



Minutes

City of DeKalb Human Relations Commission August 2, 2022

The Human Relations Commission (HRC) held a regular meeting on August 2, 2022, in the Second Floor Training Room at the DeKalb Police Department.

A. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 pm. The following members of the HRC were present: Joe Gastiger (Chair), Nadine Franklin, Norden Gilbert and Lisa King.

Other City officials/staff present:

- Mayor Cohen Barnes
- City Manager Bill Nicklas
- Scott Zak, Management Analyst and Staff Liaison to the HRC

B. Approval of Agenda – Additions/Deletions

Chair Gastiger asked for a motion to approve the agenda. It was motioned by Ms. King and seconded by Ms. Franklin. The agenda was approved by unanimous voice vote.

C. Approval of Minutes – June 7, 2022 Regular Meeting

Chair Gastiger asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Franklin motioned, seconded by Ms. King. A minor correction was made. The minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

D. Public Participation –

Resident JJ Wett spoke on the frequency of HRC meetings. He recommended the Commission hold regular meetings quarterly but also hold quarterly listening sessions around the City. Ms. King agreed it would be a good idea to alternate the ward in which the Commission meets.

E. Old Business

1. Progress Report on the Redevelopment in the AGN Neighborhood

Mayor Barnes shared the City Council is holding two listening sessions to receive community input on the best uses for the now-vacant, City-owned property at West Hillcrest Drive and Blackhawk Road. During the first session, the Council heard from a variety of groups, including Opportunity DeKalb, the Greek Row community and Fox Hollow residents, and heard a variety of ideas, including a grocery store and a cafeteria for Greek



housing. Input will also be gathered by the Opportunity DeKalb organization, which is holding sessions on the larger Annie Glidden North neighborhood, and Mayor Barnes said City officials are hearing ideas from people individually.

The merits of different ideas for the Blackhawk/Hillcrest property were discussed, and it was noted operation costs must be considered, so the development will be a public/private partnership. Chair Gastiger asked if there have been conversations with Kishwaukee College on a job training site, noting a satellite site would eliminate the obstacle of traveling to the College. Mayor Barnes added that soft skills training is also vital, so job training should be kept top of mind. Ms. King suggested the City check with the Mariano's grocery store chain, which has opened stores in low-income areas of Chicago.

F. New Business

1. Discussion on HRC meeting schedule

Chair Gastiger recalled past accomplishments of the Commission, including investigating concerns involving policing, advocating for the LGBT and disabled communities, responding to concerns raised during the Black Lives Matter movement and an overhaul of the Tenant/Landlord Handbook. He said the question now is what's next.

City Manager Nicklas shared the Economic Development Commission recently had the very same conversation and agreed to change from meeting on a regular schedule to ad hoc meetings called by the Mayor or a majority of the Commission. He said this might be a good option for the HRC, especially now the Citizens' Police Review Board has been created to address policing issues. Mayor Barnes said his concern is using the time of City staff and Commissioners to hold monthly meetings when there may be no need to meet. City Manager Nicklas said he does not anticipate adding staff for the City's 14 commissions since the City is instead staffing up for operations in the Fire, Police and Public Works departments. He added the mission of the new Belonging Council overlaps that of the HRC.

Ms. King said her concern is the work of the HRC will be reduced along with its schedule. She said a future Mayor might discourage the Commission from meeting and that having meetings monthly makes the HRC accessible to the community. Chair Gastiger said he would not support meeting only at the Mayor's discretion, but Mayor Barnes reminded the Commission would also be able to call their own meetings.

City Manager Nicklas said another option would be for the Commission to do its own work, including keeping minutes.

It was noted the Finance Advisory Committee also meets on demand, but Ms. King said the nature of finance is different and the HRC is meeting the needs of those who historically do not have access to government. City Manager Nicklas noted most issues addressed by the HRC have originated from the Commission.



Mr. Gilbert suggested meeting every other month but would like to continue meeting on a regular basis.

Ms. Franklin said she agreed the Commission does not need to meet monthly and suggested it go out into the community so more residents know the HRC exists. She would also like to see the City give the Commission work to do.

As discussion on the meeting options continued, Mayor Barnes noted it could be difficult to come up with work for the Commission since there are now new organizations working on specific areas the HRC has addressed in the past. The conversation turned to possible work for the Commission. Chair Gastiger said he would like to see a universal intake form created for those needing social services perhaps along with a staffed office. City Manager Nicklas noted Opportunity DeKalb may eventually have an office. Mr. Gilbert said the City can come to the HRC to give input on items. Chair Gastiger said a collaborative project can be done with Opportunity DeKalb to compile the services that agencies provide.

The discussion returned to the meeting schedule, and Chair Gastiger asked for a motion to change the Commission's meeting schedule to every other month. Mr. Gilbert motioned the recommendation be made to the City Council, seconded by Ms. King. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Chair Gastiger asked for a motion for the Commission to investigate the possibility of meeting in the City's different wards to get input from citizens. The motion was made by Ms. King, seconded by Ms. Franklin. Chair Gastiger added that could mean attending other meetings, such as PTO meetings, and Ms. King suggested attending ward meetings held by City Council members. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

City Manager Nicklas noted if the Commission meets at remote locations, meeting places will need to be arranged and proper notice will need to be made as required by the Open Meetings Act. Chair Gastiger questioned whether the full commission would meet at a remote site or rather one or two members would attend other group's meetings to introduce the HRC. Mayor Barnes supported the second idea and said he would be interested in joining those introductions. The discussion will continue at the next meeting.

G. Adjournment

Chair Gastiger asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Franklin made the motion, seconded by Ms. King. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was declared adjourned at 7:30 p.m. The next meeting is October 4.