

Onondaga County/Syracuse Commission on Human Rights

John H. Mulroy Civic Center
11th Floor East
421 Montgomery Street
Syracuse, NY 13202
(315) 435-3565

2016 Human Rights Commission Meeting Dates

Meeting #	Date	Location	Notes
2016 - 1	September 14, 2016	221. South Warren St.	
2016 - 2	October 26, 2016	518 James St.	
2016 - 3	November 16, 2016	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2016 - 4	December 21, 2016	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	

Approved Minutes of Human Rights Commission Meeting – Sept. 14, 2016

Commissioners Present:	Shiu-Kai Chin Starr Guckert (on phone) Leonardo Sanchez Dave Paskinski Francis McMillan Parks	Montanette Murphy Mary Alice Smothers Crystal Doody Suzette Melendez Rev. Doug Mackey	Rabbi Daniel Fellman Rosalie Young Bruce Carter Gabe Ramos
Commissioners Absent/Excused:	Joyce Suslovic	Rev. Bernard Alex	
ASL Interpreters:	Joanne Jackowski, Aurora	_____ Aurora	
County Staff Present:	Barrie Gewanter, Director		
Members of the Public Present:	Kate Pollack None	Wayne Dunham	Media Present:

Shui-Kai Chin convened the meeting at 6:00 with the above persons present

Notes Taken By Barrie Gewanter. However, notetaking interrupted during 1st section of meeting by incoming community members. Last half of notes from introductions section is much more complete.

Agenda Item 1. - Welcome and Introductions

Shiu-Kai Chin welcomed everyone. Barrie Gewanter asked all present to introduce themselves by name and vocation, and to share something unusual or unexpected about themselves.

Barrie identified herself as the Director of the Human Rights Commission and as a civil rights advocate. She shared that she was also a woodcarver who did a form of what she called “land art.”

Leonardo Sanchez stated that he was a nurse at ACR Health, but that he had done accounting on Wall Street in NY City before becoming a nurse

Dave Pasinski spoke about his history in ministry and community service in Syracuse.

Francis McMillan Parks was raised in Texas during segregation. She recalled her years working with students at Syracuse University in programs based in Hendricks Chapel. She shared that she now wants to spend time with grandchild.

Montanette stated that she has a journalism background, but now works for a doctor.

Crystal Doody stated that she is a lawyer at Legal Services, and that she and her partner are expecting the birth of twins soon.

Suzette Melendez stated that she is also a lawyer and the Director of the Children’s Law Clinic at SU, and is very interested in issues of inclusion. She also shared that she is a certified in scuba diving.

Doug Mackey is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. He stated that his first 2 years in ministry were in the City of Syracuse, but that he is now the pastor of a church in Tully. He stated that his first career was in archaeology and worked on a ship buried where land was being excavated for the original World Trade

Center. He has always had a keen interest in social justice and civil rights. Ministry allows him to do more in that vein.

Rabbi Fellman said he is a rabbi in the reform tradition in Judaism, and just returned from a summer of study in Jerusalem. He stated his belief, akin to Jewish scholar Joshua Heschel that one must pursue prayer through action, i.e. "with ones feet."

Rosalie Young was a professor in the Public Justice Program at SUNY Oswego, where she focused on the right to legal counsel, especially in civil matters. After retiring from SUNY she returned to her first career, and now does counseling at Jewish Family Services. She also does triathalons.

Bruce Carter said he is a former southerner from Florida. He said that he father taught him that "we are all the same under the skin." He teaches child psychology and child development at SU. He has worked in different ways on issues of equality. He was a former director of the local Aids Task Force, and a founder of first local LGBT Youth Center. He just finished a 5 year term on the Board of CNY Pride, including serving as it's president. He was on the advisory board of Community Wide Dialogues. He stated that he is a scuba instructor. He has been very active in the Syracuse University Senate, and just finished instructing a bunch of new senators on "how to be rebellious."

Gabe Ramos stated that he is originally from NY City, and grew up in Spanish Harlem. His parents were from Puerto Rico. He recalled that he was "one of those rebellious students at SU in the late 60's/early 70's," and was involved in supporting the so-called "Syracuse 8" from the SU football team. As one of the few Puerto Rican students at SU at the time, he established links with the Black Students Union to create more opportunities to bring Latino students to SU. He was involved in bringing paintings by an Attica prisoner to be displayed at the Everson. He has always had a passion for equality and fairness. He became a police officer, first in Syracuse, and then in Palm Beach, Florida where he worked in the schools. He has a son who has mental disabilities from oxygen deprivation, and got involved with the needs of students with disabilities. He coaches his son in basketball in the Special Olympics. While in Palm Beach he became an investigator for the Pubic Defender's, and then became a Private Investigator after he returned to Syracuse. He currently does that work for criminal defense cases, especially for cases involving indigent defendants. He started "Gideon's Boutique", which provides court clothes for indigent clients for trial. He felt that it can level the playing field a bit "if you can't tell who the lawyer is." He stated that he is also certified in open water scuba diving. He served in Coast Guard Reserve in Florida, where he did search and rescue

Mary Alice Smothers stated that she was from a family of 15 from South Maryland, and that her parents were married for 65 years. She recalled loosing her mother and then her close friend Roxanne Green. She said that it was important for her to keep working for justice for Latiesha Green, Roxanne's transgender child. Barrie offered the information that Tiesh died in a murder that was prosecuted as a hate crime. The guilty verdict was later reversed by the appellate court and remanded back to Onondaga County. Barrie stated that the man originally convicted of manslaughter in Tiesh's death will be retried later this year or in early 2017.

Starr Guckert called in from Arizona. She stated that she was born with a disability and has developed other disabilities as time has gone on. She was born at a time when there was no such thing as special education. She is very familiar with labels and devaluing, but turned that experience into a passion for civil rights. Her first effort was a one woman campaign to save the position of Disability Services Coordinator at OCC. As a result of her efforts, the college president was forced to keep the position on campus. Starr said she know what it is like to go through college without supports. Starr said that she got a call from a Deaf services co-worker at Aurora just before this meeting. She has been working to get the US. Immigration Services to provide the two required interpreters for a Deaf person from Nepal. It took 4 weeks to persuade them to get both an ASL plus a Nepalese Sign Language interpreter for a June meeting. For the past 2 weeks she has been trying to ensure that there would be 2 interpreters for this person's citizenship ceremony. She just found out that these interpreters would be provided.

Shiu Kai Chin was born in New York City. His mother became a refugee when the Japanese invaded Hong Kong. His father came to the U.S. from China as a child. Shiu-Kai is now a Computer Engineer at SU. He has lived in Syracuse since 1970. He has served on several boards. He is the financial officer of the Municipal Airport Authority, and is on the boards of WCNY and Interfaith Works. His PHD advisor founded the Alternatives to Violence Project. Shiu Kai worked as an AVP trainer in Auburn Prison for 10 years. In 2002 he spent time in N. Korea teaching about computer security.

Two people from community also introduced themselves:

- Kate Pollack stated that she works at the Disability Cultural Center at SU. She is a recent SU graduate in educational studies. She is very Interested in criminal justice and disability rights. She is on the board of Aurora, and wants to be more involved in the Community. She also said she is a cartoonist

- Wayne Dunham introduced himself as a representative of the local branch of the NAACP. Barrie added that Wayne is the current president, and has been active in the NAACP for decades.

Agenda Item 2 – Enabling Legislation & Purpose of the Human Rights Commission

Barrie stated that in the 1960's NY State passed legislation allowing counties to form local Human Rights Commissions for purposes similar to what is written in the Commission's enabling legislation. She reviewed the 10 purposes of the Commission stated in the 2015 legislation that reinstated the entity. Each Commissioner was provided a packet with this legislation included. She pointed to the language in the beginning of this legislation that the legislature wants to "renew and strengthen" the Human Rights Commission. The purposes stated in the 2015 legislation are almost exactly what was included in the original 1993 enabling legislation when the Commission became a county entity.

Agenda Item 3 – Brief History of the Human Rights Commission

Shiu Kai began a description of the history of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) by stating that only he and Starr Guckert served on former Commission. Starr stated that she was appointed to serve two terms in 1982 and 1985. Shiu-Kai had served as a Chair of the former Commission. Shiu-Kai stated that the original Commission was founded in 1963 as a City entity. It became a City / County entity, and then its operation came to be housed and funded entirely by the county in the 1990's. The former Commission did investigations into conditions at the county Jail and housing issues. They also build awareness of and monitored compliance with government requirements to include a threshold of Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE's) in their service and construction contracts. He recalled being told by Leon Modeste, an African-American leader and Director of the Urban League, that the work of the Human Rights Commission was very important and must keep on going. Shiu-Kai said that when he was involved with the Commission it had a small staff or no more than 4-5 people. Barrie offered information that in the late 60's the Commission had as much as 14 staff, including several full time investigators. Starr recalled that when she was on the Board, the Director was Lou Clark and the Commission produced a TV Show. Barrie recalled that the title was "Straight to the Source." Barrie also pointed out some advocacy highlights from the history of the original Commission including addressing the absence of African-American mannekins in Syracuse Dept. stores, working to demonstrate the need to create an police oversight agency in Syracuse and proposing related legislation, working with CSEA and the County Executive to initiate diversity training for new county employees, and

Shiu-Kai said that in 2010 the county legislature defunded the Human Rights Commission and it stopped meeting. Barrie added that 2 of the staff were retained but transferred to other departments. The other 2 positions were eliminated, including the Director. Shiu-Kai said that he did not think that the Human Rights Commission would come back. Barrie explained that in late 2015 when the Legislature decided to create an oversight entity for the county jail, the Chair of the Legislature decided to provide administrative, intake and investigative support for this new entity by standing up the Human Rights Commission again, but without the

responsibility to do MWBE contract monitoring. At the same time the Legislature passed the legislation to create the Justice Center Oversight Committee, it passed concurrent legislation to “renew and strengthen” the HRC. The HRC office has been operating since Barrie’s first day on the job in August 2015. Bridget Owens, the former Human Rights Specialist, was transferred back into the HRC office to work with Barrie. There are currently no other staff other than interns in the office.

Agenda Item 4 - Staff Responsibilities, Objectives, Observations

Barrie reviewed the 6 key responsibilities of the staff of the Human Rights Office now, including providing support and guidance for the Human Rights Commission and intake and investigation for the Justice Center Oversight Committee. It is a multifaceted office which receives and responds to intake from the public, and from inmates at the Jail and Jamesville Prison, provides diversity training for all new county employees as well as 3 non-profits. The staff also collaborates on selected projects with other county departments. The office functions as one of the smallest County Departments.

Barrie also reviewed her medium and long-term objectives for the Human Rights office, and offered her observations about the most pressing human and civil rights problems she is seeing in the intakes that come into the office and her networking in the community. This included the apparent acceptance of expressions and actions based on bias and bigotry, and the reluctance of medical and legal professionals to provide interpreters for people who have limited proficiency with English, including people who speak other languages and people who utilize symbolic languages such as ASL.

Agenda Item 5 - Commissioner’s Interests & Goals & Priorities

Shiu-Kai asked each Commissioner to comment on their individual human/civil rights interests and priorities, and he referred to the related questions Barrie had included in an email to Commissioners prior to this meeting.

Francis Parks stated that she was recently back in Texas where she listened to a lecturer who spoke about the concept of white privilege. This resonated with her strongly. She was with a group of Texas women who would have supported Barbara Jordan and Molly Ivins, but it is very different to say but you have had the privileges of being white all your life. When Frances came to Syracuse in 1982, she expected that “freedom and possibilities” would be “sounded from the rooftops.” She was very surprised to find that living here was like living in Odessa TX. Francis stated “we don’t sit across from each other and talk and share experiences.” She added that “even feminist leaders wouldn’t let African American women to the table, or at the podium.” To her, the topic of white privileging is at the top of her list. There is a sense of this as if people say “it’s mine, and I will protect it at all cost.” She recalled how community members on the North Side of Syracuse were adamant that “immigrants cannot come in.” Francis asked “how can you live in a community where people, whose parents were immigrants themselves, stand on street corner and say - no immigrants allowed.” Francis also spoke about overt vs. covert racism, and asked how we can get at the subtle racism. She also reflected on the current political cycle that that Shirley Chisholm was really the first woman to run for president. She asked “who is not invited to join the circle.”

Starr Guckert stated that discrimination runs rampant against people with disabilities. She stated that she is an ADA specialist, and before that she was a specialist in Section 504. She stated that in the last 26 years, since passage of ADA, employment percentages among people with disabilities have not increased - it is still at 30%. She stated that people look at people with disabilities and don’t see the person – they see the disability. People think, “if I had that person’s disability, I couldn’t”, and then carry that perception over into hiring or rental decisions. She offered this example that people who are blind or have a dog guide have been denied jobs. She spoke of the advocacy that she does, and that one’s expects the focus to be on one on one advocacy, on what is immediate and urgent. But she perceives the “systems advocacy” view on a generational basis. Things she did 40 years ago impacted the generation behind her. Starr said she is not seeing any disability advocates coming up behind her and her veteran colleagues, who are getting older. Starr also stated that people who are Deaf

don't see themselves as a disability group. They don't perceive that they have a problem being Deaf, it is the rest of us that can't communicate. Starr wants to change the way that the public looks at people with disabilities.

Bruce Carter said that he is very interested in issues faced by immigrant communities, and the ways they are treated. He pointed to challenges of moving to a new country and learning about a totally different cultural context, but also living in an intolerant community. He said then think about adding disability or LGBT. Bruce said, for a year, he has been trying to get the SU Child and Family Studies Dept. to develop a Master's Degree focused on children and families in refugee settings. He suggested this would be something of value. At SU, there are only 2 course on the entire campus that focus on immigrant and refugee studies, and there is nothing else on campus outside of the Law School and Child & Family Services. Bruce pointed to a community history of accepting immigrants to this land of the Onondaga's, and suggested that we should be looking at this. He stated that it used to be that the only groups about which one could express derogatory comments was LGBT or smokers, but now seems acceptable to do so in reference to the immigrant community. He feels that this focus still intersects with other issues.

Rosalie Young said she was concerned about young people, especially those from minority groups, LGBT, and immigrants who feel they have no power or future, so "it doesn't matter what I do now." There are too many young people who feel that it does not matter what I do because I have no future

Crystal Doody suggested that police and community relations is a key issue. She suggested that police abuse their power, and people don't know what to do. There are good things being done, but people need to know how to seek redress.

Rabbi Dan Fellman said he was concerned about the level of fear in America today, that it is at an absurd level. He stated that "we have far more fear here than people in Israel." He stated that "my desire to be on this committee is to create hope" and that "we need to be on the street manufacturing hope." He wants to see people linking arms, and saying that we believe that world can be better. He also stated that if the Commission spend too much time talking, it will not be worth it. He prefers action to discussion that does not move our community forward.

Rev. Doug Mackey - He recalled that the political conventions we had few months ago were all about anger and fear. He wants to focus on young people, that it is important to have young people involved in this. He stated that he has seen a lot of progress made in the 60's and 70's now being rolled back. He also suggested that many of the people that do progressive work are the same, and rotate over and over. We should be involved in educating with kids, to reaching out to the youth. He pointed to the idea that so many young women do not recognize the fights that happened decades ago. So much of that history is taken for granted, but we may have to fight the same fights over again. Things we thought we had dealt with before, we now have to go back to.

Suzette Melendez wanted to echo the issue that Francis raised. She said that she was not thinking of this in terms of "white privilege" per se but in terms of "entitlement". She also agreed that there is a lack of appreciation of previous struggles. During her job as a lawyer, she continues the struggle through the law. She stated that she has seen throughout her life that for people who are marginalized or impoverished there is a lack of process. She feels that process is extremely important - access to justice, access to interpreters, whether spanish, asl, or languages of Africa. Even in her leadership of the Children's Rights Clinic, she has learned to change to fill the needs of the community. She is now taking on special juvenile immigrant cases in the clinic. She has talked with Latino leader Ed Cuello about how we can make the larger community take ownership of this problem, not just for Latinos, but also for other marginalized groups. Ed Cuello is addressing this on a corporate level in Syracuse, but there is a reason why we should all assume ownership of the problem. One of the things Mark Lamont Hill said when he spoke recently at SU, is that you have to buy into ALL of it - you are all in or you are out. Speaking as a woman, as a Latina, as someone who speaks more than one language she feels that it is crucial to take this view. Suzette suggested that one of ways we can do it is through the diversity

trainings provided through the Human Rights staff. One of ways can do it is with someone who is passionate as I am but looks different than me. To Crystal's point, she also suggested that we address how police operate in our community, but also how the DA is allowed to practice in this community. She suggested that people feel powerless against the way the DA operates, and that this official cannot be challenged. She referred to this as a systemic concern, and suggested that there is no level of concern that process is being denied in that world, that the law is not being followed. In many cases this is because people are just too afraid.

Mary Alice Smothers noted that we have talked about kids a lot. She stated that this is the work she does, working with kids, and suggested that there is a huge disconnect. She has walked the streets, and worked with Weed and Seed. She suggested that the way police officers talk to kids is very problematic, that they are treated as nothing, and officers destroy their property. Officers throw their backpacks down. Officers take their phones. And if we try to help, we have to get out of the way. She suggested that we have to get to kids by 9th grade, and that if we don't reach out to them until 12th grade it's too late. We need to figure out how to bring kids together to strengthen them. She has seen 100 Black Men in Law Enforcement to talk to local kids. We need to talk to them, to educate them about their rights. She suggests that kids rights are taken from them. She stated that if kids are riding in a car 2-3 deep, they are going to be stopped, and suggested that kids don't want to come out of their houses because police are stopping kids even when they are on a bike. She suggested that this is happening everyday

Gabe Ramos said that he has been, and is still in the middle of all of this, and sees it on a daily basis. As a former police officer, he was taught to first treat people with respect, and then act to control a situation when people do things to lose that respect. This is the way to act. He has had people come back and thank him for arresting them, because he did what he needed to do but treated them with respect, and also explained to them what was happening. When he came back to Syracuse after 25 years away, he is almost ashamed to say that he once worked for SPD. Part of it, is that officers are now taught to, and encouraged to, be disrespectful. He suggested that officers are taught to use whatever ruse to pull people over. Once they have stopped someone, then officers almost have carte blanche. He suggested that kids are learning to be ready to fight when "here come the cops." He also suggested that youth are not seeing their peers bettering themselves and moving forward, so this must be approached from both sides. Its important to address how are police being trained, but also how Assistant District Attorney's (ADA's) are taught as well. He pointed to ADA's doing things like not turning over exculpatory evidence. He recalled a murder trial where a man was accused of murdering his uncle, but at the time of the crime the defendant was actually at a picnic in Buffalo. Police still went to Buffalo and arrested him. And there is no follow up after a case is over. For him it is about taking responsibility. We have to get to these kids, to teach them what is going on generally and in the courts too. Also wondered why they were there the first place to be involved in a police stop. This is complicated, but we should work on communicating and how to put it together.

Leonardo Sanchez stated that he wanted to piggy back on what Francis said. He left NY City and came here thinking it is 360 miles away - how bad can it be? He lives in the Tipp Hill neighborhood. One day there was a knock on the door and the person asked for owner of the house. His Husband pointed at Leonardo and said "he is right there." When he interacts with inmates at the jail as part of his job, Deputies in the jail reprimand him for being "too kind." This makes no sense. He suggested that "we need to get the word out to the community." He suggested that community members don't have the tools or resources they need. He has seen Doctors do a 360 when there is an advocate accompanying a patient. Otherwise doctors essentially shoo patients away. Doctors shouldn't be using kids as interpreters. The mom who is the patient may be being told that she needs to have double mastectomy. A kid should not be in the position of being an interpreter for that. Professionals figure that minorities don't have any intelligence. He said that he shouldn't have to point out that his brother is a Lt. Colonel in the marines in Quantico to address how he is being undermined based on color.

Rabbi Dan Fellman. I think we should set a priority at the next meeting to begin doing direct work regarding police. We could do ride alongs and look at their training. We also need a badge to identify us as Human Rights Commissioners, so can be recognized by community members.

Rosalie Young added to the list of things to address in law enforcement is the people who are working in the jail and prison. She recalled teaching in a jail, and one of her students stopped coming because a guard laughed at the student because they were carrying a book. This shouldn't happen.

Shiu-Kai asked if the group wanted to extend the meeting timeline by 15 minutes to hear from people who have not yet spoken. All agreed.

Dave Paskinski stated that he did not have much to add. He felt that the discussion was very moving. He stated that it was hard to say what area of focus stood out to him during the discussion. He stated that he is on the wavelength of what Rabbi Fellman had said. He also stated that he is overwhelmed with the tone of it in political season. Dialogue is needed but this is not a focus in itself. He added that he is fearful of what the youth are seeing modeled for dialogue and respect. He asked how we can promote more respectful listening to the human rights concerns of each other.

Montanette Murphy stated that she is "a listener and a worker." She felt that the discussion was very interesting to listen to. She also said that she has "been there", as "a person of color whose hair is coarse and beautiful." She stated that she is interested in empowering people. She stated that she has "been through the mud" in some situations, and in fact I'm still standing. She said "I am a fighter." For her it is about being a person, and fighting for humanity.

Shiu-Kai suggested that this is the beginning of a dialogue. He pointed out that he is appointed for a short time, that his term ends in Dec. so he sees himself as an interim Chair, like a midwife. He is interested in addressing leadership succession. Our time is precious and not plentiful. He suggested when the Commission meets again we should talk about priorities we should focus on and how we want to organize and lead ourselves.

Rev. Doug Mackey stated that his term also ends in 2016. Barrie stated that some of the terms were staggered, according to the legislation, to ensure continuity, by not having a large group of commissioners all appointed at once. In November/December the Commission can ask the legislature to extend the terms of individuals whose original term expires at the end of this year. She also stated that there was a time lag between appointment and convening the first meeting because she was waiting to see if the Mayor would appoint the 6 representatives from the City. When that didn't happen Barrie went forward to convene the HRC with the 16 that have been appointed by the County Executive and the Legislature.

Francis Parks asked why there are not youth on commission. Barrie stated that there were two high school age individuals from the refugee community that were considered but a decision was made not to incorporate people under 18 at this time. Several Commissioners said that this was not only about school age persons, but about people under 30 or 40. A commissioner suggested that the median age of the Commissioners appointed so far was high. There was consensus that people that were younger adults should be sought for future appointments to the Commission.

Shiu-Kai suggested again that leadership succession is important. He asked all present to think about leadership positions in this group. Barrie pointed out that the enabling legislation provides only for a Chair and a Vice Chair, and that it is up to the Commissioner to decide how else to govern and structure themselves. Rabbi Dan Fellman asked if the Commission needed a leadership council? Shiu-Kai suggested that by having only a Chair and Vice Chair, that might carry the potential for a single point of failure, which would not be a good idea. He again said that the Commission needed a way of ensuring leadership of mission. Shiu-Kai also pointed out that we essentially have a blank page as far as organizing the Commission. It is up to the Commissioners to figure out what to do and how. The Commissioner get to decide how to organize ourselves into officers and committees.

Shiu-Kai suggested that the Commission's next meeting should be all about how we are going to organize ourselves for topic focus and governance, and to come to consensus about these issues.

Bruce Carter then suggested that writing a letter is a good place to start when there is no structure. That would give everyone some comments that other can respond to. He stated that he is willing to coordinate a group that brings together suggestions on elements of governance and committee structure. He also stated that in doing so, he does not aspire to leadership. He offers this as a service to help the Commission use today's discussion to create a basis to move forward. Barrie indicated that she would summarize her notes and sent it out to all Commissioners, and that this could be used for such a meeting. Bruce suggested that using Barrie's notes a subcommittee could create recommendations for 4 committees, and that would be like a launch pad and the basis for discussion at the next meeting. Rabbi Fellman suggested that this would be like an ad hoc committee on committees. Shiu-Kai agreed that this was a good idea and suggested a smaller group of Commissioners should work with Bruce on this. Suzette Melendes, Francis Parks and Crystal Doody agreed to serve with Bruce on this ad hoc committee.

Suzette asked if we could do this meeting as a conference call. Barrie said she would check on the necessity of such a committee meeting in a way that was accessible to the public, as per the open meetings law.

Agenda Item 6 – Setting a Date for Future Meetings

- Shiu-Kai and Barrie led a discussion about when to hold future meetings, based on information in a chart of Commissioner availability prepared by Barrie ahead of time. There was no clear day of the month that worked for everyone. It was observed that the Commission may have to alternate between the 3rd and 4th Wednesday's of each month. It was agreed that the Commission would meet next on October ~~19th~~ 26th and November 16th.

A further discussion occurred about the difficulty of finding parking at the location of this meeting. It was agreed that Barrie should try to secure the Rosamond Gifford Community Room in the United Way building at 518 James St. because parking would be more convenient.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:45.

Commissioners attending:

1. Commissioners introduced themselves.
2. Barrie Gewanter reviewed 8 themes that had emerged from the discussion in the first meeting and provided a handout.
3. Bruce Carter began the discussion of the preliminary draft of the governance document. Several commissioners noted that governance document needed to be consistent with county regulations in this area. A number of suggestions were made for changes and revisions. Bruce agreed to address the changes and to bring a revised document to the November 26th meeting of the Commission.

Among the suggested changes. 24 members and each no more than two 3 year terms. 5 Standing Committees – Executive Committee, Outreach, Education or Civic Education, Advocacy

4. Shiu Kai Chin discussed his role on the Commission. Although he is committed to the Commission and its goals, he is an officer of 3 other organizations (Syracuse Airport, WCNY, and Interfaith Works) and so does not feel he can devote enough time/energy to continue leading the group after January. Discussion of future leadership continued. He indicated that he believed that the smoothest transition to a new Commission Chair would be in January.

He also noted that Barrie has been spectacular at pulling things together. Navigating a ship through body of water that takes knowledge of the terrain. That is the kind of person in leadership.

Shiu Kai agreed to draft a letter to the mayor and Legislative chair to complete the nomination of Commission members. Discussion followed.

Barrie agreed to send out copies of commissioners biographies (curriculum vitae).

5. Meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM.

Commissioners attending: Rev. Alex, Bruce Carter, Shiu-Kai Chin, Crystal Doody, Rabbi Fellman, Starr Guckert, Rev. Mackey, Suzette Melendez, Montanette Murphy, Francis Parks, David Pasinski, Gabe Ramos, Leo Sanchez, Mary Alice Smothers, Joyce Suslovic, Rosalie Young.

Commissioners Excused from Attendance None

1. Minutes from October meeting of the Commission were reviewed. It was moved and seconded that the minutes be adopted. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Report from Interim Chair (Shiu Kai Chin)

Shiu Kai sent letters to County Executive and chair of Legislature to remind them of the need to appoint remaining members of the Human Rights Commission. He also reached out to a contact in the Mayor's office. The Mayor knows about the need for appointing members and would appreciate a letter from HRC and a List of potential candidates. A list of potential candidates was distributed and the HRC members were asked for feedback and suggestions for members and how to proceed. Discussion followed. Many Commissioners expressed a need to nominate younger members and those active in affected communities. A number of Commissioners volunteered to contact prospective nominees to the Commission.

Doug will reach out to John

Joyce will reach out to Khadija.

Bernard will reach Yolanda

Suzette will contact Romana

Dave will call Carole and Olive

Montanette – will contact Sarah

3. Barrie Gewanter presented her report of activities during the past month. The report was accepted by the Commission.
4. Bruce Carter led review of revisions to governance document. Discussion of possible changes and amendments to the document followed. Barrie stated she would check with the county attorney to be certain that the document did not conflict or raise county concerns. Bruce agreed to work on the suggested changes and to bring the revised document to the Commission for its consideration at the December meeting.
5. Future governance issues were discussed. Three commissioners were willing to serve as Vice Chair: Daniel Fellman, Bruce, and Leo.
Vote in Dec.
6. The diversity training sessions were discussed. The Commissioners who had attended a training session in November were uniformly positive about the training and their experience.
7. Commissioners made a number of announcements of events that would occur in the next month or so.
8. Meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM

ONONDAGA COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MINUTES

DECEMBER 21, 2016

Commissioners attending : Bruce Carter, Shiu-Kai Chin, Crystal Doody, Daniel Fellman, Starr Guckert (via telephone), Douglas Mackey, Suzette Melendez, Montanette Murphy, Francis Parks, David Pasinski, Gabriel Ramos, Leonardo Sanchez, Mary Alice Smothers, Rosalie Young.

Commissioners excused: Rev. Bernard Alex, Joyce Suslovic

Due to a problem unlocking the meeting room, the meeting scheduled to begin at 5:30 actually began at 5:41 pm.

Francis McMillan Parks asked for a moment of silence in memory of the Lockerbie victims. Barrie Gewanter asked that we also remember those who perished in Germany during the Holocaust.

ShiuKai introduced Sally Santangelo, Director of CNY Fair Housing as a visitor, followed by the commissioner introductions with each introducing themselves and their positions in the community.

Bruce Carter produced November 2016 minutes based on Barrie Gewanter's notes. Since there were no copies, Dan Fellman moved that we grant preliminary approval until Barrie can circulate the minutes for review.

There was discussion about which possible commissioner candidates to send to the Mayor for her selection and whether all her possible choices had to live in the city of Syracuse. Dan moved that we send the list of 13 candidates regardless of residence as well as Olive Sephuma who had not definitely agreed to serve on the Commission. Crystal seconded the motion which passed unanimously. Leonardo, as chair, agreed to send the resumes on to the Mayor as the motion suggested.

Barrie provided an update on staffing in the HR Office. In response to a related request from Barrie, Dan moved that the chair appoint a non-officer recorder to work with Barrie to produce and distribute minutes. There was unanimous approval. Barrie provided updates on upcoming Diversity Trainings. 5 Commissioners signed on to participate in trainings on 2/7 and 3/9. Barrie reviewed 5 recent discrimination allegations in intakes received at HRC office including:

Racial Bias Alleged in Gas Service to woman at Kwik Fill in Liverpool, Allegation that SPD Officer searched genital area of male in traffic stop, Nob Hill Apts. not renewing leases for ARC clients with Dev. Disabilities. Allegation that state agency targeting privately owned day cares with African-American Owner/operators in 4 high minority Syracuse zip codes & 2 Medical Day Programs refusing to provide foreign language interpreters

Barrie reported that 2 MLK events were coming up. Francis reported on the Martin Luther King commemoration plans for the community, as well as Veterans events. Barrie asked about having a table at the program at Nottingham High School. Francis suggested that she contact Ginny Yeardon at the Syracuse University Hendricks Dean's office. Dave, Suzette, Leonard, Bruce and Mary Alice agreed to attend. Dan will attend if he is in Syracuse.

Barrie provided an update on the activity of the JCOC and distributed a chart with some some case stats. She also mentioned that the Inclusive Emergency Task Force was assisting Mr. Whelan from Niagara

University in outreach and publicity for a 3/7-8 train the trainer training for law enforcement interactions with people with disabilities.

Starr suggested that any activity we attend in the community include an accommodations statement which Barrie agreed to do.

Bruce sent out a new draft governance document. Several typographical corrections were suggested by commissioners. Dan moved to approve the draft preliminarily until we get feedback from the county attorney's office with any added suggestions or edits.

There was discussion of the appointment of a Commission chair and vice-chair. Shiu-Kai declined to continue as chair. Crystal moved that Leonardo should be chair and Dan Fellman should be Co--chair. The motion passed unanimously. During the discussion, it was recognized that we need to have input from all races, religions and backgrounds while working for human rights

Meeting dates for Feb and March were selected. Mary Alice Smothers offered PEACE Inc. as a meeting location for January Meeting.

Barrie briefly discussed the history of fair practice ordinances locally and statewide and then introduced Sally Santangelo.

Sally explained that HUD requires a report every 5 years regarding segregation in the county and how this correlates to opportunity. Thirteen states have Source of Income (SOI) legislation. Such legislation in New York exists in NYC, Buffalo, Nassau, Suffolk and some towns in Western NY. New communities are adding SOI legislation frequently.

Source of income refers not just to Section 8, but includes public assistance, SSI and SSI/D. When people with vouchers are concentrated in low income areas, they cannot find housing because landlords do not accept Section 8 in time and holders lose vouchers. They spend 5-6 years on waiting lists, then have to wait again. Sometimes lists are closed for several years. Of all advertisements looked at on Craig's lists, only one in the county said Section 8 was acceptable while 90 said they would not accept Section 8 vouchers. Results correlated with 2/3 of voucher holders living in areas with low economic opportunity – low income, poor housing stock, high environmental impact, low educational outcomes, lower access to jobs, and limited proximity to transit.

Sally reported that landlords cannot refuse people based solely on SOI, but can do other screening. Sally stated that Fair Housing CNY gets about 400 housing complaints a year and does about 150 undercover tests of housing discrimination a year. Section 8 is a proxy for racial discrimination. The result is discrimination based on race, income and disability.

Barrie explained that the Commission could decide on a strategy of promoting a law to deal with SOI as a stand-alone piece of legislation or as an amendment to an existing law. It was decided that the Advocacy Committee would work on a plan and report back to the full Commission.

All the committees were to meet before the January meeting. Shui-Kai would be put on a committee. Francis would serve on both Education and Advocacy and Gabe would serve on the Law Enforcement committee. Gabe Ramos was added to the Law Enforcement Community Relations Committee

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm.