ONONDAGA COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MINUTES

DECEMBER 21, 2016

Commissioners attending : Bruce Carter, Shiu-Kai Chin, Crystal Doody, Daniel Fellman, Starr Guckert (via telephone), Douglas Mackey, Suzette Melendez, Montanette Murphy, Francis Parks, David Pasinski, Gabriel Ramos, Leonardo Sanchez, Mary Alice Smothers, Rosalie Young.

Commissioners excused: Rev. Bernard Alex, Joyce Suslovic

Due to a problem unlocking the meeting room, the meeting scheduled to begin at 5:30 actually began at 5:41 pm.

Francis McMillan Parks asked for a moment of silence in memory of the Lockerbie victims. Barrie Gewanter asked that we also remember those who perished in Germany during the Holocaust.

ShiuKai introduced Sally Santangelo, Director of CNY Fair Housing as a visitor, followed by the commissioner introductions with each introducing themselves and their positions in the community.

Bruce Carter produced November 2016 minutes based on Barrie Gewanter’s notes. Since there were no copies, Dan Fellman moved that we grant preliminary approval until Barrie can circulate the minutes for review.

There was discussion about which possible commissioner candidates to send to the Mayor for her selection and whether all her possible choices had to live in the city of Syracuse. Dan moved that we send the list of 13 candidates regardless of residence as well as Olive Sephuma who had not definitely agreed to serve on the Commission. Crystal seconded the motion which passed unanimously. Leonardo, as chair, agreed to send the resumes on to the Mayor as the motion suggested.

Barrie provided an update on staffing in the HR Office. In response to a related request from Barrie, Dan moved that the chair appoint a non-officer recorder to work with Barrie to produce and distribute minutes. There was unanimous approval. Barrie provided updates on upcoming Diversity Trainings. 5 Commissioners signed on to participate in trainings on 2/7 and 3/9. Barrie reviewed 5 recent discrimination allegations in intakes received at HRC office including:

Racial Bias Alleged in Gas Service to woman at Kwik Fill in Liverpool, Allegation that SPD Officer searched genital area of male in traffic stop, Nob Hill Apts. not renewing leases for ARC clients with Dev. Disabilities. Allegation that state agency targeting privately owned day cares with African-American Owner/operators in 4 high minority Syracuse zip codesm & 2 Medical Day Programs refusing to provide foreign language interpreters

Barrie reported that 2 MLK events were coming up. Francis reported on the Martin Luther King commemoration plans for the community, as well as Veterans events. Barrie asked about having a table at the program at Nottingham High School. Francis suggested that she contact Ginny Yeardon at the Syracuse University Hendricks Dean’s office. Dave, Suzette, Leonard, Bruce and Mary Alice agreed to attend. Dan will attend if he is in Syracuse.

Barrie provided an update on the activity of the JCOC and distributed a chart with some some case stats. She also mentioned that the Inclusive Emergency Task Force was assisting Mr. Whelan from Niagara University in outreach and publicity for a 3/7-8 train the trainer training for law enforcement interactions with people with disabilities.

Starr suggested that any activity we attend in the community include an accommodations statement which Barrie agreed to do.

Bruce sent out a new draft governance document. Several typographical corrections were suggested by commissioners. Dan moved to approve the draft preliminarily until we get feedback from the county attorney’s office with any added suggestions or edits.

There was discussion of the appointment of a Commission chair and vice-chair. Shiu-Kai declined to continue as chair. Crystal moved that Leonardo should be chair and Dan Fellman should be Co--chair. The motion passed unanimously. During the discussion, it was recognized that we need to have input from all races, religions and backgrounds while working for human rights

Meeting dates for Feb and March were selected. Mary Alice Smothers offered PEACE Inc. as a meeting location for January Meeting.

Barrie briefly discussed the history of fair practice ordinances locally and statewide and then introduced Sally Santangelo.

Sally explained that HUD requires a report every 5 years regarding segregation in the county and how this correlates to opportunity. Thirteen states have Source of Income (SOI) legislation. Such legislation in New York exists in NYC, Buffalo, Nassau, Suffolk and some towns in Western NY. New communities are adding SOI legislation frequently.

Source of income refers not just to Section 8, but includes public assistance, SSI and SSI/D. When people with vouchers are concentrated in low income areas, they cannot find housing because landlords do not accept Section 8 in time and holders lose vouchers. They spend 5-6 years on waiting lists, then have to wait again. Sometimes lists are closed for several years. Of all advertisements looked at on Craig’s lists, only one in the county said Section 8 was acceptable while 90 said they would not accept Section 8 vouchers. Results correlated with 2/3 of voucher holders living in areas with low economic opportunity – low income, poor housing stock, high environmental impact, low educational outcomes, lower access to jobs, and limited proximity to transit.

Sally reported that landlords cannot refuse people based solely on SOI, but can do other screening. Sally stated that Fair Housing CNY gets about 400 housing complaints a year and does about 150 undercover tests of housing discrimination a year. Section 8 is a proxy for racial discrimination. The result is discrimination based on race, income and disability.

Barrie explained that the Commission could decide on a strategy of promoting a law to deal with SOI as a stand-alone piece of legislation or as an amendment to an existing law. It was decided that the Advocacy Committee would work on a plan and report back to the full Commission.

All the committees were to meet before the January meeting. Shui-Kai would be put on a committee. Francis would serve on both Education and Advocacy and Gabe would serve on the Law Enforcement committee. Gabe Ramos was added to the Law Enforcement Community Relations Committee

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm.