



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Regular Meeting
June 6, 2024
City Space, 100 5th Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902
6:30 pm**

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1. WELCOME

- a. CALL TO ORDER
 - i. Chair, Ernest Chambers, called the meeting to order at 6:36 pm
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Ernest Chambers
 - ii. Wolfgang Keppley
 - iii. Kathryn Laughon
 - iv. Suzanne Lynn
- c. MISSION (recited by all): *Act as a strong advocate to justice and equal opportunity by providing citywide leadership and guidance in the area of civil rights.*

2. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC – IN-PERSON ATTENDEES ONLY

- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
 - i. None
- b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
 - i. None

3. WORK SESSION

- a. Housing, Homelessness, and Wraparound Services Legislative Panel
 - i. Shayla Washington, Executive Director of the Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless (BRACH)
 - 1. There is a need for more truly affordable housing for people at or below 30% of the area median income (about \$25,000 annual income for a household of one)
 - 2. Wants City Council to fund a Homelessness Services Outreach Coordinator
 - a. BRACH is also in the process of acquiring private funding for this position, though ideally, it would be a team of two
 - 3. Wants Council to provide more funding to agencies who do targeted eviction prevention to reduce strain on non-profits
 - ii. Roy Fitch, Employment & Financial Opportunity Manager of Downtown Job Center and Home to Hope Supervisor (City of Charlottesville)
 - 1. Home to Hope is a re-entry program began in 2019 to provide resources to Charlottesville residents after experiencing incarceration

- a. One of the biggest challenges he sees for program participants is finding housing (more than finding work) due to their credit histories, rental histories, and criminal backgrounds
 - 2. Commissioner asks what program participants typically hear from landlords when they are trying to rent
 - a. Landlords may prefer not to rent to people with certain criminal backgrounds, particularly for those with violent crimes or multiple evictions
 - b. Landlords may require a security deposit, last month's rent, and first month's rent at once
 - c. Workaround credit
 - 3. Commissioner asks how program participants find housing
 - a. Sometimes they experience homelessness, or buy a car, or put themselves in non-ideal living situations
 - b. About 50% of intakes identify as unhoused or are homeless shelter residents
 - 4. Commissioner asks for recommendations
 - a. Not sure what options are available, but wants more shelters (even if temporary)
 - 5. Mr. Fitch discusses other barriers
 - a. Estimates it would take about a year for a person to work through the available resources in the area
 - b. 60-70% of participants also have certain restrictions on their licenses, records etc., and thereby must pursue license reinstatements
 - c. Education is a challenge—some participants have to get their G.E.D. to get a job
 - 6. State-level recommendations
 - a. Will let Todd know
- iii. George Dillard, Housing Chair of the NAACP
 - 1. The NAACP explains people's rights to them
 - 2. Works with the NAACP state chair
 - 3. Has seen changes over time as a longtime Charlottesville resident
 - a. Outside contracts came in to make builds for low-income people, but it is still not affordable
 - b. There are sometimes administrative problems, like losing an application
 - 4. Need affordable housing to be actually affordable
 - a. There are often additional costs, like parking
 - 5. Commissioner asks for biggest complaints he hears about housing
 - a. People's applications get turned down even though they have good enough credit
 - b. Landlords often ask for high upfront costs
 - c. Landlords will refuse to take care of their properties upon request
 - 6. Positions on the NAACP board are not paid

7. Commissioner asks how many people he advocates for
 - a. It varies
 - b. The NAACP tells people they offer education
 - i. It must operate by a certain set of rules
8. Commissioner asks what legislation the state-level chair is advocating for
 - a. Lots of things with HUD—state-level chair has shared documents with him
 - b. May be able to connect the Commission with her
- iv. Elizabeth Stark, Housing Justice Chair of Charlottesville Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)
 1. Is also the Eviction Prevention Case Manager at Piedmont Housing Alliance, where she administers funding for the VA Eviction Reduction program (she is speaking tonight on behalf of DSA and as an individual)
 2. Is still a renter despite having lived in Charlottesville since 2013
 3. For about two years, DSA would regularly canvass those who were facing eviction to talk to them about their rights and connect them with aid
 - a. Also has gone to eviction court and gave people information there
 - b. COVID moratoria and funding have expired
 - c. Charlottesville has robust rental relief funding for crises, but Albemarle funding does not
 - i. This has stressed other organizations who are a part of that relief system
 4. A crucial part of keeping tenants housed is having relief during crisis situations
 5. In Charlottesville, there is Community Resource Line funding
 - a. People can get \$1000 per month, up to \$3000 per year, and up to a \$10,000 lifetime limit
 - b. However, rent is still more expensive than this
 - c. There are also late fees, attorney fees, legal fees, etc.
 6. A local recommendation is tying Community Resource Line funding to market rent
 - a. Also wants representation for those facing eviction
 - i. Legal Aid Justice Center represents people who have a housing choice voucher
 - ii. Central Virginia Legal Aid Society represents people who make less than the federal poverty limit
 - iii. People who do not qualify for either of these are still struggling, and they also need representation
 7. Other local recommendations
 - a. There is currently no shelter for families
 - b. Wraparound services to address people who have emergencies not during business hours
 - c. 30-50% AMI are still struggling with current rent—look

- at market-rate rent and adapt services to that
 - d. Share tenant resources in plain English (ex. some people think a pay or quit notice is an eviction)
- 8. State-level recommendations
 - a. Many bills have already been vetoed
 - b. Reinstate 14-day pay or quit
 - c. Create option for payment plan to account for emergencies
 - d. "Just cause" or right to renewal
 - i. Many tenants cannot find or afford a place after their lease expires
 - ii. Landlords are allowed to refuse to renew a lease
 - e. Conditions issues are related to evictions; tenants should be able to assert conditions issues even while during an eviction
- 9. Commissioner asks about proposed legislation about fees
 - a. There was a bill to make all fees clear on the lease
 - b. Another Commissioner asks about restrictions in community funding to pay for fees other than rent
 - i. For the most part, tenants can use these resources for non-rent fees
- 10. Commissioner asks what she would prioritize
 - a. Ms. Stark would like to especially focus on local recommendations
 - b. Right to renewal
 - i. Until it is in place, tenants cannot access their other supposed rights because they will face retaliation
 - ii. Tenants often feel that all hope is lost when they receive a pay or quit notice
- v. Deidre Creasy-Quirindoongo, Director of Adult Rehabilitation Services at Region 10
 - 1. Supervises the directors that supervise medical, substance use services, mental health case management, and the new Blue Ridge Center
 - a. PATH is a program with substance use services to assist people experiencing homelessness with mental health challenges to navigate housing
 - 2. Housing is at the front and the back
 - a. Many individuals are experiencing homelessness or a substance use challenge and have to leave and come back
 - 3. Wants to have some kind of unrestricted funding that is individualizable
 - a. Existing parameters do not always work for every individual
 - b. Housing is a great need, but there are also other needs, like for food, childcare, mental health services, etc., that

- help them sustain that housing
 - c. Funding would help organizations
 - d. Individuals need individualized help, like pest control, but funding is restricted
 - i. Could call upon tenant's rights, but they are likely still suffering during that process
 - ii. Domino effect and sustainability
 - 4. Another program she has is peer support---teaching advocacy
 - 5. Would eventually like to see those who have unmet needs to be able to speak up for themselves
- vi. Questions for Shayla Washington
 - 1. Commissioner asks about unnecessary barriers being put on her work, either locally or state-level
 - a. Needs more staffing
 - b. City management has been supportive
 - c. There have been talks of a new low-barrier shelter
 - d. Needs more funding and advocacy
 - i. Many residents support shelters, but not located near them
 - e. Need for more education and reducing stigma
 - 2. Commissioner asks how we convey information to the unhoused population
 - a. Ms. Washington would love to make more PATH workers full time
 - i. But this requires people to self-identify as having significant mental illnesses
 - 3. Commissioner asks what more she would like to see in terms of homelessness prevention services
 - a. The Haven currently has a HUD-funded, state-funded program that helps prevent people from falling into homelessness
 - i. However, they cannot access this aid until they are about to be evicted
 - b. Need for more prevention funding
 - c. Could increase the cap for those who qualify for homelessness prevention services
 - 4. Commissioner asks if there has been a shift in the types of landlords she works with
 - a. Housing navigation is lacking in the community
 - b. Agencies and nonprofits in the area are sharing the same list of landlords—there are not that many, and the ones that have more affordable units have less ideal living conditions
 - 5. Commissioner asks if there are any issues specific to women or gender minorities
 - a. Traditionally, there are more men who make up the unhoused population
 - b. There are typically shelter options for gender minorities
 - c. Transgender and non-binary people may choose which

- side they stay on
 - d. Those with service/emotional support animals and families will sometimes choose to sleep in their cars
 - 6. Commissioner asks whether there are talks for another homeless shelter
 - a. Talks are in progress with City management
 - 7. HRC Director asks where homelessness prevention limit comes from
 - a. Might be a local decision rather than from HUD
 - b. Ms. Creasy-Quirindoongo says specifically, the SA block grant funds have restrictive parameters
 - vii. Commissioner would like to continue these conversations and thanks panelists for their work in the community
 - 1. Commission has contact with Del. Katrina Callsen and Sen. Creigh Deeds, as well as City Council
 - 2. Shayla Washington is presenting to Council at 4pm on Monday, 6/17/24 for a state of homelessness address
 - 3. Ms. Creasy-Quirindoongo says the Wartime Fitness Warriors are holding a USA-certified boxing event at Charlottesville High School on Saturday, 6/8/24 whose proceeds go to at-risk youth
 - b. HRC Annual Work Plan
 - i. Regular meeting on 6/20/24 to discuss Ordinance amendments and HRC intern research
 - ii. No work session on 7/4/24, but will reconvene on 7/18/24 for Focus Area Legislative Priorities panel
 - iii. HRC Director and Chair presented on 6/3/24 to City Council about CY23 Annual Report
 - iv. No talks yet about Virginia HRCs meeting
 - v. Chair tells Commissioners to think about new ideas and previously vetoed bills in preparation for July panel
 - c. New business
 - i. Commissioner asks about questions for City police
 - 1. Need to narrow down which questions to ask the City
 - 2. Chair will speak with OHR staff about next steps
- 4. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC – IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL ATTENDEES**
- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
 - i. None
 - b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
 - i. None
- 5. COMMISSIONER UPDATES**
- a. None
- 6. NEXT STEPS**
- a. Regular meeting 6/20/24 to present Ordinance amendments and HRC research
 - b. Regular meeting 7/18/24 to hold Focus Area Legislative Priorities Panel
 - c. Other next steps
 - i. Commissioners should think about topics related to legislative panel
 - ii. Chair and OHR staff to be in contact regarding questions for CPD
- 7. ADJOURN**
- a. Meeting adjourned at 8:39 pm