

City of Lawrence
Lawrence Human Relations Commission
May 19, 2016 – 5:30 PM
Minutes

Members Present: Carl Edwards, Sarah Bloxsom, Katie Barnett,

Members Absent: Martha Taylor, Jacqueline Becks, Mike Machell, Caleb Stephens

Staff Present: Scott Wagner, Toni Wheeler, Elizabeth Hafoka

Public Present: James Dunn, Sara Toms, Bill Larzalere

Commission Meeting Called to Order

The Lawrence Human Relations Commission (LHRC) Meeting was called to order by Chairman Carl Edwards, at 5:35 p.m. in the Carnegie Building, located at 200 West 9th Street, Lawrence, Kansas 66044. The meeting was held in the East Gallery room.

Chairman Edwards welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced himself and provided background about the Lawrence Human Relations. He noted that a quorum of the commission was not present for the meeting tonight. Therefore, the commission cannot take binding action. The previous minutes from the February 18, 2016 meeting will not be approved nor will elections for officers take place. These items will be placed on the August 18, 2016 agenda. As the commission is hosting a guest from the Unified Government – Sara Toms, it was decided that the commission would continue to meet and work through the agenda items.

Introductions

Sara Toms introduced herself. She is on staff with the Unified Government of Kansas City, Kansas. She has been given the task of reviving the Human Relations Commission of the Unified Government. She has been visiting this afternoon with staff of the City Attorney's office and met with Steven Lehwald in the prosecutor's office. She is here tonight to observe the work of the Lawrence Human Relations Commission.

Commission Updates

Chairman Edwards notified the commission that there is one open seat on the board. Scott Wagner noted that if commissioners know of persons of interest who would be willing to serve, that they should get in touch with the City Manager's Office or Mayor Amyx who makes the appointments.

Receive Staff Report

Elizabeth Hafoka provided an update on pending and closed human relations cases.

Case Report Update – 3 cases have been closed since the last meeting - all were housing and were related to emotional support animals. One case was successfully conciliated. Two cases were found to be no probable cause.

One case is currently open – housing, related again to emotional support animals.

Chairman Edwards asked if staff was seeing a trend related to cases involving emotional support animals. Elizabeth Hafoka responded by saying that it seemed like that and from her training, she thought HUD was also seeing a trend in such cases. Commissioner Bloxsom asked if there was a pattern among certain landlords in such cases. Director Wheeler noted that staff had not seen a trend or pattern among particular groups or landlords in town.

Outreach Activities

Scott Wagner provided an update on recent outreach activities.

Scott Wagner reported on activities that recognized April as Fair Housing Month. On April 5, 2016 – the Lawrence City Commission proclaimed April to be Fair Housing Month in Lawrence. Chairman Edwards was there to receive the proclamation. The proclamation process was always a nice opportunity for the Lawrence Human Relations Commission to be in front of the City Commission and to raise awareness and be recognized for the work they do in the community.

The 2nd annual Fair Housing Month poster competition was held this year. A new community partner – Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc. signed up to help sponsor the event this year in addition to USD 497 and the Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority. At the urging of Commissioner Bloxsom preschoolers were added to the competition this year. The City received over 115 entries. 1,000 competition flyers were printed and distributed at area schools. Advertising was also utilized on the Journal World website. Everyone that submitted an entry received a Fair Housing Month t-shirt that utilized artwork submitted in last year's competition. Finalists were on display at the library from April 1st to April 25th. The winners were set to be recognized before the Lawrence City Commission on April 26th. However, that afternoon there were severe weather forecasts for the area and it was decided to postpone the recognition. A couple of families braved the weather, so those in attendance at the April 26th commission meeting were honored. Chairman Edwards presented the awards that evening along with Commissioner Humphrey. Another recognition is scheduled before the USD 497 school board on May 23rd. Chairman Edwards and Commissioner Bloxsom will attend along with Scott Wagner.

Other Fair Housing month activities included an educational lunch on April 28th held in partnership with Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority. Betty Bottiger, the HUD District VII regional director was the guest speaker. The lunch was held in the Carnegie Building and was very well attended. Ms. Bottiger spoke on the AFFH rule and answered questions from the audience. There was also a Fair Housing Month insert that was included in the City's April utility bills. The insert used art work that was submitted in last year's poster competition. The City's communications staff also tweeted about Fair Housing Month using the City's Twitter account. There was also use of the outreach videos as they were promoted on the City's Facebook page along with the Fair Housing Month poster competition.

Scott Wagner provided an update on the 50th anniversary of Lawrence's Fair Housing ordinance planning. Thomas Arnold, a graduate student in history and a volunteer researcher with Watkins Community Museum is taking a class this spring on Oral History. As part of the class, he is required to submit an oral history project plan. Scott Wagner indicated that Mr. Arnold has submitted a draft document which provides a plan, a budget and a project description for the oral history part of this commemoration. Scott asked that the subcommittee of the

commission that was formed to help plan other community events consisting of Commissioner Machell and Commissioner Stephens meet to start discussing other possible events.

Staff Training

Elizabeth Hafoka reported that Steven Lehwald in her office had attended week 2 of the National Fair Housing Training Academy training in Washington, D.C. on April 18-22. The training was focused on the legal framework of investigations and the different types of evidence in discrimination cases.

Scott Wagner reported that he had attended a HUD region VII training on May 17 held at the HUD regional offices in Kansas City, Kansas. The training focused on the AFFH rule, especially on the public participation component of that rule and was very helpful.

Open Meetings Act Training

Director Wheeler advised that since a majority of the commission was not present, that training on this important Kansas law be held at the August meeting.

Commission Items

Chairman Edwards noted that in the last meeting minutes, several subcommittees had formed. He asked for updates. Commissioner Barnett provided an update on the work of her subcommittee formed to offer training for the community. She noted that Martha Taylor and Caleb Stephens were also on the committee and they had developed an agenda for training. They were looking at a one day seminar focused on Animals and the Law. Katie Barnett would present as that is her practice area. They were looking at a speaker who could focus on the Science of Animals from a behavioral health standpoint. They would also present some Fair Housing Act training and had contacted Kristi McTigh of the HUD Region VII office to provide that. Scott Wagner also noted that he had met with Teresa Baker of Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc. and they were also interested in providing Fair Housing Act training for the community. After commission discussion, it was decided that the subcommittee should meet with staff to plan further details of the event and have some recommendations in place for the August 18 commission meeting.

Public Comment

Bill Larzalere thanked the commission for the work they are doing and applauded the efforts to offer training in Lawrence. James Dunn asked about the planned training and if it address who responsibility it is to protect the interests of animals – especially those that may be neglected by renters or tenants. Commissioner Barnett mentioned that there are social service agencies that serve low income families and that maybe they could have an information table at the event.

Adjournment

The commission adjourned at 6:05 P.M.