

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, MAY 18, 2021
7:00 p.m.
VIRTUAL (Zoom)

Members Present

Danielle Beach
Michelle Cho
Janeka Cogdell
Matt Harris, Chair
Susan Kellom
Katherine Lloyd
Scott Schwartz

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher, Director
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez

Members Not Excused

Elizabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson

Members Excused

Lisl Brunner, Vice Chair
Kevin Edwards, Vice Chair
Lynette Foster
Chris Harris
David Rigsby

Guests

Legislative Director/Assistant City Manager Sarah Taylor

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair, Matt Harris

Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. Introductions were made. Chair Harris welcomed special guest Legislative Director/Assistant City Manager, Sarah Taylor.

2. Approval of April Minutes

Upon a motion by Commissioner Schwartz, seconded by Commissioner Beach, the Commission approved the minutes of the April meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye.

4. Sarah Taylor, Legislative Director/Assistant City Manager

Chair Harris welcome and introduced City Legislative Director and Assistant City Manager Sarah Taylor. He asked Ms. Taylor to give a recap of the legislative session that is now over, and also stated that Ms. Taylor did a phenomenal job on her part in drafting the civilian review board for the police department.

Ms. Taylor started her presentation by giving a brief background of herself, and said that she is a newly promoted Assistant City Manager in the City, but that the bulk her day job is as the City's Legislative Director. She serves as the City's lobbyist with the General Assembly, but has spent a lot more time on federal stuff as well with the Covid-19 money and the American rescue plan. She said that she spends most of her time focusing on the City's Legislative priorities and the City's budget priorities as they go through the General Assembly.

Ms. Taylor reported back about what this legislative session was like and said that this session started back in January and ended in March, and this was a short session. She stated that this session was held virtually for anyone participating from outside, the Senate met in person, they all met at the science museum of Virginia, and the House met entirely virtually. She stated that one of the things that the General Assembly is doing, moving towards next session, is figuring out what parts of virtual sessions worked, what was good, what was bad, what helped with participation, what helped with scheduling,

what helped with coordinating participation. She said that they are really working to integrate some of those things into the subsequent sessions, even as they go back in person. She said that they are expecting the General Assembly to go back in person this next coming session and they are expecting the next session to be in late July early August. They are going to hold a special session during which they appropriate the monies that the state receives from the American rescue plan funding, so the state is getting about \$4.3 billion, some of it is discretionary, some of its not.

She stated that, at this past session, which was virtual, everybody had bill limits, so the number of bills was very limited, there were fewer issues, and really focused on some of the carryover issues in the last special session which were criminal justice reform, policing reform, and issues related to Covid-19. She also mentioned that there were some very big bills as the legalization of marijuana, which was a huge bill, it was literally 500 or 600 pages; they did away with the death penalty, so there were a handful of really big issues that got done. She added that there were also a lot of carry-over issues that they worked on, such as providing paid sick leave to home healthcare workers, more common-sense gun safety legislation, prohibiting guns on school board property, restricting domestic abusers from purchasing guns, extending background checks before they are just automatically approved. Also banning guns in Capitol Square and in state government buildings, those were all done this session, and they also did legislation related to the pandemic and public health expanded Virginia's vaccination capacity by allowing more kinds of health workers to administer vaccinations. She added that in that same piece of legislation, they also required the capturing of race and ethnicity data when people were getting vaccines. In order to have data to see are we looking at it with a social equity lens; are we getting vaccinations to people who are most impacted by the by Covid-19 and so that piece of legislation was one of the first things to come through special session; it was one of the few bills that was actually signed this past session.

Ms. Taylor stated that technically, this past session was two sessions, they had a regular session that is constitutionally limited to 30 days, unless there is a an agreement to extend it to 45 days, and the Republicans said that they did not want to extend to 45 days, so the Democrats agreed and they said that they will do 30 days and then they were going to call a 15-day special session, which is what they did. She also stated that they did a number of bills in the area of inclusivity; they did so much when it came to equity and equality. She added that they passed a bill requiring state agencies to create and maintain comprehensive strategic plans for hiring with regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as in their procurement processes, they created the Virginia LGBTQ plus advisory board. She stated that, right now there is an African American advisory board, there is all kinds of other advisory boards for the state. She said that delegate Rome had a bill that prohibited the LGBTQ panic defense in Virginia, one of the first southern States to do that.

Ms. Taylor also added that they expanded the Virginia Human Rights Act to include those with disabilities, in the past they extended the Human Rights Act for LGBTQ, gender, all sorts of race, ethnicity, religion, and just this past session added disabilities to those protected by the Virginia Human Rights Act, and abolished the death penalty. She reported that in the marijuana legalization bill there is very little of it that is actually going to be in law on July 1; it is going to be that simple possession is no longer a crime, people can possess a small amount for personal use. Also, people can have up to four plants in their home, but people cannot drive with it, cannot smoke it in public. The actual possession of plants or marijuana will be no longer illegal on July 1, 2021. She stated that there is also a Board to regulate recreational use marijuana in the Commonwealth and the Board is going to be similar to the

ABC board. She added that all of the other provisions of the bill require, what is called reenactment, which means the next legislature has to vote to approve it as well, and then the full legalization would go into effect in 2024. , She added that localities will have the option to opt out of a retail location in their locality, if the locality decides they do not want marijuana in for retail sale in their locality, that is it. They are not going to have in their locality, because once the retail licenses are distributed or people get those licenses they cannot then add more, if a city decided that they then wanted to have retail in their locality.

Ms. Taylor also explained that they did automatic expungement for certain misdemeanors, they did the restoration of voting rights, they passed the constitutional amendment to do that so it will be on a ballot in the future; they passed the Voting Rights Act of Virginia, which is the first state level voting rights act in the South. She stated that a lot of the temporary provisions for voting that were put in place last year were related to the pandemic, things like postage on absentee ballots, absentee ballot drop boxes were all codified and put into law last session, they were put in the budget, so they were only in force as long as that budget was current. She also stated that they also passed legislation allowing for Sunday early voting. She added that they banned guns at polling places within that same perimeter that people cannot campaign in. She also stated that Alexandria had legislation that will allow record sharing between the Court services unit and the Social Services folks where kids, who are crossover youth kids, between the juvenile justice system and the child welfare system can be better served.

Director Kelleher praised Ms. Taylor for the wonderful job she does as the City's Legislator and said that she is astoundingly capable and involved, and the City is just thrilled to have her.

Ms. Taylor addressed questions by Commissioners, such as part of the data collection on the vaccine, persons with disabilities and having access to the vaccine should probably have been included in the data collection. She addressed the question related to medicinal marijuana and said that medicinal marijuana is already the law. She also stated they did not do a lot on State Police reform and said that a lot of the policing reform has been very focused on affording localities opportunities, putting mandates in place with regard to training. She also added that locality cannot do away with qualified immunity, but that qualify immunity reform is one of those things that is still on the table. She added that this issue was sent to believe the issue got sent to Boyd-Graves Committee, which is a public safety review Commission and then also to the crime Commission to do some work on it.

Ms. Taylor also stated that Alexandria has come down to a really good model and the most robust Community Police Review Board that will in effect in Virginia in July, and can also be replicated in other places. She added that any recommendations made by the Board, have to be answered in public, so there is that level of transparency and accountability that these recommendations just do not go off into a folder somewhere, but they actually get acted on. After an extensive discussion on the transition from the Commission to the Police Review Board, Commissioner Schwartz suggested that someone from the Commission should meet with the new auditor to convey what the Commission has been doing.

Ms. Taylor stated that there are two things that they are going to carry-over from this session, one is that they want to continue to work with the legislature and the code Commission on cleaning up code to make sure to replace the word handicapped with disabled, or whatever the right words are for that. She also states that they had an item in the package that would allow Human Rights Commission's to have some permissive authority to enhance their enforcement of our local human rights ordinances.

Director Kelleher asked Ms. Taylor if she could speak at The Virginia Association for Human Rights Conference the first Saturday in June about the Community Policing Review Board. Ms. Taylor stated that she will get back to Director Kelleher on that.

Chair Harris thanked Ms. Taylor for her presentation.

4. Executive Committee /Upcoming Meetings

Chair Harris stated that the Executive Committee met last Monday and added that this is Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

AAPI Heritage Month Town Hall, NVCC Panel

Chair Harris stated that former Chair Jim McClellan had contacted Director Kelleher about putting together a Town Hall on the Asian American Pacific Islander month and the issues facing the community. He stated that this meeting will take place on May 27th, at 7:00 p.m. via zoom.

Rainbow Crosswalk letter

Chair Harris stated that the rainbow crosswalk letter has gone to T&ES and Yom Lambert's group. He added that different departments have seemingly approved it and okayed it. Director Kelleher stated that there was support from Council members and the City Manager early on, had asked Yon Lambert from T& ES about some pricing issues. She stated that the Fire Department wanted to support the idea, and they put on social media their letter of support that had gone to City Council. She added that she had heard from Diane Ruggiero who is with our RPCA and heads up the Commission on the arts about the public art process that they have, which is going to be when it is further along. Director Kelleher stated that we are just waiting, and it is being addressed.

Progress Pride Flags on Market Square

Director Kelleher stated that the progress pride flags have been purchased and the flags are going to be displayed for pride month beginning June 1, 2021 at Market Square. She added that funds have been donated again this year for this project.

Library Fees Chair Harris stated City Council went beyond what the Commission had asked for, and included all late fees, and said that he was really impressed. He added that Elizabeth Bennet-Parker had contacted him to let him know that it had passed.

Chair Harris reported that Fire Chief Corey Smedley will be speaking at the June Commission's meeting.

5. Old and New Business

Pride Month Planning

Director Kelleher stated that the annual pride fair virtual event will take place on June 3, and that the committee is still putting information together.

Appointment of Nominating Committee

Chair Harris asked for volunteers to serve on the nominating committee to get in contact with Commissioners and come up with a slate. Commissioner Beach volunteered to serve on the nominating

committee. Chair Harris asked Director Kelleher to send an email to the Commissioners who were not at the meeting.

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project

Director Kelleher reported that there was a very successful public honoring of Joseph McCoy in late April and said that Susan Strasser's lectures have taken place three of the four events. She added that there many more events plans and encourage commissioners to visit the Office of Historic Alexandria website. She stated that ultimately the goal is to get the replica of the pillar from EJI and bring it back to Alexandria and install it.

Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index 2021

Director Kelleher stated that the Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index for 2021 is being reviewed right now of Alexandria's score card, which is typically released in June, and then the City has until July to make suggested edits or in effect kind of argue their case. She stated that the City's score exceeded 100 last year for the first time, she said that she was informed that there has been a tightening up of criteria for Trans health benefits and said that the City does provide health care coverage for transgender employees. She added that they are just trying to provide as much information as they can about all of the services that the City has for the LGBTQ+ Community group.

6. Liaison Reports

Commissioner Lloyd reported that the Alexandria Commission on Person with Disabilities had a guest speaker, Ann Cody, who is a Special Advisor for International Disability Rights for the State Department. Ms. Cody talked about the work that they are doing all over the globe, and how they gather information and help enhance Disability Rights for Americans and people all over the world. Commissioner Lloyd stated that their legislative subcommittee is still grinding different issues that they will work on and bring forward.

Chair Harris asked if the ACPD has looked into shopping carts at grocery stores that are wheelchair accessible so someone in a wheelchair can push it down the aisle and put their groceries in the cart. Commissioner Lloyd stated that she will bring it to the ACPD Commission and see if anyone has any leads on anything like that. Chair Harris also mentioned the accessible gas pump stickers at the gas stations, where if more than one person was working at a gas station and someone honked the horn, that second person was required, at no extra charge, to go pump the gas of that person's car. He asked if that is something that needs to be renewed, because it has been so long. Director Kelleher stated that she thinks there all the gas stations have the sticker with the information on the pumps.

7. Announcements /Adjournment

There were no announcements.

MOTION: adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27p.m.