

Morgantown Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes for April 20, 2023

Attendees: Bonnie Brown, Keenan McClane (Secretary), Annie Cronan Yorick, Danny Trejo (Vice-Chair), Cal Carlson, and Jena Martin (via Zoom for the first 30 minutes)

Absent: Zoey Vilasuso

Liaisons: Tim Hairston, WVHRC, and Brian Butcher (City Council)

Members of the Public: Lilith McGee (via Zoom), Mindy Poling, and Scott Iles (in-person)

Call to order: 6:30

Welcome Cal Carlson to his first meeting as an HRC commissioner.

Public Session

- Lilith McGee gave a presentation on nasal naloxone overdose kits. These kits are used to provide emergency medical help for opioid overdoses. Some businesses, namely bars, have expressed interest in having them on hand.
- Annie asked about the costs of each kit. Lilith explained that they are generally paid for using grants and through other public organizations, each kit costing \$250.
- Bonnie asked about the sourcing and production of the kits. Lilith explained that they are made locally by recovering addicts in Charleston and that they are not authorized to ship kits across State lines.
- Mindy asked if other businesses, such as gas stations, could acquire kits. Lilith said yes.
- Brian and Tim asked if Lilith would be open to presenting before the City Council or the WVHRC. She affirmed that she was willing to do that.

Minutes and Elections

Annie moved to approve the December minutes; Keenan Seconded.

Minutes: Approved by 5 Ayes with 1 Abstention.

Danny announced his resignation as the vice-chair, effective immediately.

Nominations for Chair:

- In the absence of other nominations, Annie nominated herself.
- Then, Danny nominated Bonnie. Bonnie respectfully declined the nomination.
- Nominations for the Chair were closed.

Vice-Chair

- Annie nominated Bonnie. Bonnie accepted.
- Nominations for Vice-Chair were closed.

Vote for Annie as Chair

- Approved: 2 abstentions Cal and Jena (off-line), Keenan, Danny, Annie, and Bonnie, "Aye".
- Annie was elected as Chair.

Vote for Bonnie as Vice-Chair

- One abstention (Cal), Annie, Bonnie, Danny, and Keenan, "Aye".
- Bonnie was elected Vice-Chair

Commissioner Updates

Bonnie

- Bonnie described the “Hidden No More” event to be held at the Evansdale Library next week. It will have a presentation and exhibit on the Native Land that was claimed by Colonial Settler John Evans who prevented it from being sold to people of color. Eventually, WVU purchased the land.
- Bonnie also announced and described the upcoming “This Land Was Already Loved” event. Speakers will visit to speak on Indigenous People and their history in the area. There will be a public forum and a Peace Tree Ceremony.
- Brian added that as a point of relevance to the HRC, it brings more communication between the public about the City about issues that have been contentious in the past, such as Indigenous People's Day.

Danny

- Danny discussed the desire to hire a full-time person to write grants or act as a general staff person.
- Annie pointed out that the city already has a grant writer.
- Brian reported that in the past, the HRC was not comfortable asking someone to do the amount of work required for the available pay.
- Annie thought there was some money that the commission had been budgeted. Brian explained that there isn't a lot of money left, but that the City Council may be open to providing some money if the commission requested it. He suggested that we should make that an agenda item.
- Keenan asked if that would be the same amount of money that was previously considered inadequate to pay someone. Brian replied that it was a separate matter, but that the HRC could request that the City Council hire someone for the position.
- Bonnie made a motion that Annie should make a proposal for money and a staff person. Keenan seconds motion. Annie declined the nomination.

Cal

- Cal mentioned that it was hard to get a hold of information online about the HRC including its goals, bylaws, etc. that are in place. He suggested that it might be worth inventorying things and fixing the HRC's online presence.
- Bonnie followed up on that point, stating that commission rules/bylaws are out-of-date.

Keenan: N/A

Annie

- Annie pointed out that there was no annual report on record.
- For International Women's Day, Annie attended an event in Abu Dhabi run by Forbes where she met many notable women who have fled conflict zones such as Ukraine and Afghanistan.
- Bonnie asked if the conference highlighted issues that the commission should address locally. Annie identified sexual abuse and human trafficking as prominent issues.
- Annie also brought up the Americans with Disabilities Act, describing an outdated statute and informing that there is no ADA officer for either the City or County. She called the Department of Justice. They said that they only have authority over government buildings and hospitals. Individual businesses need to be sued on a case-by-case basis.

Tim

- WVHRC update: Still in flux after DHHR was split into 3 organizations. They have received significantly more complaints this year, especially in employment, and some in housing. The government has also been settling cases much more quickly.

Priority Items

- Human Rights Film and Discussion Event:
 - Bonnie spoke about a fund for Human Rights focused film showing, but that it had been pushed to the back burner. The founders of the fund have asked that the Native American Studies program run the event, but that the scope of films has not changed. Bonnie asked that commissioners consider what films we might present for consideration.

There had been discussion about running an event through the University to access more venues and raise visibility.

- Religious Freedom Restoration Act:
 - No one knew who this issue was, but we should keep an eye on it.
- ADA inspector:
 - Annie informed the HRC that the City does not have an ADA officer or inspector. And that a City job listing mentioned ADA experience as a “desired qualification”, but she could not find any other signs that attempts are being made to fill the inspector position.
 - Annie pointed out an old resolution that had been signed and accepted, but it had no specific requirements or enforcement clause.
 - Annie will consider writing a proposed ordinance to address the deficiencies.
- Racial Equity Strategic Plan:
 - Attendance at meetings has not been very high. Brian described the subcommittee duties, and requirements to get any policy passed. The current priority is to determine who can perform an audit on the City.

Adjournment

- Bonnie moved to Adjourn; Annie seconded.
- Adjournment: 8:42