

Human Relations Commission
CMO Conference Room
519 Washington
Minutes
July 25th, 2019

Meeting called to order by Werksma 5:36 pm.

Present: Barbara Lee-VanHorssen, Reyna Masko, Wes McGee, Alexa Redick, Denny Swartout, Angela Tran, Louann Werksma, Sam Woitesheck

Absent: Brummitt, Kley

Approval of Agenda: Agenda approved; motion by Swartout, second by Redick, all in favor

Approval of Minutes: Minutes approved; motion by Tran, seconded by McGee, all in favor

Welcome guests: Alicia Miller and Leah James

Point of Order: Werksma; Leah James and Alicia Miller to speak now in advance of agenda

- a. HRC and LEDA were founded because of the cross-burning incident on the Ferrysburg Property of the James family in 1996. Leah was 12 at the time, attending Lake Hills Elementary School. She went on to graduate from GHHS in 2002, moved out of the community and moved back with her family last year. She attended in order to address the Commission regarding her experience in Grand Haven. What follows is a summary of her words: She fears that Grand Haven is incapable of change. She lived in Muskegon and sent her kids to Muskegon schools, but decided it was worth having her kids face the prejudice in Grand Haven rather than have her kids be exposed to the “senseless violence” in Muskegon schools. It was better for her family to move to the Tri-Cities. She works in downtown Grand Haven, lives in Spring Lake Township and has four kids, 10, 12, 14 and 16. All go to different schools in GHAPS. McGee discussed the need to teach kids black history in many forms. James responded that both she and her father, Pastor Ron James, who now lives in Georgia, ensure that her children are exposed to Black culture.
- b. Alicia Miller – Grew up in Grand Haven and graduated from GHHS. Went into the Army first, couldn’t afford housing in GH and moved to Muskegon. Son struggled in Muskegon schools but is now at West Michigan Academy of Arts and Academics, and is succeeding. Lived in SL but couldn’t deal with all the driving and then decided to sell, and move to Grand Landing. The rest of the details (including her personal perspective) are all outlined in the complaint filed.
- c. Turned discussion back to the group about the difficulty in filing a complaint with the committee. We should work with the City of Grand Haven to ensure that those who want to file a complaint have easy access to do so. Should be on the main page of the City website. We overall need to increase awareness of racial issues in the community and that shared network of struggle in Grand Haven – power in numbers.
- d. In addition, people do not understand how to file discrimination complaints or what happens after they do so. In general, also work in increasing social media awareness.

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- e. Two new commissioners – welcomed Angela Tran, a junior, will have two years with the commission. Welcomed Sam Woitescheck – a senior, will be with the commission for one year.

Old Business:

a: **Dinner and Dialogue Update** – subcommittee met in June and has not met since. Brummitt has solidified someone who wants to host the dinners, but we have not heard from her about further details. We will table this discussion until Brummitt is present. Keeping in mind going forward the C3 is eager – and has put a financial incentive on the table - to be involved in an immigration topic dinner in December. There is a pressing importance to move forward for donors and August dinner –D&D committee members asked to make an effort to reach out to Brummitt

Werksma noted she met with Ben Knight, the Adult Services librarian at Loutit District Library –who has agreed to assist the commission with varying displays of cultural materials, beginning September 1 in recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month, Black History month, etc.. Werksma added that Knight and his spouse, who recently moved to the city, would be a great addition for the “new people in GH” dinner.

b. **Hispanic Heritage Fiesta update:** Masko reported she has raised \$11,000 in sponsorships, about 50% of goal. At July 15th city council meeting the Fiesta was presented for approval. Alcohol was the main concern in finalizing a decision. Certain council members made their case about this new and exciting opportunity for the city, and eventually all members of the council (5-0) voted in favor of having the fiesta. Rev. Jared Cramer, pastor at St. John’s Episcopal Church, spoke eloquently, articulating the importance of what the migrant and Hispanic communities bring to West Michigan. Robyn Afrik, new Ottawa County Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, was introduced at the beginning of the council meeting – Masko felt that Afrik’s introduction set the stage for the eventual appreciation and acceptance of the fiesta.

I. HRC’s role at the fiesta will be: cosponsor, and will work a welcome table. People can sign up for dinner and dialogues, and we can bring pictures and materials from former dinners. Website for more information is www.grandhavenfiesta.org

II. Commissioner input on teen activities: Go through GHAPS to share teen presence – possibility for a partnership/sponsorship? Send the word out through weekly Tracy Wilson e-mails at the high school. Put a teen emphasis in the marketing. Redick will look into pricing of a snapchat filter – Woitescheck will put a press release in the paper directed at teens

c. **Loutit Library Partnership:** As mentioned above, Ben Knight will assist the fiesta with a display in September for Hispanic Heritage month – starting September 1st. Redick will work on some Fiesta marketing material and send to Knight, who will include it in display and elsewhere in Library (Columbus Street lobby cases). Masko will

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reach out to community connections for Hispanic materials/history to put on display.
McGee will chat with Knight about materials for Black History.

d. Beach Wheelchair Signs: Tran created new beautiful flyers and had them printed and laminated by VerDuins Printing – we will wait to put them up next year. Have a goal of getting wheelchair history from former commissioners. Wheelchair is a gift to the city – Werksma will put flyer on FB – Woitesheck to put something in tribune about the chair being available for Coast Guard Festival.

New Business:

- a. **Budget Update:** Kleyn is absent— no new updates. Still have not heard if we received any funding from the 2019-20 City Budget.
- b. **Discrimination Complaint Update:** Since last meeting, Officer Wright met with complainant. Officer found no evidence of racial-based wrong-doing. But, Officer did open a new complaint file in the matter to separate it from the complaint of the other tenant. Officer closed the incident as a civil issue/neighbor dispute. All we can do at this point is ensure that we are brought in right away to handle these issues – that we can facilitate from a community/civil standpoint. Commissioners need to encourage those to fill out a complaint on discrimination if party is comfortable doing so. What can HRC do in the future to advise public safety on appropriate cultural awareness issues?
- c. **Invitation to Robyn Afrik to attend future HRC meeting:** Commission wishes to Robyn in her new position and would like to hear her plans for the county. There will be a Facebook Live event on July 31st with Al Vandenberg and Afrik answering questions of citizens about this new office/position.
- d. No updates for **Visionary Award** – committee will meet to tie up loose ends in September.
- e. **HRC schedules and processes:** Werksma proposed that, in future years, HRC not meet in July. HRC agreed to continue working on pending matters but not to meet in August. Discussion of setting HRC work up in Google Drive. Better for streamlining documents and communication. Will revisit after GHHF.
- f. **Correspondence Sent/Received:** None
- g. **Agency Updates:** Inspire Summer Series – Disabilities – Mondays at 6:30PM.
 - I. August 12 – Stacey Trowbridge – Disability Network
 - II. August 19 – Tammi Ryan – OTR/L, Shoreline Center
 - III. August 26 – Laura Ruhle, Alzheimer’s Association

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- IV. Topics for next Inspire season to come soon – September 16th – townhall with teenagers panel – flyer for fiesta to be distributed there
- V. Salmon Run to eRace Stigma- September 14th at 8AM – ghsalmonfest.com – register at www.active.com
- VI. Discussion about the cultural immersion event that Momentum Center is planning with Muskegon and Grand Haven – looking for adults to go – Barbara Lee-VanHorsen asked for HRC to recommend others to attend– D&D participants that enjoy being involved may be good for it.
- VII. Momentum Center is transitioning its branding away from Extended Grace.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:35 pm

Next meeting is Thursday, September 26th, 2019.