission discussed possible ways to get in contact with retired Judge Welker, but asked staff to try to find a contact for him. Staff suggested writing a letter to him asking whether he would be interested.

Chairman Valdez suggested placing the mock hearing on June's agenda for final discussion and decision on whether to move forward.

6. Commissioner Comments and Upcoming Events

Commissioner Lawrence announced the following events:

- 2/22/2013: Annual Hometown Heroes Luncheon at the Angel Museum at 11:00AM. Cost is \$25 per person.
- 2/22/2013: Telethon fund raiser at the Merrill Center. Anyone can call in with a donation.
- 2/26/2013: Blackhawk Technical College, presentation on Black History.

Commissioner Finnegan announced that the landlord trainings sponsored by the Beloit Property Manager's Association are continuing and have been very well attended with approximately 45 landlords; many from Beloit. Commissioner Hansen commented that there were many new landlords that found the trainings very helpful.

Councilor Kincaid announced that the Rotary Center will be hosting their Rise and Shine event on the first Saturday in March, and there will be an auction.

Staff announced that Alexis Siatos has indicated that this will be her last EOHRC meeting as she needs to step off the Board due to health reasons.

7. Next Meeting Date: April 17, 2013

8. Adjournment

Commissioner Lawrence moved for adjournment and Commissioner Finnegan seconded. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:30PM by Chairperson Valdez.

Date approved by EOHRC

Teri Downing
Director of Community and Housing Services