

MINUTES OF THE WEST HARTFORD HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING OF FEB. 1, 2023
7 P.M. ELMWOOD COMMUNITY CENTER

Attendance:

Co-chairs Esam Boraey and Dawn Ennis, Commissioner Ted Mancini, Secretary Aurora Melita and Facilitator Pramod Pradhan were present.

Treasurer Eric Schoenburg, Commissioner Kristyn Rosen-Jacobs, our two new commissioners (Mark Linabury and Cara Paiuk) were absent and excused.

Dawn Ennis volunteered to take minutes.

The commission welcomed Ann Galer, Investigator at the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities to deliver a presentation and to answer questions.

Aurora Melita asked: How do you educate public on investigations and do what you do?

- Ms. Galer responded that her colleague Anna Mitchell's primary role is education and outreach and that the WHHRC may want to invite her to speak at one of our meetings.
- Ms. Galer said her role is to make people aware of CHRO's mission.
- She is putting together a symposium on the Holocaust and hopes to invite local leaders to discuss the Holocaust and related issues in the community.
- Many young people, she said, don't know much about the Holocaust, which seems to reflect the growing trend of Holocaust deniers. Ms. Galer said she wants to tie together this issue with the history of human rights and the history of slavery.
- Ms. Galer expressed an interest in coordinating with the WHHRC to work on human rights.

Aurora Melita asked: Tell us what you do as an investigator?

- Ms. Galer explained the CHRO has so many cases, but not enough staff
- Her job is to check if the CHRO has jurisdiction when someone files a complaint, and whether that individual has a valid complaint.
- She drafts discrimination complaints and collects affidavits, most of which she explained are employment-based.
- She files them, gets them notarized, and employers are served notice. They have 30 days to respond, and there's a 15-day extension available which is very often requested.
- The company at the center of the complaint is offered an option to submit a written rebuttal.
- The case assessment review is performed by CHRO's legal department.
- If CHRO is retained, the commission first tries to settle the case out of court.
- The company and the complainants are required to engage in mandatory mediation.
- Ms. Galer works as both a mediator as well as conducting full investigations for CHRO.
- The task of fact finding, she said, is now split among investigators to ensure no bias arises from mediation, which is confidential and provided free of charge.
- However, the employers usually hire attorneys.

Dawn Ennis excused herself to attend another board meeting via Zoom at 7:30 p.m. Esam Boraey took minutes from this point forward.

Ted Mancini asked: Can you add a Holocaust denier to the event to hear their perspective and maybe refute their arguments?

- Ms. Galer responded: “We are still in phase one and we don’t have a specific plan yet. We haven’t reached that point yet in our plan.”
- At this point, the WHHRC thanked Ms. Galer and was asked if there is anything else? She thanked the commission and departed.

Aurora Melita delivered her report on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Celebration.

- She gave a full run of the event and the feedback.
- Next time we need to prepare the room reservation better.
- We should consider inviting more vendors to attend and to share their work with us.
- We should consider adding a projection screen to provide translation for the articles of the declaration read in languages other than English, and to underscore those that are read in English.

Eric Schoenberg sent a report regarding the adoption of a Definition of Anti-Semitism proposed to the Town Council via Mayor Shari Cantor.

- Esam Boraey read the message from Eric:
- “Through Dawn’s help we were able to find out that the reason that our recommendation to adopt the definition had not yet been adopted was because the mayor wanted to get feedback from the Anti Defamation League, the Jewish Federation, and the Jewish Community Relations Council on their positions on the definition.
- “I reached out to all three and am happy to report that the ADL had already written a letter in support.
- “I have already spoken with the Jewish Federation and the Jewish Community Relations Council and know that they do support the definition, however, it has taken a bit longer than anticipated to get the letter.
- “I am extremely confident that they will provide the letter and fully expect them to do it shortly.”
- Eric concluded that once he receives those last two letters, he expects that the mayor will approve our recommendation and the Town Council will formally adopt the definition.

Agenda Items

The murder of Tyre Nichols in Memphis

- Commissioners discussed the issue of race, crime and police.
- Due to lack of a quorum, Esam Boraey postponed a vote on any action by the WHHRC in response to Nichols’ murder by Memphis police officers to its next meeting March 1.
- Dawn returned at 8:11 p.m. She shared a sample statement by other boards

- She suggested that the WHHRC should put out a statement on social media.
- Aurora Melita suggested the subcommittee can write a social media post.
- Dawn Ennis volunteered to write a post for the subcommittee to consider.
- Ted Mancini suggested that we should not consider the color of the victim as relevant.

Online holiday posts

- Discussed briefly and further discussion postponed until next meeting March 1.
- Aurora Melita volunteered to collate the previous posts and share them with the commissioners for our reference in advance of the next meeting.

WHHRC member outreach

- We have one vacancy after a new commissioner approved by the mayor withdrew.
- It was suggested we can look back to the pool of applicants and see who the Town considers eligible.
- Ted Mancini offered to reach out to some Republican and Independent Party candidates.

Open Discussion

- Ted Mancini said that many conservatives, Republicans and Independents believe they can't join the WHHRC because they feel they cannot talk to the members of the commission, because they're worried they won't be heard for political reasons.
- Aurora Melita proposed adding the topic of slavery to the March 1 agenda, and inviting experts on the discussion of slavery.
- Aurora Melita announced she will be stepping down as secretary going forward, but will stay on as a commissioner, and will remain secretary for the next meeting March 1 and until we elect a new secretary at that meeting.
- Pramod Pradhan talked about the Town's immigrant teen clubs. He suggested the WHHRC invite them to speak to the commission at our next meeting March 1.
- Dawn Ennis noted that Krysten Rosen-Jacobs also proposed inviting high school students to talk to the commission at a future meeting.
- Aurora Melita provided the commission with an update on the food drive she managed for the WHHRC. She brought to our attention her proposal that we organize a new fundraising event, perhaps in June. Commissioners agreed to include it on the March 1 agenda for discussion. Pramod Pradhan suggested the WHHRC could use the library resources and network for this event.

Next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Wednesday, March 1, in Room 24 of the Elmwood Community Center and it is solely an in-person meeting.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:30 p.m.