



City of Milwaukee

200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
53202

Meeting Minutes

EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSION

TONY SNELL, CHAIR

JACQUELINE COOK, VICE-CHAIR

Nathan Guequierre, Martha Collins, William Crowley, Jessica
Boling, and Jamal Washington

Staffing: Vacant

Wednesday, March 29, 2023

4:30 PM

Room 303, City Hall

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Equal Rights Commission Chair Tony Snell at 4:38 pm

2. Roll Call

Present 5 - Snell Rodriguez, Guequierre, Crowley, Boling and Cook

Excused 2 - Collins and Washington

3. Approval of Previous Minutes

Members were asked to review the minutes of the meeting of February 15th 2023. Motion to approve was made by Chair Snell, moved by Member Guequierre and seconded by Member Boling.

4. Communication from Department of Administration Director Preston Cole (introduction)

Chair Snell made note that in March we honor Women's History Month, and mentioned that while we celebrate Women in one month, Women make us a better City, and better Country each and every day in our lives.

Chair Snell then invited the new Director of Administration, Preston Cole to say a few words. Director Preston thanked the Commission for the work they do. Before accepting this position, Director Preston was Secretary of the Wisconsin State Department of Natural Resources, prior to which he had worked for 28 years in the City of Milwaukee in a number of capacities, culminating in becoming the Deputy Commissioner of Public Works, and ultimately the Commissioner of Neighborhood Services.

Director Cole has throughout his leadership experience, been a champion for equal rights. Director Cole mentioned that it is his responsibility to assist the Equal Rights Commission in any way he can, to accomplishing its mission, and making sure people's rights get protected in the City of Milwaukee.

Chair Snell thanked Director Cole for his service and for his return to the City of Milwaukee to head and leverage the work in this "Department of Departments". Chair Snell added that it is important that this commission continues to hear from city departments on the work they are doing around equal rights.

Chair Snell concluded by encouraging all present to work through the transition challenges by turning them to opportunities. He added, developing solid structures is vital so that two years from now we can look back and see how we memorialized this valuable work we do, not for ourselves or titles but for our community.

Upon an invite for comments, member Guequierre mentioned he was very happy to welcome Director Cole. Member Guequierre added that the Equal Rights Commission has needs from the Administration. Of urgent need is some language on the city's vision for an equitable Milwaukee. Director Cole mentioned he would respond to the request pretty quickly. Member Boling also commented by welcoming Director Cole.

5. Communication from the Office of Equity and Inclusion

Chair Snell welcomed Chief Equity Officer Bernadette Karanja to share communication from the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI), and recognized that she is doubling her role by staffing, and taking minutes for the meeting due to the vacancy in the ERC Specialist position.

CEO Karanja thanked Chair Snell, and added the only communication she had was the sad news that the OEI was losing the ADA Coordinator Rebecca Rabatin, who is retiring and that position will be vacant for two to three months or more. CEO Karanja added that there's no designated interim individual for this position, and a transition plan has been put in place to respond to ADA needs at a minimum, while a decision to fill that position is being deliberated by the Administration.

Chair Snell responded by saying that Americans with Disabilities accommodation is a high priority to which CEO Karanja agreed. Chair Snell requested to remain updated on the status of that vacancy and its impending posting.

Chair Snell requested an update on the vacant Equal Rights Commission Specialist's position, to which CEO Karanja responded that the incumbent is on a leave of absence without pay, because she was an electoral candidate for Aldermanic District 1, pending results. Should the incumbent win, this position will in effect be open for recruitment and will be filled. Until then, CEO Karanja will continue to staff the ERC, as best as the Office of Equity and Inclusion's staffing deficit capacity allows.

Chair Snell further inquired on the proportion allocation of the Equal Rights Specialist function TO staffing the Equal Rights Commission. CEO Karanja responded by saying she has humbly but very directly recommended to the Administration that the Equal Rights Specialist position be dedicated 100% to the Equal Rights Commission as the Department of Administration can measurably justify this allocation in meaningful and variable ways in line with the Commission's strategic plan.

Vice Chair Cook reiterated the critical need for a full-time position support in the Equal Rights Specialist function.

Member Crowley inquired on an estimated timeline to fill the ADA Coordinator position. CEO Karanja mentioned there wasn't a specific timeline created, relative to the City's

Department of Employee Relations' schedule, but she will be reaching out with a request for this timeline in early April.

Chair Snell concluded by recognizing the additional work and devotion staff at the Office of Equity and Inclusion are undertaking alongside the Commission's membership in filling the enormous workload gaps until the various positions are filled, and reiterated the need to fill these vacant positions as quickly as possible to ensure a positive impact continues for many of the city's related services.

6. Communication from outgoing ADA Coordinator Rebecca Rabatin regarding office transition

Chair Snell welcomed outgoing ADA Coordinator, Rebecca Rabatin to present on the status of the ADA Compliance Program relative to Title 2's definition of Public Entities.

Rebecca began with providing a brief history of how her role was created and explained that Under Title 2 of Americans with Disabilities Act, the City of Milwaukee is required to conduct a self-evaluation of all buildings that are accessible to people with disabilities; adopt, publish, establish and post a grievance procedure, and designate an ADA Coordinator to monitor the related compliance.

Rebecca further extrapolated in her presentation, (attached herewith), on the ADA compliance update which included the City of Milwaukee's responsibilities on the settlement agreement effort, aimed at eliminating physical, and communication barriers preventing people with disabilities from participating fully in community life. Rebecca provided information on the number of compliance items completed and the number of compliance items pending, identified in slides 10 to 15 of the presentation.

Rebecca concluded with making recommendations on how to remain ADA compliant by staying current on (1) accessibility at the beginning of projects, (2) as technology evolves, and (3) thinking about compliance from an ADA Regulations perspective rather than focusing only on ADA Architectural or Transportation Standards.

Chair Snell thanked Rebecca and recognized her advice, expertise, attention to detail, and dedication to ADA efforts and to the Equal Rights Commission. Chair Snell observed the way Rebecca brought people together on various projects. Of note was the Accessible Bikes Project and Human Rights Day, both of which were leveraged by the Commission with invaluable support from Rebecca.

Member Guequierre also thanked Rebecca and noted she had encouraged him to join the ERC Commission after working together on a related project on how Americans with Disabilities Act integrates with Environmental Justice.

Member Crowley also thanked Rebecca.

Chair Snell asked what the Grievance Procedure was, and Rebecca responded by mentioning that the Grievance Procedure was adopted by the Council in October 2016.

CEO Karanja also thanked Rebecca and noted that the vacancy will be difficult to fill with someone as well qualified as Rebecca was.

Rebecca added she planned to retire from the City on Friday March 31st and begin a new job at Independence First on April 3rd as Community Outreach and Legislative Policy Analyst.

7. Communication from the Legislative Reference Bureau regarding Chapter 109 complaint and compliance legislation

Chair Snell noted that this item will be postponed pending a response from the Legislative Research Bureau. Chair Snell explained that the Legislative Research Bureau is working on the Legislation, after which City Attorney Thomas Miller will review. Once approved the legislation will be presented to the Commission.

Ms. Tea Norfolk from the Legislative Research Bureau affirmed Chair's Snell's report. Chair Snell thanked Ms. Norfolk and requested that the legislation be ready for the next Equal Rights Commission Meeting and Ms. Norfolk confirmed it would be ready.

8. City department report schedule under s. 109-11 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances

Chair Snell explained this agenda item was related to presentations from City Departments regarding their equal rights efforts. Chair Snell reaffirmed the need for fewer departmental presentations that were intentional in improving the reporting process.

Chair Snell requested a specific hearing from the City's Health Department relative to their work on Racism being a Public Health Crisis. Chair Snell would like to explore how the City's Health Department can collaborate with the new Board of Health.

Chair Snell also requested a specific hearing from the Budget Office Director Nik Kovac in terms of how we tie equity and inclusion to budget efforts.

Vice Chair Cook and Member Guequierre agreed with Chair Snell's requests.

9. ERC annual report to the Mayor and Common Council under s. 109-7.4-a of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances

Chair Snell wanted to obtain information on how ERC will be supported by the Office of Equity and Inclusion in submitting their 2021 Annual Report, as well as how they will be supported in various other pertinent areas including budget support and commissioner recruitment.

10. Commissioner recruitment

Chair Snell welcomed Vice Chair Cook to make a report on Commissioner Recruitment. Vice Chair Cook inquired on the status of the Commissioner Recruitment flyer. It was agreed that a new flyer design is created to recruit for four commission vacancies while being mindful of three specific areas:

a) Sourcing County and City list serves, City of Milwaukee social medial channels and sourcing Common Council Member networks along with Mayor's Office network.

b) Recruitment: Vice Chair Cook reiterated the power of the Commission's network and influence as a resource in finding and reaching out to subject matter experts, not already represented on the Commission's membership.

c) Selection: Vice Chair Cook lauded the selection process but requested we use behavioral based questions rather than open ended questions in the interview process.

Chair Snell agreed with the strategy Vice Chair Cook presented, and requested Commission Members tag-team as a core group on this recruitment with the power of the ask.

11. Community announcements

Chair Snell announced that Friday March 31st 2023 was the International Transgender Day of Visibility. It was, a day to celebrate trans and non-binary people, and to draw attention to finding solutions to exclusion and inequity practices that create poverty, violence and discrimination for the Trans Community.

12. Adjournment

Having no other business, Chair Snell requested for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:56 pm which was made by Vice Chair Cook, seconded by Commissioner Guequierre, and favored by all Commissioners present.