

Chaska Human Rights Minutes

Thursday, April 25

Meeting called to order at 6:30

1. Roll Call

Present: Bean, Carlson, Dunbar, Haga, Leggett, Welvaert, White

Absent: Scarborough, Spreadbury

2. Motion to adopt the agenda. Moved by Carlson, seconded by White. Motion approved.

3. Open Forum:

Jenny Stone, ECCS School Board Member

Stone introduced herself as someone who taught and coached at Chaska High School for a number of years and is the newest member of the school board. She said we live in a strong and caring community with great schools, but we have a lot of work to do so everyone in our community feels welcome, safe, and supported. Noted her gratitude that so many HRC members were there to speak at the last school board meeting and agrees we need to do better for our kids. The more we communicate, the more trust we can build. She also wanted to note for the record that she didn't know anything about latest racial incident at CHS at the April community conversation. She was disappointed, and felt disingenuous, and was sorry.

As is common practice with a district of 10,000 students, behavior issues stop at the superintendent level. She believes this incident should have brought forth to the public. In spite of that misstep, she believes community dialogue was progress in the right direction. Stone came to the HRC meeting to learn and listen, and is committed to doing the hard work necessary to make change. She wants to partner with all of community leaders to create safe and nurturing schools for all of our students and the life of our community depends on it.

Leggett thanked her for a powerful, authentic, and heartfelt statement made in the City Council Chambers. We have children that are hurting, the community is hurting. The community is getting a name right now – we have to decide as a community if we're going to change that. The school is just a symptom. City Council has to decide what they want to do. He noted he was encouraged there's been some joint activity. Mayor Windschitl was at the school board meeting and put out a statement. For this community to truly come out of this positively - which we must – it will take the community to step up and do something. He thanked Stone for taking the first step as the leader he knows she is.

Carlson thanked her for coming.

Kabat noted the city is working on opening dialogue with the school district. That starts with the city working to understand better what the true nature and nuance of things at the school district are, but this is a community issue and we have to understand all sides. Quality of education is really important to the entire community, which increases the sense of urgency.

4. Motion to approve minutes.

Motion to approve by Carlson, seconded by Bean. Motion approved.

5. Treasurer's Report:

No expenditures yet this year, so balance remains \$2,000.

6. Old Business

a. Joint Work Session, June 17, 4:30 – 7:00 pm

Reminder of June 17 Joint Work session.

b. Discussion: Equity and Inclusion

Welvaert read a statement she developed on behalf of the commission. She noted there was a lot in her heart this week, and the need to create a platform for these voices and back them up with action. She noted appreciation for the work of the commission on these issues, being present in the community and working to help heal.

Kabat provided an update on what the city's been working on following the mayor's statement:

- Three key steps

- Dialogue with school district; there is a meeting scheduled next week. The discussion will talk about city work, and taking a leadership role in recognition that this is a community topic. There will be discussion about partnership to achieve those goals.
- The city is working with the YMCA about possibility to do some training, open up some community conversations. They met with the Y today, who has been doing programs for some time around equity, race, dialogue. They opened a new center in Minneapolis that among other things provides training on unconscious bias. They also have a lot of training they can bring to communities and have done so in places like Hastings and Burnsville. Talking with them it became clear that this could be a really good opportunity for the city. There aren't specifics yet but the city will work with the Y to develop a proposal. Many community leaders will be involved in that conversation, makes sense for Jen in her role as chair to be a key part.
 - During the meeting with the Y the city committed to sending all staff to the YMCA to receive this training on unconscious bias. That's a six-month process, but every staff member will receive that training. There is also hope that the City Council can participate in some way, possibly something condensed available for commissions.
- The city is also exploring working with a group to do a community dialogue. YMCA is part of that conversation, they've also talked with HueLife, who has a lot of experience working with communities on strategic planning, broader community discussions. Not just equity and diversity but other potential contentious situations. The city group will look at both proposals, and talk about building. Will look at Y proposal, HueLife proposal, with city group. Can also look at opening up dialogue and building capacity at a leadership level, too.

Leggett said it was great to see the city taking a stance. It would have been good to see the city respond faster, because these issues have been going on for quite a while and it's taken a long time to recognize it was happening and for city to engage but better late than never. He noted that the city hasn't had a real community conversation yet – the one the district sponsored last week was controlled conversation. We need to make sure everyone gets to engage and all voices are heard. The meeting at Clover Ridge didn't meet expectations, a lot of folks walked out of there feeling very disappointed. If the city is going into a meeting with the school district, be really clear what the outcomes are. People are looking for action. Leggett encouraged the city leadership to act on what they can do to change the culture in the city – that's what's going to reverberate. These impacts have lasting ramifications.

Carlson said she went to the community meeting expecting to have dialogue. There were no interpreters there, so rights of those who were disabled were not met, no introductions were made. Some people were walking around the room, there were discussions at the tables; one of two community members at a table filled with school employees reported they all said they were instructed not to speak negatively. She felt the apologies made were hollow and walked away feeling very unsatisfied. She noted another incident has occurred at Chaska High School, and she continues to be deeply troubled. She suggested partnering with school board and members of city staff to work towards resolving these issues – respecting, honoring, listening, and acting so that there is a positive change.

Carlson told Stone she was thankful she was at the HRC meeting and was troubled that no one bothered to introduce the school board members at the community dialogue meeting. Dialogue didn't even occur, it wasn't community engagement. Something has to change. Process, education, opportunities take time. She's glad to hear the city and commission are stepping up, but deeply saddened that this is occurring in our community and we as the HRC have not stepped forward and said what can we do. What is it we can do, how soon can we get this going?

White asked if the HRC can host a community dialogue.

Kabat said that's what the city is currently working on. The YMCA doesn't want to tell the city what that looks like, but it's a great place for the HRC to engage and act as a sounding board for that process. Intent is to have these groups assist with one. What's said in the HRC meetings informs him, it informs the council, they read meetings and watch minutes. What happens at these meetings is not isolated to this moment in time, but is heard and shared. Community dialogue is a good idea, and it's important for us all to be on the same page. We need to have professionals in the room who can help lead and guide that discussion.

Leggett asked what are we advising. The commission knows there's a problem, we know the city wants to go after it the right way; an attempt was made that wasn't very good. He urged the city to move faster, and get to work. People are in jobs to do this kind of work. Making a community work well is the mayor's job, that's the superintendent's job, that's the city administrator's job. React as if your kids depend on it. There are kids even today who continue to have issues and not feel safe. The city has to act.

Dunbar noted she was at a table at the community conversation and only two of the others at that table weren't district employees. There was a list of five questions and answers were provided by going around the table but there was no indication how that information would be used. She realizes these things take time but we're almost to the end of the school year and there are kids hurting right now who shouldn't have to go the summer with no resolution that something's going to happen. If the commission doesn't have concrete ideas tonight we're going to fall way behind.

Kabat noted that the YMCA is preparing a proposal, hoping to move forward with it in the next couple of weeks. Dunbar asked to be notified via email when something moves forward.

Welvaert said it's the same thing that people have been saying at school board meetings - we need some communication and transparency. Everyone keeps hearing about things in the works but have no idea what they are. Getting communications out to the people in Chaska is important, and they don't have to be detailed, but just who/what, timelines and deadlines. People need to see the work along with increased visibility and effort from leadership. That's going to be reassuring to community members.

Welvaert said she's been struggling this week with how to change the culture. It's not something you can say – you can't say don't do that and it won't occur anymore. She's going to meet with a couple of commissioners from the Saint Louis Park and Bloomington HRCs to understand what they've done. This isn't to fix Chaska, but find out what worked for them and get some takeaways to look at things from a different perspective.

Carlson said this isn't an issue that's just important for parents who have kids in the schools, it's important to our community. Chaska is our home, ISD112 is the school that serves our homes. if we don't have good school systems here, then people will choose not to come to Chaska, but go to Waconia, or someplace else. That would be a shame.

Dunbar noted that the meeting didn't provide a lot of direction, but if there are updates before May we should get them sooner.

Kabat said the intent would be so share updates.

c. Census – Update on city involvement

- a. It is probably not possible to do a complete count city process at this point but there may be other ideas to promote everyone getting counted. Andrew Vernon has offered to come out and speak to the commission at our next meeting. Mayor and city council are welcome to attend. Carlson also noted he will be able to provide the HRC with material to hand out at River City Days about why it's important. There may be some funding available through the state but that's not certain.

Motion to direct staff to formally invite city council to attend the presentation made by Dunbar, seconded by Haga. Motion approved.

d. Equity letter revisited

Members complimented Welvaert on the letter she'd read earlier in the meeting and encouraged wider distribution. Motion to send letter, with small revisions, to Herald, city social media made by Carlson, seconded by Leggett. Motion approved.

e. River City Days

An update will be provided at the next meeting with concrete plans and actions.

7. New Business

Leggett asked for a clarification from last meeting regarding open meetings. Welvaert noted that the June training will clarify many of the outstanding questions.

Kabat noted that those on the commission are appointed members of the HRC, so whether in this chamber or not members are commissioners. Obviously, everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but any time members are at a public forum and there's a quorum present (>4) there's the potential to be in violation of open meeting law. There's some nuance to that of course, and it's up to a court to determine. His advice is to avoid having a quorum at an event to avoid even the perception of an open meetings law violation. The reality is more likely than not if commissioners are at a community event they're not making decisions, but it could put us in a position to defend ourselves. If HRC members anticipate four or more are going to be somewhere let him know so he can post it. If at all possible, avoid having a quorum.

Welvaert indicated that practice could be a positive PR piece, actually, if commissioners let Nate know and he posts something it shows level of engagement. This is why the training is important.

Kabat urged, as HRC moves forward, to do as the City Council does. The best practice is to figure out who is going to represent HRC at particular meetings. That's the way public bodies frequently approach this sort of thing. Show of support piece is important, and makes sense on occasion, but that needs to be balanced strategically.

8. Our next meeting date is May 23, 2019.

9. Motion to adjourn made by Carlson, seconded by Leggett. Meeting adjourned at 7:42.