



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Work Session
February 6, 2025
City Space, 100 5th Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902
6:30 pm**

1. WELCOME

- a. CALL TO ORDER
 - i. Chair, Heather Roberson Gaston, called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Present
 - 1. Heather Roberson Gaston
 - 2. Jason Melendez
 - 3. Ernest Chambers
 - 4. Wolfgang Keppley
 - 5. Suzanne Lynn
 - 6. Elizabeth Stark (participating virtually due to temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition that prevented the member's physical attendance, pursuant to City Policy No. 100-02 and Va. Code § 2.2-3708.3.B)
 - ii. Absent
 - 1. Mary Bauer
 - 2. Dawn Lawson
- 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. Commissioners discuss sidewalk accessibility during winter weather
 - i. Livable Cville has sent a letter to City Council requesting that the City use its existing equity plan (intended originally to prioritize sidewalk construction and improvements in certain areas) to remove snow in a timely and equitable way
 - 1. Commissioner suggests that HRC could use this letter as a starting point for another letter to City Council
 - 2. Commissioner suggests that the HRC recommend that City Council create a fund in the budget for addressing these concerns
 - 3. Another commissioner suggests sending an email to City Council endorsing the letter from Livable Cville and proposing

that Council increase the appropriate funding to allow for snow removal to be done in accordance with the City's sidewalk equity plan

- a. Commissioners discuss whether this would be needed each year given the inconsistent snowfall
 - i. Commissioner suggests that the HRC make a recommendation to develop a plan for how to remove snow from sidewalks in an equitable way which can be used as needed
- ii. Commissioner suggests meeting with City employees in Public Works for more information about the current snow removal process
 1. Another commissioner suggests meeting with the City's ADA Coordinator to discuss connections to ADA transition plan and other ADA accessibility work
- b. Commissioners discuss proposed low-barrier shelter on Cherry Avenue
 - i. Commissioner shares that Senator Deeds worked with the City Manager and Council to include \$1.5 million in the proposed state budget to be used for a low-barrier shelter in Charlottesville
 - ii. Commissioners discuss need for shelter to be accessible to all demographics, including gender minorities, people with disabilities, families, people with limited English proficiency, and others
 1. Commissioner states that this is an important requirement and must continue to be a priority if legal protections for these groups change in the future
 2. Commissioner agrees that City must commit to upholding its values and the Human Rights Ordinance regardless of the organization managing the proposed shelter
 - iii. Commissioners discuss definition of "low-barrier shelter" as it applies to the proposed Cherry Avenue shelter
 1. Commissioner suggests that the City should maintain a clear and consistent definition of "low-barrier shelter"
 2. Commissioner states that "low-barrier" is generally defined by a locality's Continuum of Care
 - iv. Commissioner suggests that it may be helpful to talk to the City Manager to ask about the most helpful role for the HRC to play in this process, because there may be more impactful actions to take than writing another letter to City Council
 - v. Commissioner suggests inviting Shayla Washington at Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless, new Director of The Haven, and new Director of PACEM to speak with HRC
 1. Commissioner suggests asking these guests about critical elements of low-barrier shelter
 2. Another commissioner suggests including Cathy at Monticello Area Community Action Agency (MACAA)
 3. Commissioners plan to invite the above guests to their Regular Meeting on February 20th, 2025
 - vi. Commissioner encourages HRC to prioritize supporting the City Manager's proposal rather than focusing too heavily on the definition of "low-barrier"

- vii. Commissioner acknowledges that there have been concerns raised by community members, but affirms that opening a shelter would improve safety for all community members

4. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC

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

5. COMMISSIONER UPDATES

- a. Commissioner asks if the HRC would like to consider issuing a statement about the University of Virginia (UVA) decision to stop providing gender affirming healthcare to the community
 - i. Commissioner suggests statement regarding UVA's deterioration of protection for several protected groups
 - ii. Commissioner expresses concern around the potential for UVA to harm additional protected classes of individuals due to perceived risk of losing federal funding in the future
 - 1. Another commissioner disagrees with this statement
 - iii. Commissioners discuss possibility of hosting a Town Hall on this topic
 - 1. Suggested participants to invite include UVA President Jim Ryan, leadership at UVA Health, private providers of gender affirming care, and members of community impacted by this decision to speak with commissioners
- b. Commissioners discuss whether there will be a need for HRC to be involved in conversations around schools and immigration enforcement
- c. Commissioner asks how HRC poll is promoted and encourages other commissioners to share poll directly with their networks
- d. Commissioners discuss the format of HRC meetings and whether or not to continue posting recordings of meetings online
 - i. Director suggests drafting a resolution to codify the HRC's publicity policy and commissioners discuss this option
- e. Commissioner shares upcoming Regional Housing Summit on March 13th hosted by Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC)
 - i. Director states that commissioners who would like to attend can reach out to staff for cost of attendance to be covered
 - ii. Commissioner suggests requesting TJPDC waive entry fee for commissioners
- f. Commissioner shares upcoming Learning from LGBTQ+ Community event on February 2/8 and encourages commissioners to attend

6. NEXT STEPS

- a. Kathryn and Wolfgang
 - i. Work on sidewalk snow removal letter
- b. Todd
 - i. Contact City staff regarding meeting about snow removal procedures
- c. Wolfgang
 - i. Reach out to individuals that may be interested in participating in Town Hall
- d. Todd & Elizabeth
 - i. Reach out to Shayla, Cindy, and Owen to request dialogue

1. Options: join February Regular Meeting in person or virtually,
have an individual meeting with a commissioner
 - e. Heather, Jason, Todd, and Lily
 - i. Draft resolution regarding meeting publicity
 - f. All commissioners
 - i. Consider other potential housing advocates to contact for more
information related to proposed shelter on Cherry Avenue
- 7. ADJOURN**
- a. Meeting adjourned at 8:10pm