



Carbondale Human Relations Commission

Minutes – December 8, 2014
Carbondale Civic Center ~ 6:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Lauren Bonner, Peg Falcone, Jerrold Hennrich, Eric McMillan, Faith Miller, Joshua Phillips, Kareem Shariati, Dora Weaver

Commissioners Excused: Joseph Brown

Commissioners Absent:

Study Circle Staff Present: Sarah Heyer

Guests Present: Rosie Dorsey, Cathy Field, Molly Parker, Elius Reed

Staff Present: Deborah McCoy

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Hennrich at 6:00 p.m.

Chair Hennrich asked Commissioner Josh Phillips to introduce himself. He indicated that he was interested in homelessness and panhandling and thought he might have something to contribute to the Commission from that perspective. Commissioner Phillips worked at Good Samaritan during the summers for several years. Chair Hennrich encouraged Commissioner Phillips to review the material in the binder to become familiar with the HRC.

MINUTES

Motion was made by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner McMillan to approve the minutes of the November 3, 2014 meeting. Motion carried.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

December 9, 2014 “Die In” to be held at the Student Center to protest Michael Brown and Eric Gardner shootings at 12 o’clock noon.

December 11, 2014 SIU Board of Trustees Meeting – SIUC Student Center, 10:00 a.m.

December 16, 2014 State of the City Address, Carbondale Civic Center, 11:30 a.m.

December 18, 2014 Brightfield Follow-Up Meeting, Eurma C. Hayes Center, 7:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Reed reported on articles he had retrieved from the internet regarding the Pravin Varughese incident.

STUDY CIRCLES REPORT

Commissioner McMillan reported that the annual Neighborhood Alliance Meeting will be held on January 17, 2015, from 9:30 am to 12:00 noon, at First Methodist Church. Refreshments will be served from 9:30 to 10:00, followed by agency/organization brief presentations. City Council and Mayoral candidates will be introduced at noon, but will not be presenting. Chair Hennrich will speak on behalf of the HRC. Soup and chili will be served following the meeting.

The Neighborhood Group discussed zoning matters and special use permits, and expressed concern that rules that impact all seem to be written for the benefit of one business/owner.

NON-VIOLENT CARBONDALE PROJECT

Commissioner Shariati reported that the NVCP is pulling together a group called the Sparrows. The group is organized to develop a resource list of the various services offered by nonprofit agencies and organizations for people in need, including the hungry and homeless. The filming of the Civic Soul television series, coordinated by the SIUC School of Journalism, is in progress. The project consists of two phases. Phase I included bringing in speakers who articulated the concerns of the Racial Justice Coalition such as Dr. Ella Lacey and Ms. Cathy Field. Phase II involves bringing together those and other individuals to have a discussion in the studio. The series is scheduled to be aired in the spring. Dr. Peter Lemish and Ms. Diane Sussman are contacts for the NVCP.

OLD BUSINESS

Law Enforcement Reports:

Chair Hennrich indicated that he would draft a letter requesting information. Mr. Reed commented that a form to submit a request for information is available in the City Clerk's Office. Commissioner McMillan indicated that he recalled Interim Chief Grubbs reporting that he and other IT representatives would be attending training the first part of this month, and the new system would be up and running the end of January or first part of February. Commissioner McMillan stated that the information regarding complaints and actions taken should not require the new computer system. Commissioner McMillan commented that the Professional Standards contain the complaint procedure. Chair Hennrich stated that he had spoken with Interim Chief Grubbs who indicated that his intent is to speak with those filing complaints and inform them of the findings. Commissioner Weaver stated that a separate entity should investigate complaints and not the Police Department. Chair Hennrich commented that he agreed that there should be independent oversight of the Police Department. Commissioner McMillan stated that these kinds of issues should be brought to the attention of Police Chief candidates. Commissioner Bonner suggested that a proposal be developed to send to City Council. Chair Hennrich commented that an advisory committee be formed to study other communities to see what they are doing. Commissioner McMillan reminded Commissioners that the public are customers and there should be concern about the service they are receiving. Chair Hennrich commented that police pensions account for a large portion of the budget and taxes in this town. There is a large presence of law enforcement in this small community considering the City, SIU, and Jackson County departments.

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HRC Responsibilities, Role, Charges

Education Campaign Committee: Chair Hennrich spoke about the need to educate the public on their rights where the police are concerned. He stated that a class or seminar could be coordinated through the SIU Law School. Commissioner Miller asked about the tone and focus of the Education Committee. She reminded Commissioners of the request by Mrs. Nesbitt and others, under the former Police Chief's tenure some time ago, to provide information and/or training on citizen rights. Commissioner Miller encouraged the HRC to be more proactive in addressing these concerns.

Discussion took place regarding Carbondale Police Officers in the elementary schools. Ms. Field indicated that the Racial Justice Coalition discussed that topic at their last meeting, and the question was how does it benefit the kids? How does building relationships with the children help? Ms. Heyer said she went through the Academy and she is more afraid of the police now because all that's being looked for is compliance. Commissioner Miller stated that she went through the class and did not come away with that understanding. If an individual was a law-abiding citizen, there was no reason for concern. Under current circumstances, there is cause for concern. Mr. Reed commented that it was his understanding that some students are informing the Police about what's going on with drugs in their households or neighborhoods.

Commissioner McMillan reminded Commissioners of the information he presented previously on the concept of trust. He indicated that there needs to be discussion on trust, community policing, and what is expected of police. Chair Hennrich stated that the Police Department realizes that changes need to be made to improve the relationship with the community, and are making some changes. Commissioner Shariati commented that he feels Interim Chief Grubbs is clearly making an effort to address some of the issues that have been brought to his attention.

a) HRC Web Page: Commissioner Falcone reported that all Commissioners and comments are included. No feedback has been received to include additional information. Commissioner Shariati commented that he has been working to pull together a listing of agencies/organizations and is getting to know what agencies/organizations are relevant to the HRC mission and should be included on the website.

Community Discussions

Public Forum on Policing in Carbondale: Chair Hennrich commented that the Commission decided to sponsor a forum later in the spring. The Racial Justice Coalition is requesting to know what they can do to help in the search for a new Police Chief. Commissioner Falcone stated that she has been thinking about the search process and questions that should be asked. Motion was made by Commissioner Falcone and seconded by Commissioner Shariati for Commissioner Falcone to draft a letter to the City Council, with a copy to the City Manager, outlining recommendations regarding the hiring of a police chief, with the final letter being forwarded on behalf of the HRC by Chair Hennrich. Motion carried.

Racial Justice Coalition: No report.

NEW BUSINESS

None

NEXT MEETING: January 5, 2015, 5:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, motion was made by to adjourn at 7:50 p.m.

Recorded by Deborah McCoy _____