

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2024
7:00 p.m., City Hall
301 King Street, Room 2000
The Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Lisl Brunner, Chair
Marc Bendick
April Breslaw
Iulia Fratila
Matt Harris
Manisha Maniyar
Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson, Vice Chair
Megan Prince
Tom Reeder, Jr.
David Rigsby, Vice Chair
Conrad Sylvanus
Jon Thompson

Staff Present

Anna McClure
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Members Excused

Katherine O'Connell
Sam Schwartz

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Lisl Brunner

Chair Brunner called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and welcomed new Commissioner Manisha Maniyar.

2. Introductions

Commissioner Maniyar introduced herself and said that she has a small business that offers transportation services. Introductions were made.

3. Approval of Minutes of the March Meeting

Upon a motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Vice Chair Rigsby, the Commission approved the minutes of the March meeting, as amended. All Commissioners present voting aye.

4. Executive Committee Meeting

Chair Brunner talked about the ceasefire statement sent to the City Council and asked if anyone had received any feedback or had heard anything concerning it. Commissioner Bendick asked about protocol or City procedure if the Commission makes a recommendation to the City Council, but don't receive any kind of official acknowledgment. He asked if City Council has an obligation to let the Commission know what happened to the recommendation? Acting Director McClure stated that the City Council does not have any obligation to do so. Commissioner Bendick stated that there needs to be a procedure or official recommendation that Council should respond officially, and if that is not the current practice maybe this Commission needs to talk to the City Council and make a recommendation to the City Council saying that there should be some kind of response. Commissioner Bendick stated that it is inappropriate for the City Council just to ignore the Commission. Chair Brunner suggested appearing at the City Council meetings when issues come before them and she also suggested raising this issue at the next Boards and Commissions Chairs meeting.

Chair Brunner stated that the Executive Committee discussed honoring Susan Kellom with a proclamation or some kind of recognition on behalf of the City in recognition of her services to the City. Vice Chair Palmer Johnson suggested nominating former Commissioner Susan Kellom for the Alexandria Celebrates Women Award, which is for women who have done outstanding work for the City. Upon a motion by Commissioner Bendick, seconded by Commissioner Prince, the Commission will support the nomination for Commissioner Susan Kellom.

5. Potential Guest Speaker

Chair Brunner reported that the Sheriff had a conflict and was not able to attend tonight's meeting. She also reported that she had reached out to the Tenant and Workers and the Legal Aid Justice Center about the concerns they had shared, last year, regarding the Sheriff's enforcement of federal immigration administrative orders that the Sheriff's Office is not legally obligated to enforce, but she said that they did not have a full discussion on that topic.

Chair Brunner reported that the Sheriff is willing to come and speak to the Commission in a future meeting. Vice Chair Palmer Johnson reported that Commissioner O'Connell had sent her four questions for the Sheriff. Action Item: The Commission will submit their questions to Acting Director McClure so that she can collect them and forward to the Sheriff. Vice Chair Palmer Johnson suggested inviting the Tenant and Workers to come when the Sheriff comes to present.

Chair Brunner reported that Interim Police Chief Pedroso is coming to the June Commission meeting, and he would like for the Commission to tell him, specifically, about the issues that they are interested in. She said that she told him the Commission is interested in school resource officers. Vice Chair Rigsby would like to get an update on body-worn cameras.

Commissioner Bendick made two comments on the 2022 Annual Use of Force Report Analysis and said that the Police Department has discontinued its practice of tracking use of force cases by the officer(s) involved. He said the department now reports strictly based on incident. Commissioner Bendick stated that this is a terrible practice that the Commission should bring it to APD's attention. Commissioner Bendick suggested writing a letter to the Police Department saying that they have reviewed the report and found deficiencies and would like to know if the Police Department can change their data analysis practices and notify the Commission that they have changed it and amended the report. There was an extensive discussion on this issue.

Chair Brunner stated that the Community Policing Review Board has sent a Memorandum of Understanding to the Police Department, and Department is reviewing it and has not yet provided a date for when they will come back with an agreed-upon MOU. It might also need to be approved by City Council. The Community Policing Review Board said that, by ordinance, they will evaluate complaints and the use of force incidents.

Vice Chair Rigsby suggested sending a letter to the City Council in support of the Community Policing Review Board and the Memorandum of Understanding, asking that the Police review it and sign it as soon as possible.

The Commission is interested in hearing from the Police Department about excessive-use-of-force statistics, school resources officers, body-worn cameras, and biased policing statistics.

Chair Brunner stated that the Police Chief will be coming in June and that Kevin Harris will come to the July meeting, so there is an opening in May. Chair Brunner stated that the Executive Committee is interested in a tour of the Juvenile Detention Center. Acting Director McClure will reach out to Mike Mackey, who is staffs the board of the Juvenile Detention Center.

6. Old & New Business

Nominating Committee

Acting Director McClure asked for volunteers to serve on the nominating committee. Upon a motion by Commissioner Thompson, seconded by Vice Chair Rigsby, Commissioner Harris and Chair Brunner will serve as the nominating committee.

Rainbow Crosswalk

Vice Chair Rigsby stated that Adriana Castaneda sent an email with an update regarding the rainbow crosswalk. Vice Chair Rigsby read the email, which stated that the City Council directed staff to implement the rainbow crosswalk by June 1, 2024, with the design that aligns with the pride progress flag. Two locations were agreed upon. Since November 2023 staff has developed a crosswalk design, finalized materials, and established an implementation timeline.

Commissioner Prince wanted to know if any follow-up has been done on the gender-neutral bathroom issue. Chair Brunner stated that Erika Kleiner spearheads it with Kennetra Wood, from ACPS, and they have started talking about floor plans, especially for the new Minnie Howard facility, and they have some concrete ideas for ACHS. Chair Brunner will follow up with them to see where they left that.

Chair Brunner brought up a child immigrant labor law issue and said that the Labor Department had published a report on different topics. There was a section devoted to youth employment; the report was issued in 2023 and they had conducted 1,239 inspections; they issued 951 violations and investigated 47 complaints of child labor. She also mentioned that the New York Times had a series on migrant children; working long hours to pay for their transport to this country and to support their families. She suggested reaching out to the Fairfax and Arlington Human Rights Commissions to see if they would like to send a letter to the Virginia Department of Labor to ask more about these investigations.

Chair Brunner brought up partnering with members of the City Council and establishing standing relationships with some of the NGOs and other groups in the City. She read a list of the organizations that she maintains contact with; Tenants and Workers United, Legal Services of Northern Virginia, ACT (African Communities Together), the Legal Aid Justice Center, the NAACP for Northern Virginia, and VOICE. The commission will create a spreadsheet with the organization's information and will provide it to the office. The following Commissioners volunteered to be liaisons: Commissioner Bendick - Tenants and Workers; Commissioner Sylvanus- ACT; Commissioner Breslaw - Legal Aid Justice Center; and Commissioner Fratila - Legal Services of Northern Virginia. Vice Chair Rigsby volunteered to attend other commission meetings where they have no liaison to it.

7. Liaison Reports

Vice Chair Palmer Johnson reported that the Commission for Women sponsored a webinar on Black Maternal Health. Their guest speaker was Pat Miller, the Executive Director of Alexandria Celebrates Women. She also announced that, on September 24, 2024; the Commission will have their 50th-anniversary celebration in the Vola Lawson Lobby. She announced that April is Sexual Assault

Awareness Month and that Commissioners will be distributing flyers at the Metro stops in Alexandria. She also announced that they will be having a “baby shower” for the City, on April 20; they will be collecting diapers and other items for babies for donation.

Commissioner Prince reported that the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities met on April 10. Doris Ray discussed that ECVN is trying to get an increase in the affordable accessible dwelling unit program from 2% to 10%. The ACPD had a guest from the Health Department, and they conducted an activity on how to solve possible health issues that people can deal with in housing; the top resident complaints were: pests, smoke, mold, and clutter. The ACPD also discussed Disability Pride Month and possibly partnering with the Human Rights Commission. She also announced the ACPD awards on June 26.

Commissioner Sylvanus reported that the Economic Opportunity Commission met on March 20, and they approved their FY25 budget letter. The letter advocated for housing voucher and eviction prevention programs and the continuance of the DASH fare-free system. He reported that they completed their needs assessment and are working on whether to have youth voices on their board.

Commissioner Reeder reported that the Commission on Aging also focused on the City budget. They are pushing for an increase in eligibility for property tax relief by increasing the income and asset limits, and no cuts in DASH bus services. He reported that they finalized their Age Friendly City Report, which will be submitted to City Council. They have started working on the new Age Friendly Plan.

8. Public Comment

Members of the public spoke to the Commission about several issues. They provided updates on events in Gaza, expressed that the contributions and concerns of the Palestinian, Islamic, and Arab-American communities in Alexandria are being ignored or erased by the City, expressed anger that City Council has not taken up the Commission’s recommendation for a cease fire resolution, and encouraged commission members to speak at City Council public hearings about it. They shared their request to the Mayor for a proclamation recognizing the Naqba of 1948 and supported the Commission’s concerns regarding police use of force and the Sheriff’s policies regarding immigration detention and cooperation with ICE.

9. Announcements /Adjournment

Chair Brunner reported that she had attended the ALIVE! Food Hub on April 13. Commissioner Fratila volunteered to stuff the ALIVE! Food Hub table, on May 11, 2024.

MOTION: Adjourn the meeting.

Vice Chair Palmer Johnson/Commissioner Thompson **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m.