MEETING MINUTES FOR
MICHIGAN CITY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

November 5, 2014
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Present:
JoAnn Engquist  Chairperson
DeShawn Gordon  Vice-Chairperson
Nila Williams  Treasurer
Marty Corley  Commissioner
Kia Bergerson  Commissioner
James Guerrucci  Commissioner
Kay Hill  Commissioner
Mary Ellen Quinn  Commissioner
Maria Valdez  Commissioner
Tyra Robinson-Walker  Commissioner
Sharon Wright  Commissioner
Jeff Deuitch  Executive Director
Larry Arness  Staff Attorney
Soljourna Atwater  Executive Secretary

Absent:
Sunny Akhigbe  Commissioner

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Engquist and the new commissioners were asked to introduce themselves. The new commissioners are; Casaundra “Kay” Hill, the Executive Director for the Stepping Stone Shelter for Women. She also serves on the Commission for Women and is a Chairperson for EVOLVE a mentoring program for young women. LaReina Maria Valdez a former teacher with Michigan City Area Schools. She is now contracting with various nonprofit organizations working with the youth and college readiness programs.

ROLL CALL: The Executive Secretary called the roll – Attendance and absences are reflected above.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Chairperson Engquist asked for any additions or correction to the October minutes. Having heard none, she asked for a motion to accept the minutes as written. Commissioner Wright made a motion to accept the October minutes and it was seconded by Commissioner Corley. Vote: all in favor, none opposed. Motion carried.

TREASURER’S REPORT: Commissioner Williams gave copies of the Treasurers report to each commissioner. She stated that several checks have been deposited sponsoring Black History Month and a donation to the Human Rights Commission was made. Recent activity included a payment of $200 toward the purchase of the Human Rights Billboard that will be on Michigan Blvd. The current account balance is $6,753.30. She stated the second page of the report is the ledger from the Controllers’ office and can be used to compare with the Treasurers’ report. Commissioner Williams stated that funds have been received for Black History Month. The Director added the budget for Black History Month was $600 and by raising additional funds he would like to put more money towards that event. There was discussion among the commission regarding the donations for Black History Month and sponsorship for the Human Rights Booklet.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT: Director Deuitch stated he is waiting for construction projects to close and he will give his recommendations to the Mayor. A new construction project has started at Washington Park and he met with them last week regarding it. He provided commissioners with a summary of complaints the department received for the month of October. Other activities during the month included:

- Director Deuitch met with different non-profit organizations in the area on how to better serve the community regarding jobs and education.
- There were four meetings on expungement throughout the month he attended with Social Status of African American Males Commission and other groups. Attorney Kiner did an excellent job presenting.

**Meeting minutes also available for viewing on ALCO T.V. website http://alco.org**
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- Work keys testing took place at City Hall in October and three people showed up. He noted that most factories require work keys testing so this is important.
- The Director also attended the Fire Merit Commission meeting and stated they had some very interesting views on how the term minority should be labeled. He and Attorney Arness conveyed that the term includes groups of people and not just one group. They have to go by the law and he is looking forward to the next meeting.
- He reported that sponsorship for the Human Rights Diversity Booklet has raised about $1,400 and with additional funds pledged from other sponsors they should raise about $3,500 in sponsorship for the booklet. The cutoff for sponsorship is December 15th and he would like to have the booklets printed before January 19th so they would be ready to give out by February 1st.

STAFF ATTORNEY’S REPORT: Attorney Arness welcomed the new commissioners. He stated the Director is doing a great job with the donations. Attorney Arness gave clarity on two issues regarding the federal consent decree and the ordinance for the Fire Department. He reported the federal consent decree issued in the seventies states the City of Michigan City must hire African Americans to their Fire Department. There must be two African Americans hired for every three hires. Some of those hires happened in the seventies and then for a long period of time there was nothing. Then about five or six years ago there was an inquiry about the consent decree and Attorney Arness located it in the Human Rights files. There was a lot of debate with the Fire Merit Commission and a new ordinance was passed. It was agreed that African Americans would be hired according to the federal consent decree. Attorney Arness reported the ordinance uses the term minorities to include other groups and to get women hired into the Fire Department as well. The ordinance is a separate issue from the consent decree. The consent decree does not mention females or other minorities just African Americans. Attorney Arness stated he hopes the Fire Department is complying and Director Deuitch stated the department has a 19% minority rate. To reflect the minority make-up of the city their goal should be about 28% and he hopes they can reach that in the next couple of years. Attorney Arness stated if anyone had any questions regarding this to email him. Chairperson Engquist asked if they knew how many people, African American and women took the test. Director Deuitch stated he would have to get that information from the Fire Department. Attorney Arness added he is waiting on response from the city regarding changes to the Local Hiring ordinance.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE: Commissioner Gordon stated the fundraising season has come to a close. The October 18th fundraiser was cancelled for various reasons. She has not gotten any feedback regarding the give back night at Buffalo Wild Wings. Commissioner Corley stated he would follow up with them regarding the matter. Chairperson Engquist asked if there were any contributions made in lieu of the last fundraiser. Director Deuitch stated there were inquiries regarding commissioners making donations and that some commissioners have donated their monthly check and others have donated different amounts. If this was something people wanted to do they could. They would still receive their monthly check from the city and if they wanted to make a donation they would write a separate check.

ADOPT A CLASSROOM COMMITTEE: Commissioner Begerson reported there was no activity during the month of October. She stated she would like to schedule a committee meeting.

ANTI-BULLYING COMMITTEE: Commissioner Wright stated the committee was amazing. Three applications were received for the End to Bullying Educational grant. Applications were received from Knapp, Lake Hills and Marsh Elementary Schools. Each recipient has been notified. There was a budget of $600 and it was decided that each school would be awarded $200 dollars. Commissioner Wright asked how the funds would be disbursed and it was clarified that each school would receive an individual check. She added that the schools were very excited and she hopes they can go forward with this committee next year.
OLD BUSINESS: Commissioner Corley stated he would like to have the Black History Month Committee to meet next Wednesday November 12th. There was some discussion regarding the time and it was decided they would meet at 4:30 p.m. at the police station.

Commissioner Williams thanked Commissioner Quinn for stepping at the last minute to be on the Probable Cause Committee. Commissioner Wright asked if everyone would be selected to participate on a Probable Cause committee and Chairperson Engquist stated everyone will get a chance including the new commissioners so they can get the experience.

NEW BUSINESS: Commissioner Quinn stated the Salvation Army is doing intake for the holiday season and in the past the commission has made a donation or adopted a family. This year she would like to make a request for a donation to the Salvation Army for the holiday season. There was discussion regarding the donation and the request would be referred to the finance committee for review.

Commissioner Guerrucci asked if the committee list they received is for 2014 or 2015 and will more committees be added? Chairperson Engquist stated the committee list is for 2014. There is only one standing committee and the others are ad hoc committees. She added there will be a slate of nominee’s next month and there will be an election in January. The newly elected group would determine with input from the commission what committees would be formed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

COMMISSION ON THE SOCIAL STATUS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES REPORT: Commissioner Williams discussed the billboard that Human Rights will have on Michigan Blvd. She also mentioned that contractor Rieth & Riley would not be suspended because redevelopment money was used for the project. She reminded the commission of the county wide Martin Luther King Celebration breakfast on January 19th. Terry Woodard’s youth program has started at the Emmett Wise center and he has about fifteen kids between the ages of 10-17 in the program. Commissioner Williams reported that the Ministerial Alliance met with the president of Tonn & Blank. It was a very productive meeting with about ten ministers present and they discussed getting more African Americans hired.

Director Deuitch stated he was present as well and actually set up the meeting. There was also a meeting at the A.K. Smith Center and it is a great place to take practice tests to help people brush up on their skills. Grace Learning Center is another free resource people can use to help improve their skills. Chairperson Engquist asked if the Director could be more specific regarding the tests. Is it the same test that will be given or will it be something comparable so they can learn the skill for taking aptitude test. Director Deuitch stated the tests are very similar and are math orientated and A.K. Smith center can help you raise your skill level through practice tests. Chairperson Engquist stated a lot of people are nervous when taking a test, but the more you practice the better you become at it. It’s all about skill building.

Director Deuitch reported there was a request for funds for the Martin Luther King Celebration held at Purdue North Central and in the past the commission donated $200. He and Chairperson Engquist discussed it and they would like to increase the amount to $500.00. Commissioner Wright asked if it would be a sponsorship and Director Deuitch stated yes and it would be a gold level sponsorship. Commissioner Guerrucci made a motion to accept the request for funds in the amount of $500 for sponsorship for the Martin Luther King Jr Celebration and it was seconded by Commissioner Corley. Vote: all in favor, none opposed. Motion carried.

Chairperson Engquist noted the addition of two new committees. The Black History Month committee which was added last month. Commissioner Corley will be the chair of that committee. She also announced the addition of the By-Laws committee. It is an important committee and will decide if any revisions will be made. Any proposed revisions will be put before the full committee to be voted on.
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ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned by Chairperson Engquist.

NOTE: The next regular meeting will be December 2, 2014.