

# Boston Human Rights Commission Public Meeting Minutes

July 26, 2023 at 6PM In-Person at City Hall

Hearing Room 801

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## **Present:**

Amber Garcia-Gonzalez (BHRC Staff)

Chief of Equity and Inclusion Mariangely Solis Cervera

**Commissioners:** Chair Reyes Coll-Tellechea and Commissioners Anne Rousseau, Robert MacEachern, Leonard Lee, Elijah Evans, and Tre'Andre Valentine.

**Others:** 3 members of the public were present at this meeting

## **A. Introductions**

1. Chair Coll-Tellechea called the meeting to order at 6:14PM.
2. March 16th meeting minutes: all approved
  - a. Commissioner Lee and MacEachern abstained due to absence

## **B. Chief Solis Cervera's Report**

- Councilor Louijeune will reach out if she can join
- 1.5 year of working together
- Commissioner Paredes has resigned and joined The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement as a policy advisor
- The Boston Human Rights Commission is a tool to better advance Equity & Inclusion throughout the city
  - How can we rethink the current work of the commission, past work and move from there?
  - Councilor Louijeune and Councilor Flynn have expressed support
  - Trying to find something impactful
- Currently, AGG is the sole staff for the Commission

## **C. Councilor Louijene's Report**

## **D. Chair's Report**

- The Boston Human Rights Commission research interns completed their research in June
- The interns have not presented because we haven't met until now

- Based on the research of hate, the Boston Human Rights Commission received an invitation conflict early warning analytics team at UMass Boston
  - Seeking partnership on this federal grant on hate
  - Homeland security in Washington contacted Chair Coll-Tellechea in June, interested in learning what we are doing and how we can help
- In June – Chief Solis Cervera and Chair Coll-Tellechea met with students from Yucatan Mexico, lawyers and law students.
  - Very interested in our work
- Finally going to discuss next steps and direction of the Boston Human Rights Commission
- Chief Solis Cervera and Chair Coll-Tellechea have been in communication constantly without the presence of an ED or interim ED

#### **E. Commissioners Discussion (Chair)**

- BHRC working in 2 tiers: intakes & events/research
  - Research has continued
- The ordinance was written 30-40 years ago
  - The complaints HRC received are solely reviewed by staff and them sent externally to MCAD and other resources to resolve
  - BHRC serves as a referral agency
  - The rest of the ordinance is to protect the residents of boston
- Chair and Chief Solis Cervera, have been working over the past few months
- The other departments are doing a lot of the work that BHRC should be doing
- Hate is a topic these departments have not been working on,
  - This has caught the attention of the Homeland Security Division of Civil Rights
- Suggests this is where BHRC can focus on hate if the Commission and administration are on board
- Commissioner Lee: questions about stabilizing the Commission - we need to make it stable with staffing shortages, as we continue to rebuild moving forward
  - Expressed support for focusing on hate
  - States the foundation is crumbling
- Chief Solis Cervera: states her role is to hear the concerns, questions and her goal is to summarize and meet with the Mayor in the next few months with recommendations for the future of BHRC
- Commissioner Lee: Are we able to recruit/ staff at full capacity?
- Chief Solis Cervera responded this will happen once we have a clear vision of BHRC
- States the weight fell on Suzie H
- Chief Solis Cervera states she will come up with structure
- Councillor Louijeune: thanked everyone for their service for BHRC

- Original vision was a great one, continue to evolve, there is an increase in hate incidents in all demographics
  - How can we have an office that is taking accounts of racism and discrimination in the city – if it's partnering with MCAD, other resources
  - Expertise as a lawyer and as a self identified black woman from Mattapan
  - Her office filed a hearing order to question BHRC—is the name sending the right signal and message to the residents?
- Commissioner MacEachern: one issue that's important: COB has about 6k employees, always been interested in how BHRC can address inequalities in Boston
  - A commission that is looking out, when there's bias, or inequalities and look inward so employees know when there's bias there's a neutral body that can help solve those issues
  - Reflecting on the E&I cabinet: while each department does important work; BHRC has the ability to advocate, educate so that equality can happen that it's consistent with our Ordinance
  - Believes we should be getting more
  - Wants a robust investigative staff, to create a network that we are processing complaints in a timely manner
  - Reshaping will allow opportunity to raise voices
- Commissioner Rousseau:
  - Wanted a *no hate campaign* in Boston to educate people where to go
  - Wanted the commissioners in the community to meet people where they are, not relying on online complaints
  - Tracking the online complaints
  - Diversity is important for commissioners
  - Envisioned rapid response to hate, peaceful and trained staff to response to hate incidents ex: neo nazi's in JP
- Commissioner Evans: thinks it's important to focus on strategic planning; learn what other HRCs are doing
  - Building trust is important
  - People need to know if it will be taken seriously
  - Community engagement is important, will help build trust
- Commissioner Valentine: wants to understand his role as a commissioner
  - Agrees we need a strategic planning process
  - When he thinks about how responsive we want to be – BHRC reviews and shares to external stakeholders
  - Question: what do we mean by responding and reviewing complaints?
- Chair: complaints are processed by staff, Commissioners have nothing to do with intakes
  - They see what is available online on the dashboard

- Chair encourages reflection about the ordinance and our role in intakes, 40 years ago it was necessary to review complaints of discrimination
- States an ED and one investigator cannot do investigations
- Commissioner Lee: capacity -
  - Is on this commission because of his personal experiences with racism
  - Emphasizes strategic planning to establish our limits and boundaries
  - Suggests rewriting the ordinance
- Commissioner Evans: benefits of the strategic plan is alignment, leaning into what works, checking for inefficiencies
- Chief Solis Cervera: clarifying questions:
  - Strategic planning: commits to helping with
  - Rewriting the ordinance: wants to hear questions and thoughts about this
  - Community engagement: help her understand what this would look like: is it an educational body? Is it recruiting complaints from the community? Wants to make sure it aligns with the E&I cabinet
- Commissioner Lee: providing a platform for constituents to be heard about their grievances is powerful and educate on the ordinance
- Commissioner MacEachern: is there a way to engage the community on a meta level to understand the grievances
  - We have subpoena power
  - Communication & engagement can be formal & informal ex: formally via hearings it sends a strong message
  - Ex. digital divide hearing sent a message to corporations doing work in Boston
- Chair: fully supports our work on discrimination, but believes we
  - Asks for direct communication with the departments within the cabinet to help facilitate the work of BHRC to learn their work & concerns & their ideas
- Commissioner Valentine: benefit of community engagement: not only their complaints, but also hear from what BHRC should be doing to be better engaged and informed so the community is involved in our work
- Commissioner Evans: agrees with Chair's point to communicate with departments within the cabinet
  - BHRC can convene stakeholders to help resolve issues
- Councilor Louijene: internal employees MCAD, HR, and more independent based offices like BHRC
  - there is a way to streamline discrimination complaints to MCAD but BHRC can be an independent agency within BHRC
- Chair: To be effective with complaints we need investment in staff
- Commissioner MacEachern: filing of complaints - shouldn't focus on individual complaints

- structures for complaint filing were built to exclude people and protect the interest of agency
- Believes the commission can investigate COB departments, that's not in our ordinance
- Commissioner Rousseau: if there's a pattern of complaints, the commission should see them
- Councilor Louijene: AAPI community meeting: it's all about community presence
  - Her office has made edits to ordinance in conjunction with Chief

F. Public Comments:

- Does BHRC open up with the Pledge of Allegiance?
  - No
  - Is this a governmental organization; is it paid or volunteer work? Volunteer?

G. Votes

- 1 Vote: approval of minutes. Meeting adjourned at 7:27 pm.