



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

**Monday May 31, 2011
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
City Hall Council Chambers & Room 1027
First Floor, 301 W. Second Street, Austin, TX 78701**

Chair Judy Cortez called the Board Meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

Commission Members in Attendance:

Judy Cortez – Chair
Elizabeth Brenner
Tom Davis
DeWayne Lofton
Delia Meyer
George Reynolds
Paul Rhea

Human Resources Staff Present:

Tony Robertson, EE/FHO Executive Liaison

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting of April 25, 2011 were approved - Commissioner Davis motion, Commissioner Rhea second on a 7-0 vote.

2. CITIZENS COMMUNICATIONS

None

3. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Presentation of Mr. Edward Sledge, discussion and possible action of unregulated group homes which provide housing for people in the city of Austin that include people with disabilities and the elderly.

Mr. Sledge: Former Human Rights Commissioner who is involved in advocating for the group homes. Mr. Sledge stated that the purpose of his presentation was to talk about certain privately-run group homes in Austin that are operated without regulations of any authority. Mr. Sledge explained there are many types of group homes that are regulated by state like nursing homes, retirement homes, and homes for the developmentally disabled, but group homes are operating without regulations of any authority.

Mr. Sledge handed out the Regulation of Group Homes in Austin and explained that the purpose of the group is to serve and assist elderly people and people with mental and/or physical disabilities. He explained that these homes are in single family residential zones and they are located in the North-East and South Austin areas that are protected by the Fair Housing Act and other anti-discriminatory legislation.

Mr. Sledge said that the Health and Human Services Commission at the direction of the state legislature developed the seven "Model Standards" that the city could adopt for the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the residents and to improve and maintain operational standards. Mr. Sledge invited the public, home owners, and the residents of group homes to attend the next hearing on Wednesday June 1, 2011 at the University Hills Branch Library at 4721 Loyola lane in northeast Austin.

Mr. Sledge also brought a hand out of the Presentation to Stakeholders which was presented on April 26, May 3, and May 10, 2011 of House Bill 216 dealing with Boarding Homes and its effect to the City of Austin. The presentation was about Proposed Programs to Permit and Inspect the boarding homes and was sponsored by the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services.

Commissioner Meyer commented about these group homes serving 15 to 20 people living in one home, and she asked Mr. Sledge whether there is a law that prevents that many people from living in one home. Mr. Sledge answered that no law enforces the model standards but there are state standards that were established as model standards that could be adopted in any city, community, and municipality. He explained there is no record of these group homes having a license to operate, and some times there are no records showing how many people live in one home. This is why so many irregularities maintaining a healthy, safe, and secure place for those residents are an issue.

Commissioner Davis and Commissioner Cortez invited Mr. Sledge to come back with Mrs. Bartz from the University Hills Neighborhood Association Group Home Task Force to update the commission on the next hearing meetings before the Regulation goes to city council.

4. OLD BUSINESS

- a. Update on working Committees, discussion on the Sheraton Hotel and LBJ Library Contracts, and other areas of responsibility for the 2011 International Association of Official Human Rights Agency (IAOHRA) - Conference in Austin.

During the meeting, the Commissioners conducted a conference call with Ms. Beverly Watts, the IAOHRA Planning Committee Chair. The purpose of the call was to understand the Commissions role and receive an update on how the conference's planning was progressing. Commissioner Cortez introduced the HRC members to including their newest Commissioner, Mr. Reynolds. In attendance were Ms. Scales, and Mr. Robertson.

Mrs. Watts congratulated every one for hosting the conference in Austin, Texas. She spoke generally about the IAOHRA conference draft agenda and talked about the daily events and speakers during that week and said that more information will be sent.

After the conference call ended, Commissioner Cortez mentioned that she sent an e-mail to the Commissioners to check on their committee updates and to bring information during the May meeting.

Registration committee: Commissioner Meyer mentioned that registration is being handled at the national level online. She asked Tony Robertson for the website to check on updates. He confirmed the website, www.iaohra.org and he stated that this particular committee brings their own staff to handle the registration that week but the Austin Host committee is assisting with five volunteers.

Program and Planning Committee: Commissioner Brenner said that she is expecting to attend to a budget meeting soon. Mr. Robertson and Ms. Scales talked about the budget committee responsibilities as a local host of over viewing, watching and assisting with the money portion that is coming from the fundraisers. Beverly Watts, IAOHRA National Planning Chair, also informed Commissioner Brenner that she does not need to worry or focus on Budget concerns because this is all handled by the IAOHRA Treasurer.

Volunteer committee: Commissioner Rhea said that his group of members meets every two weeks and they have been focusing on promo bags, gifts and volunteer equipment and needs. He has received bags with from the Austin Visitor's Bureau with maps and brochures of places of interest in the city. He said his committee will continue looking for donations from local businesses. Ms. Scales added that the city departments are going to continue donating more gifts.

Logistics and Transportation Committee: Commissioner Davis mentioned that they are working on the VIP transportation between the airport and the hotel, and transportation for everyone to and from the LBJ Library. He has investigated school buses with air conditioning, the least expensive option. The bus can transport 49 passengers in each shuttle leaving every 20 minutes; the price estimated, is for \$350.00 including tips for 5 hours minimum. He is also investigating a company that offers a more comfortable, ADA-compliant bus, but that is more expensive. More information will be given at next meeting. On the logistics, he is working with Dolores from the HRD – ADA division.

Special Events and Entertainment: Commissioner Lofton's group; Mr. Robertson is working on a group of young people to sing the American and Canadian National Anthem. He is working with Houston Tillotson College and other schools to participate. Also, the Commissioner's talked about a tour of the city including the Warehouse District and Austin's' fine musicians as an addition of exploring different places in Austin.

b. Discussion on the Annual Work Plan and its priority value.

Tabled

c. Discussion on HRC brochure edits, update, and distribution.

Mr. Robertson handed the HRC brochure draft for the Commissioners to update and bring during the next meeting.

5. STAFF BRIEFINGS

- Equal Employment Fair Housing Office (EE/FHO) Updates by Tony Robertson, Administrator.

None

- Administrator response to HRC in reference to Mr. Krause questions and concerns about EE/FHO process.

Mr. Robertson said that based on advice from Legal, he did not need to respond to Mr. Krause about EE/FHO response to Mr. Krause's concerns on this case and how his office processes an investigation once a complaint of discrimination has been alleged. Mr. Robertson provided each Commissioner a response to Mr. Krause's concerns and opened it for discussion with the Commissioners if they had any questions. Ms. Scales said that this office took the proper action to respond to Mr. Krause, and added that during the next meeting someone from the Legal department would attend to respond to Mr. Krause's questions or allegations. Commissioner Brenner said that she has specific questions to ask in reference to Mr. Krause's questions, but she will wait until the legal department attends to the next meeting. Commissioner Brenner was also asked to provide any of her questions or concerns to the Administrator in writing so that he could address them with her.

- Commissioner Cortez introduced the new member of the Commission. Commissioner L. George Reynolds who was appointed by Council Member Riley. He thanked all the commissioners for welcoming him. He said he had been living in Austin for 30 years; he attended Law school at the University of Texas; he is a lawyer in Austin. Commissioner Reynolds mentioned that in his life he has been living in fear of discrimination because half of his family is Hispanic and he is a gay man living with the HIV virus. He said he had experienced much discrimination, which is why discrimination that reduces people's quality of life should be minimized.

6. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Commissioners will discuss same items noted in the Old Business section.

ADJOURN

Chair Judy Cortez adjourned the meeting at 7:45 pm without objection.