



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Special Meeting
November 7, 2024
City Space, 100 5th Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902
6:30 pm**

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1. WELCOME

- a. CALL TO ORDER
 - i. Vice Chair, Wolfgang Keppley, called the meeting to order at 6:33 pm
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Ernest Chambers (arrived 7:02pm)
 - ii. Wolfgang Keppley
 - iii. Kathryn Laughon
 - iv. Dawn Lawson (arrived 7:01pm)
 - v. Suzanne Lynn
 - vi. Heather Roberson-Gaston
- 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

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

3. WORK SESSION

- a. City-level Recommendations
 - i. Commissioner states that there may need to be changes made to reflect the proposals made by the City Manager regarding year-round low-barrier shelter and other housing supports at the 10/21/2024 City Council Meeting
 - ii. Commissioner suggests consulting with Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) staff to understand their needs and constraints ahead of making a recommendation that Council fund effective right to council
 - 1. Staff member suggests also meeting with staff from Central Virginia Legal Aid Society (CVLAS) to understand how they may be involved to expand the scope of services provided
 - a. Commissioner states that while CVLAS does important work, they may not be able to provide meaningful assistance because of their eligibility requirement that individuals earn less per year than the federal poverty line. Commissioner is concerned that the population of

individuals earning less than the federal poverty line but paying market-rate rent is too small to warrant providing funding to CVLAS for eviction representation. LAJC, however, can assist anyone in low-income or subsidized housing as well as voucher holders.

2. Commissioner asks about timeline of City budget process.
 - a. Staff member shares that City Council will hold a work session for the budget on January 30th, 2025 and approve the budget on April 14th, 2025. The City Manager's Budget Forum will be held December 12th, 2024.
 - b. Commissioners discuss making a more general recommendation to provide effective right to counsel now, then commissioners can conduct research to create a more specific recommendation at a later date.
 3. Commissioner clarifies that the City Manager's proposal was for a 2-year pilot program including the hiring of one Homelessness Services Coordinator and two homelessness outreach staff.
 - a. Commissioner amends recommendation letter to affirm support of this proposal.
 4. Commissioners discuss additional proposals from City Manager, including pallet homes, public restrooms, and providing funding to Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless (BRACH).
- iii. Commissioner moves to approve recommendations to Council
 1. Vote
 - a. In favor: 5
 - b. Opposed: 0
 - c. Abstained: 0
 2. Motion to approve minutes passes
 - b. Commissioners discuss new business and upcoming events
 - i. Outreach Specialist shares tabling opportunities for the upcoming week
 - c. Case 2020-2 Public Hearing Discussion
 - i. Commissioner asks for an overview of options for how to proceed
 1. Director clarifies that at this time, the HRC can either vote to hold a public hearing or vote to not hold a public hearing.
 2. Director clarifies that the HRC is not receiving this case as a result of an appeal or request. The HRC would receive this complaint for a vote on a public hearing regardless of either party's expressed interest in a public hearing.
 3. Director explains the process that the HRC would undergo if Commissioners vote to hold a public hearing.
 - ii. Commissioner asks if both parties are aware that the HRC is voting on this.
 1. Director states that both parties are aware of the HRC's vote and understand the public hearing process.
 - iii. Commissioners informally indicate whether they support holding a public hearing, oppose holding a public hearing, or are undecided.
 1. Commissioners in support of a public hearing explain their

perspectives.

- a. Commissioner states that a hearing may give the Complainant a chance for their voice to be heard and to feel a sense of closure.
2. Commissioners that are undecided explain their perspectives.
 - a. Commissioner shares concern for obligating the Complainant and the Respondent to be together in the same room. Commissioner is also concerned that the HRC is not able to create a productive outcome for the parties in the case.
 - b. Commissioner states that there may not be an opportunity for justice to be further served by holding a hearing.
3. Commissioners that oppose holding a public hearing explain their perspectives.
 - a. Commissioner does not feel that holding a public hearing would advance justice in this case. Commissioner would like to close the case in a timely manner to grant the Complainant the option to pursue legal action.
 - i. Commissioner agrees.
 - b. Commissioner is concerned about imbalanced legal representation.
 - i. Commissioner agrees.
 - c. Commissioner is interested in protecting privacy of Complainant.
- iv. Director states that Complainant is willing to pursue a public hearing but is unwilling to participate in mediation.
- v. Commissioner states that investigation was thorough. Commissioner feels that the Complainant's voice was heard and the HRC cannot provide any additional meaningful recommendations.
 1. Commissioner agrees.
- vi. Commissioner states that the Complainant's original requested remedy was a change to the Respondent's leasing policies. Commissioner asks if the HRC may be able to research practices of individual leasing agencies in Charlottesville and making recommendations to increase the use of non-discriminatory practices and equitable policies.
 1. Commissioner states that there may be ways to address this through legislative recommendations.
 - a. HB 996 may be relevant to this issue.
- vii. Director expresses concern about reaching out to the Respondent about their leasing practices after voting to not hold a public hearing.
 1. Commissioner clarifies that HRC can make recommendations to the Respondent, but the Respondent is not obligated to follow them.
 2. Commissioner contemplates whether the OHR or another organization are already doing work to address barriers faced by tenants.
- viii. Commissioner expresses concern that holding a public hearing may add

additional expenses for the Complainant.

1. Commissioner responds that Commissioners should try not to make assumptions about the unknown wants and needs of parties to the complaint.
 - ix. Director reminds Commissioners that their role in this decision is to decide how the Charlottesville Human Rights Ordinance (CHRO) is best served. Director encourages Commissioners to consider which process is most likely to yield resolution and wholeness for the parties.
 1. Commissioner asks if the HRC can rule on the legitimacy of the process and finding.
 - a. Director states that the HRC is not obligated to consider this.
 - x. Commissioner moves to not hold a public hearing
 1. Vote
 - a. In favor: 4
 - b. Can live with: 2
 - c. Abstained: 0
 2. Motion to not hold a public hearing passes.
 - xi. Commissioner asks if the City could levy a fine against landlords that are found to have violated the CHRO.
 1. State law does not allow the Charlottesville HRC to enforce fines.
 - d. Commissioners review 2024 Work Plan
 - i. Commissioners make adjustments to the 2024 Work Plan to reflect decisions and work completed in this meeting.
 - e. Commissioners discuss officer nomination and election process.
- 4. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC**
- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
 - i. None
 - b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
 - i. None
- 5. COMMISSIONER UPDATES**
- a. None
- 6. NEXT STEPS**
- a. Todd
 - i. Inquire about budget process and identify best time for HRC to share recommendations with Council
 - b. All commissioners
 - i. Revisit recording of 10/21 City Council Meeting as needed
 - c. Ernest and Kathryn
 - i. Officer nomination committee duties
- 7. ADJOURN**
- a. Meeting adjourned at 8:08pm