



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Regular Meeting
January 16, 2025
City Space, 100 5th Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902
6:30 pm**

1. WELCOME

- a. CALL TO ORDER
 - i. Chair, Ernest Chambers, called the meeting to order at 6:36 pm
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Present
 - 1. Ernest Chambers
 - 2. Wolfgang Keppley
 - 3. Mary Bauer
 - 4. Kathryn Laughon
 - 5. Dawn Lawson
 - 6. Suzanne Lynn
 - 7. Jason Melendez
 - 8. Heather Roberson Gaston
 - 9. Elizabeth Stark
 - ii. Absent
 - 1. None
- 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. OFFICER ELECTIONS

- a. Chaired by the HRC Director during the officer elections process
- b. Nominating Committee presents slate of nominees:
 - i. Wolfgang Keppley: Chair and Vice Chair
 - ii. Heather Roberson-Gaston: Chair and Vice Chair
- c. Floor nominations:
 - i. Jason Melendez: Chair and Vice Chair
- d. Chair election
 - i. Jason makes a motion to nominate Heather for chair
 - 1. Wolfgang seconds
 - 2. Heather accepts nomination
 - 3. Vote 1
 - a. In favor: 9
 - b. Opposed: 0

- c. Abstained: 0
 - 4. Heather Roberson-Gaston becomes new Chair of the Commission
 - e. Commissioners discuss possibility of amending rules and procedures to allow for two Chairs and Vice Chairs
 - i. Outreach Specialist states that if there are three HRC members in leadership roles, additional administrative tasks will be required for meeting planning conversations pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
 - 1. Commissioner agrees
 - ii. Commissioner states that having two Vice Chairs will create additional logistical workload and cause confusion
 - 1. Another commissioner agrees
 - iii. Commissioners decide to continue with current Rules and Procedures to elect one Vice Chair
 - f. Vice Chair election
 - i. Ernest makes a motion to nominate Wolfgang for Vice Chair
 - 1. Jason seconds
 - 2. Wolfgang accepts nomination
 - 3. Vote 2
 - a. In favor: 4
 - b. Opposed: 5
 - c. Abstained: 0
 - 4. Motion to elect Wolfgang as Vice Chair fails
 - ii. Kathryn makes a motion to nominate Jason for Vice Chair
 - 1. Mary seconds
 - 2. Jason accepts nomination
 - 3. Vote 3
 - a. In favor: 6
 - b. Opposed: 3
 - c. Abstained: 0
 - 4. Jason Melendez becomes new Vice Chair of the Commission
 - g. Heather begins leading meeting as new HRC Chair
- 4. MINUTES**
 - a. Review of minutes from 11/21/2024
 - i. Suzanne makes motion to approve, Ernest seconds
 - ii. Vote 4
 - 1. In favor: 7
 - 2. Opposed: 0
 - 3. Abstained: 2
 - iii. Motion to approve minutes passes
 - b. Review of minutes from 12/19/2024
 - i. Jason makes motion to approve, Heather seconds
 - ii. Vote 5
 - 1. In favor: 8
 - 2. Opposed: 0
 - 3. Abstained: 1
 - iii. Motion to approve minutes passes
- 5. BUSINESS MATTERS**

- a. CHAIR UPDATE
 - i. Chair shares that she will be traveling less and therefore be more available for HRC Chair work
- b. OHR STAFF REPORT
 - i. Outreach Specialist
 - 1. Few tabling opportunities right now due to seasonal shift
 - 2. Worker Protections for Pregnancy and Lactation brochures are in the final stages of being translated
 - 3. OHR will have new ads inside all City buses in the next 1-2 weeks
 - 4. OHR postcards are in progress
 - ii. Intake Specialist
 - 1. Staff are managing incoming intakes well
 - iii. Director
 - 1. City Council will review proposed amendments to the Charlottesville Human Rights Ordinance at their upcoming meeting to become eligible to enter the Housing and Urban Development Fair Housing Assistance Program
 - 2. 2024 Annual Report is in progress
 - a. Director notes that there is an error in the data provided in the OHR Monthly Reports, and it will be corrected in the 2024 Annual Report

6. WORK SESSION

- a. ACTION UPDATES
 - i. Director states that both of HRC's recommendation letters to Council have been signed and sent
 - 1. Commissioner states that Delegate Katrina Callsen and Senator Creigh Deeds put in a request for the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to utilize a portion of its budget surplus to fund a pilot program in Charlottesville to provide free legal representation for tenants facing eviction
 - a. Director states that this may dovetail with the HRC's recommendation to City Council regarding an effective right to counsel program
 - b. Director clarifies that the HRC and its Commissioners cannot directly advocate to state legislators but can make recommendations to City Council regarding state legislation
 - ii. Commissioner asks if it would be appropriate for HRC to write a letter to City Council with a recommendation to hire staff in the City Attorney's Office for the purpose of increasing the City's ability to advocate for state legislation
 - 1. Director shares that hiring is in progress, but it is a long process
- b. WORK PLAN CHECK IN
 - i. Commissioners confirm date for Annual Planning Meeting on March 22, 2025 from 11:30am-4pm at CitySpace
- c. NEW BUSINESS
 - i. Commissioner shares concern about the impact of snow and ice on

accessibility of sidewalks

1. Commissioner questions equitability of City's plowing prioritization

- a. Another commissioner shares that Livable Cville has an existing letter suggesting that the City apply its existing equity plan for sidewalk to snow pre-treatment and clearing practices

2. Commissioners discuss City's enforcement of existing ordinance requiring homeowners to clear sidewalks

3. Commissioner suggests that the HRC either draft a letter or review and consider supporting the Livable Cville letter

- ii. Commissioner asks if HRC would like to consider an additional letter in support of a low-barrier shelter on Cherry Avenue

- d. The HRC will hold a Work Session on 02/06/2025

7. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC – IN PERSON AND VIRTUAL ATTENDEES

- a. PUBLIC COMMENT

- i. None

- b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC

- i. None

8. COMMISSIONER UPDATES

- a. Commissioner expresses gratitude to Ernest Chambers and Wolfgang Keppley for their service as Chair and Vice Chair

9. NEXT STEPS

- a. All commissioners

- i. Encourage people to apply to be on the HRC! Deadline is February 1st at 5pm

- b. Heather

- i. Compile and share updated information and news articles related to shelter on Cherry Avenue

10. ADJOURN

- a. Meeting adjourned at 7:58pm