

City of Morgantown
Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes for November 19, 2015

Present: Kristen Cooper
Jan Derry, Chair
Marlene Robinson-Savino, Vice Chair
Don Spencer, Secretary
Fran Whiteman
Tim Hairston – Liaison w/ State HRC

Meeting called to order by Jan Derry, Chair, at 6:30 p.m. Commissioner Billie Murray reported inability to attend due to illness. The agenda was approved with an addition of presentation of an article on Syrian refugees.

Public Session: There were no participants in the public session.

Minutes: On a motion by Fran Whiteman, seconded by Marlene Robinson-Savino, the minutes of the September 17, 2015 meeting were approved. The notes from the October 15, 2015 information exchange were received by the chair.

Communications: There was no report on the October 14th Fairness WV Conference held in Morgantown. Jan Derry reported on the October 28th CHAP Housing Conference held at the Ramada Inn. Topics of special consideration were the need for a municipal land bank, further enforcement of city codes relating to housing design and maintenance, and innovative financing for the construction of accessible/affordable housing. She also reported that there are approximately 100 vacant buildings in the City of Morgantown.

Derry also reported on the distribution of information on the 2015 Disability History State Essay Contest. Spencer reported on his meeting with Jennifer Meinig, Director of the State ACLU organization which is promoting concern about the 70 bed juvenile institution being constructed in Logan instead of having a statewide community based juvenile justice program for serving primarily youth with mental disabilities. The issue will be considered in the 2016 State Legislative Session.

Tim Hairston reported on the planning for the January 18, 2016 MLK Day at the Met Theatre. The theme will be focusing on the international impact of the life of MLK.

Don Spencer presented an article on the rejection of Syrian refugees. Representatives of some local churches are working to enable support for such refugees who may come to the Morgantown area.

Priority Item: The recommendation on observing the International Human Rights Day on December 10th from the October information exchange was endorsed by consensus. This recommendation called for not proceeding with the observances and recognitions this year but postponing it until 2016. Instead the Commissioners decided to try to move the regular December HRC meeting from December 17th to December 10th – so as to, begin an honoring of the International HR holiday. Don Spencer was asked to organize a brief program for the occasion in coordination with Jan Derry and to have a news release prepared on the plan. Commissioners were urged to call in ideas for the event as well as help contribute refreshments for the special annual HRC December meeting.

Progress Reports: Jan Derry and Don Spencer reported that the City will be including Employment and Housing Non-Discrimination as well as support for a Just Transition for Coal Workers in its annual state legislative priority list.

Marlene Robinson-Savino reported the 24/7 phone line issues will be resolved by December 10.

Fran Whiteman reported that she is working on proposed gender identity and equality issues for a proposal to the Board of Education and to the City based on the Kanawha BOE experience. She also reported that the list of MEI (Municipal Equality Index) scores for all participating cities will be published in December by the national Human Rights Campaign.

Marlene Robinson-Savino reported on the work of the Diversity/Representation Planning Committee – and also indicated that the Committee needs help on managing projections relating to disability. A meeting was set up to address this concern for 8 a.m. at the Sabraton Shoney’s on Monday, November 30th. All are welcomed to attend.

On the matter of establishing priorities for completing the diversity plan and the Inclusive City Plan, Jan Derry recommended that if the community wants inclusivity, the city needs to demonstrate its commitment to diversity in its own management of volunteers and employees. Inclusive employment practices of the city can help generate greater inclusivity in the community. It was agreed by consensus of the Commissioners present that completing the diversity plan should take priority in scheduling over the completion of the Inclusive City Plan.

No report was available on the status of the work on the Affirmative Action Plan, the ADA or Fair Housing Plan. It is not clear to the Commission on how these documents should interface with the diversity plan and the Inclusive City Plan.

Don Spencer reported that the Advisory Planning Committee for the Annual WVU Community Human Rights Film Festival would be meeting the next day at the WVU Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices.

New Business: Research is continuing on the possibility of presenting to the City Council a draft ordinance on Universal Design standards for new housing.

Commissioners recommended making changes on the design of a contemporary “rights that matter” banner to be considered for December.

Regular Meeting Items: The Commission reviewed its need to prepare an annual report for the December meeting as well as a need to promote the public use of its Human Rights Observances Calendar. As far as the latter is concerned, it was suggested that copies be distributed at the MLK Day event and also with the support of a news release at the library, City Hall, and other public locations.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned by the chair at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Don Spencer, Secretary
November 23, 2015