

## Meeting of the Human Relations Commission

6801 Delmar Blvd.

City of University City, Missouri 63130

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room

February 16, 2012

6:30PM

In attendance:

Mayor Shelly Welsch

Kathy McGinnis, Chairwoman;

Richard Brown, HR Manager

Dave Olander,

Charlotte Sagi,

Jackie Womack – Secretary

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The meeting was called at 6:30PM. Mr. Womack suggested that the question of attendance be added onto new business. The agenda was approved by all.

Mayor Welsch stated that she is the council liaison now. She also stated that she will try to attend as many commission meetings as she can, and that she is not a member of the council but will be in attendance to answer questions or give input as requested.

Richard Brown, HR Manager, was introduced to the Committee by Kathy McGinnis.

The Juvenile Community Service was tabled until the next meeting.

Mr. Womack asked if it were possible for the meetings to be posted on the bulletin boards in the park and around the city. Mayor Welsch responded that at present the city does not have the time or the ability to post all the boards in commission meetings. She suggested that Rick – Mr. Brown -- might be able to figure out how other commissions post their meetings and where they post them beyond on the website. She stated that would be more suited for something like a community

conversation or an event something like that. University City also has a public relations firm that works with the city, which would be useful for getting the word out for specific events or community surveys.

Ms. McGinnis also suggested that Mr. Brown find out how other commissions do post things, and perhaps the City could take advantage of that, maybe the U City Patch. Mr. Brown stated that he participated in the Civil Service Board and the Pension Board and for those two announcements were posted on the website, posted downstairs and posted at the Library. He added that he would look at what else goes on with the other commissions and boards as well.

Charlotte Sagi suggested that homemade signs be posted in the community, shopping areas, and perhaps the high school. She volunteered to put up the signs. The motion was approved by all.

Next Steps With the School District was next on the agenda. Chairwoman McGinnis stated that the committee intended for the kids from the U City Youth Society to come in and talk, and that doing the meetings in April would be appropriate. Mr. Womack suggested that there be a wider cross-section of kids to interview and Ms. Sagi agreed, adding that kids in the Spanish Club or other clubs could be approached to participate.

Mayor Welsch asked what the purpose of getting information from the kids would be, and how the information would be used once it was gathered. Chairwoman McGinnis stated that the committee wanted to acquire information about racial diversity, and also wanted to know from the kids themselves whether they felt safe in the schools, particularly the high school. She emphasized that the committee was not coming in with a program, that this would be more like educating themselves, getting a feel for what's out there from the people in the community.

Mayor Welch stated that she wished this commission would do a whole community wide conversation on these issues, have facilitated discussions with people of all races, and ethnic groups and religions and ages and socioeconomic and start getting feedback from them to get a sense of what the people in the community are thinking because that could guide the work that the commission might choose to do. She also suggested that the committee needs to go out in the community to speak with kids and also other segments of the community.

Chairwoman McGinnis added that she felt that having five or six kids would make the discussions easier. She moved that the meetings about diversity in U City Schools be conducted in April, with 2 or 3 representatives from the U City Youth Society and 2 or 3 representatives from the alternative school, and that 4 or 5 kids would not be intimidated by meeting with the committee in that way.

Mr. Brown suggested that the commission go to one of the schools and invited the students to come talk, with rules of order, with perhaps 30 students in a classroom and two commission members that perhaps the students would feel more comfortable because they would be on their own territory, the school.

Mayor Welsch stated that she felt it was more appropriate to go through the superintendent's office and the School Board.

Ms. Sagi spoke against the motion, stating that she preferred meeting with a large group of kids at the school because she felt there would be a wider cross-section.

Chairwoman McGinnis again presented the motion on the table that the committee meet with a small group of kids (4 to 6 kids) from the high school and the alternative school in April. She amended the motion that the committee meet with all of the kids at U City High school, instead of at City Hall.

The motion was approved by all present, with details to be worked out in March.

The next subject was Voter Suppression in the state of Missouri.

Chairwoman McGinnis said she remembered that the council wanted to ask University City council if they would speak out that they were opposed to voter suppression, which was photo IDs. The motion was passed, but she was unsure whether anyone had ever talked to the city council. She moved that someone from the commission should go to the council meeting and ask the council to go on record, to give a statement against concerning voter suppression in the state legislature.

Mayor Welsch stated that the City Clerk should get a copy 10 days in advance of the council meetings.

Mr. Olander suggested that the commission receive a draft of the document, developed and approved by the committee ahead of time, by next month.

The motion was amended and approved.

Community Conflict Services was tabled due to time constraints.

The last point was the relationship between the African American community and Asian businesses.

C.J. Larkin, a U City resident, was introduced to the commission. She is a teacher at Washington University School of Law, and the head of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee there.

The commission members introduced themselves.

Chairwoman McGinnis suggested for that this discussion there were three things the commission should try to address: 1) Clarify this issue after discussion, are there still points that we're unsure about? Is there information we need and don't have, and if so, how can we get the information? ; 2) What is the outcome that we would like to have, and 3) how do we begin to get to that outcome?

Mr. Olander began by saying that he was not sure that the problem had not been defined, that there was only one incident, between one customer and one store. He felt that the commission needed more information.

Ms. Sagi stated that she didn't realize that the scope of the problem was nationwide until she saw the articles.

Chairwoman McGinnis clarified that the articles were from the Baltimore Sun, Los Angeles Times, and the Washington Post referring to the tensions between the African American community and the Korean businesses.

Mr. Olander said that the commission doesn't have sufficient data to substantiate the issue's existence.

Ms. Sagi suggested that perhaps a couple of the commission members could go to the store owner and discuss the matter. She wanted to solve this at the lowest possible level, between the complainant and the store. Perhaps a couple of the commission members could go talk to the store owner, and say, "Okay, here's what we heard." She felt that the store owners need to understand that people may

be a little put out and that it doesn't have to be racial. Can't it just be a problem that two people have?

Mr. Womack stated that he was more interested in hearing what Ms. Larkin had to say. He disagreed, saying it was race.

Chairwoman McGinnis said that she remembered that in the last meeting Katie stated that it was not just that one store, or that one incident, that there was a pattern of treatment of African American customers in that particular store and in other businesses owned by Asian people. She wondered if they were owned by Korean, or Chinese or Asian people?

Mr. Womack stated that based on his life experience he was aware that some people would be reluctant to come forward and complain.

Mayor Welsch suggested that if the commission wanted to establish that this is an issue, then they have to collect more data, that you have to be able to show the pattern.

Ms. Larkin suggested that one way to gather information would be to convene a group, invite all people to come and talk about it if they had a problem.

Mayor Welsch commented that she would rather see a series of meetings convened over five or six months' time, facilitated discussions where people from the community bring in their concerns. The commission may find during those discussions that it is an issue, or it may not be an issue with as many people as we think.

Chairwoman McGinnis suggested that the commission talk to a couple of African American church groups, see what they are feeling, which would be on a specific issue, rather than a general issue.

Ms. Larkin suggested that sometimes communication styles might be misunderstood, and that people are reluctant to be wrong about race. Talking about the issue might very well change their behavior, if not their true attitude.

Mr. Olander moved that Chairwoman McGinnis contact Ellen Bern (Chamber of Commerce) about setting up a co-sponsored town hall meeting to ask people their opinion on human relations issues in University City, specifically with regard to

shopping in University City, how are people treated, are they comfortable, that sort of thing.

Ms. Sagi suggested that the commission take a survey on the street, on the Loop, over on Olive, as a supplement to the town hall meeting.

Mayor Welsch added that the city could put a survey up on the city website, as was done for the Youth in Senior survey. She mentioned Survey Monkey.

The motion was seconded and approved.

Mr. Olander moved that Ms. Sagi draft a survey to be posted on the website as one way to get people's opinions. The draft would be emailed to the commission in advance, to be discussed at the next meeting.

Mr. Brown also mentioned that Survey Monkey does have some limitations as how you can phrase those things. He suggested the commission go online and look for free.

Mayor Welsch said that hard copies could be made available in City Hall, and the library and Centennial Commons.

The motion was seconded and approved.

Chairwoman McGinnis suggested that commission members should talk to more people about this issue, including Katie and Marva.

Mr. Olander made the motion that Mr. Womack talk to the commission members to be sure they're coming.

The motion was seconded and approved.

Mayor Welsch suggested that commission members carry around copies of the survey. She also stated that the city can help with their marketing firm, and that copies of the survey can be posted on bulletin boards and the website.

Ms. Larkin suggested that the commission might also want to provide a one or two word sentence as to why they were doing this in the first place.

Chairwoman McGinnis said that would be done at the next meeting after the survey is reviewed and discussed.

Mr. Brown stated that one of the tenets is employee satisfaction surveys you let employees know up front why the information is being gathered, and what you're going to do with the information. That would be critical to this survey.

Mayor Welsch added in order to ensure another one hundred years, University City intends to remain a welcoming community, which means they want to gain input from the community.

Chairwoman McGinnis stated that new business is frequency of meetings, and attendance.

Ms. Sagi said that she thinks we should meet twice a month because she is frustrated about how long it takes to get things done.

Mr. Brown suggested that there are always electric meetings, conference calls, emails, and Skype.

Chairwoman McGinnis suggested that perhaps the commission could use frequent emails to prepare ourselves for meetings.

Mayor Welsch said the appointments to the commissions are made by the council, and there have been a number of problems with members on other commissions not attending. Perhaps someone from this commission would like to go to the council meeting and ask them for guidance on how to cope with commission members who don't show up. The rules may be changed because of this. She will ask for guidance from the council on this subject.

Mayor Welsch mentioned that in the Other that the City is having a Celebration of Diversity Event on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, Saturday night, at 6PM, at Centennial Commons. The city will be unveiling their new brand identity at that time. Everyone is encouraged to come. Someone might talk to Mr. Walker about printing flyers, to let everyone know that the commission is here. The Library has also received a grant for 3 different lectures for Building Common Ground. Karen Armstrong is coming for a lecture, she will be here March 25<sup>th</sup>. The information should be on the library's website.

Mr. Womack asked what year discussion about diversity and multi-cultural start in this area?

Mayor Welsch said that a Chinese person signed the papers that organized the city. The papers were signed in 1904 or 1906.

Chairwoman McGinnis reminded everyone about our next meeting which is the 15<sup>th</sup> of March.

A motion to adjourn was moved and seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.

