

Human Rights Commission
Kirkwood, Missouri

Year End Report

“New Mission, New Members, New Energy”

Submitted to Kirkwood City Council
January 4, 2011

The Kirkwood Human Rights Commission (HRC) has undergone huge change in 2010. These changes were brought about by the Mediation Agreement between the City and the US Department of Justice.

The Kirkwood City Council undertook the creation of a new ordinance that dramatically altered the mission, responsibility and direction of the HRC. The old Human Rights Advisory and Awareness Commission (HRAAC) had been operating in 2008 and 2009 with less than a full complement of members. It met infrequently- every other month -and would occasionally lack enough members for a quorum to conduct official business.

The mission of the HRAAC had been to address citizen complaints brought to it, primarily in the areas of housing and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. It's second function was to advise the City Council on any needed action to address those complaints. The HRAAC had become stale and in the face of human rights realities in Kirkwood virtually irrelevant. Clearly, change was needed.

On January 21, 2010, the City Team, represented by Kirkwood City administration, and the Community Team, representing various interested parties within the community, completed a Mediation Agreement in conjunction and with the guidance of the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service. There were three broad areas of agreement:

- 1) Empowering a new Human Rights Commission with the tools necessary to establish itself as a more active and responsive servant and leader within the community. In addition, the new HRC would increase transparency, efficiency and public confidence

in the citizen complaint/request process.

2) Create, expand and/or focus on specific Kirkwood police programs.

3) Address the perceptions and misconceptions of the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) process

This report is concerned only with the steps taken to empower the HRC and what has resulted from those steps.

Beginning in late 2009, City Administrator Mike Brown joined City Council liaison Iggy Yuan in attendance at HRC meetings.. They kept the Commission aware of developments in the mediation agreement process. The first step taken by the HRC in 2010 was to adopt a measure for more frequent meetings. Instead of meeting bimonthly the Commission moved to a monthly schedule. This provided greater visibility to the community and demanded greater accountability from the Commissioners.

A second major step was to address the issue of membership on the HRC. There had been two unfilled positions for almost 8 months. In addition there were two members leaving the Commission when their second three year appointments expired in June. It was agreed that new criteria for membership should be developed and publicized. The new criteria were developed with input from the Commission, Pastor David Bennett of the Community Team and City Administrator, Mike Brown. The new criteria emphasized a commitment to the issues of diversity, the time required to be an effective Commissioner and a willingness to listen and speak effectively to work to end

discrimination wherever it may occur in Kirkwood. In addition the HRC added "sexual orientation" as a discriminatory issue that should fall under the HRC's responsibility. A new application form citing these criteria was also developed.

Furthermore, the issue of attendance at HRC meetings was addressed. The Commission recommended to the City Council that the new ordinance should include an attendance requirement and a removal process should any member fail to meet the attendance requirement.

By the April 30th meeting the HRC was well on its way to understanding the Mediation Agreement discussions and the draft of the new ordinance. It was also decided to adopt the City Council regulations on duration and frequency of comment with regard to citizen comments. A general tightening of the meetings resulted. In May the two outgoing members of the HRC, Art Manse and Terry Bryant were recognized and thanked for their more than 6 years each of service to the Commission. Their leaving created four openings on the Commission. Mike Brown reported that the new application process was in place and that there were a number of high quality applicants. Appointments would be completed by the Mayor and City Council in time for the June 8th meeting.

On June 8, 2010, Darnel Frost, Margaret Duwe, Romona Miller and Tere Owens were sworn in as new Commission members. Patrick Burch was reappointed to a second three year term. They all joined Walter Smith, John Hoffman, Genevieve Hodges and Pete Nardie to completely fill the Commission's membership. The now fully staffed HRC

began to quickly address a number of issues. First and foremost was to schedule training. There were a number of names of potential facilitators submitted to Mike Brown. He would contact them, do an initial analysis of their abilities and strengths and report back to the HRC. The members would then meet with his choice to decide whether or not to accept his recommendation.

At this time the new ordinance was scheduled for a first reading by the City Council. Also at this time it was announced that the new computerized complaint system had been installed and would go into operation in July. Under this system a citizen may lodge a complaint/concern and an HRC contact will be provided.

Genevieve Hodges suggested that now was the time to create a new Commission brochure so it would be available by the Green Tree Festival in September.

In July elections were undertaken for leadership positions on the Commission. Darnel Frost was elected Chair, replacing outgoing Chair Walter Smith; and Pete Nardie was elected Vice-Chair filling an unfilled position. At this meeting it was decided to ask Fred Falker to meet with the HRC for consideration as training facilitator. Mr. Falker had worked with the City and Community Teams on the Mediation Agreement and came highly recommended from Mike Brown and Pastor Bennett.

Margaret Duwe suggested that Commissioners read the book "My Iceberg Is Melting" as a good tool in preparation for Strategic Planning. Pastor Bennett offered his services in leading a discussion of the book. Initially this book discussion was to be a single meeting. The meetings began September 15th and continued for four weeks. Eventually

there were were four two and half hour long meetings that focused not only on the book but also allowed Commissioners to bond. The importance of these meetings cannot be underestimated. They were extremely helpful in allowing the Commissioners to get to know one another, almost retreat like, and would prove invaluable in the future training.

On August 3, the Commission met with Fred Falker and listened to his presentation on what he intended the training to accomplish. Favorably impressed, the HRC voted at the August 10 meeting to enter into an agreement with Mr. Falker as facilitator. The City budgeted \$3500 for the training.

Also in August the annual HRC Essay Contest time frame was agreed to. That month members of the HRC staffed a booth at the Partnership for Educational Achievement in Kirkwood education fair at Meramec Community College.

In September Margaret Duwe was elected Secretary with responsibilities to handle all correspondence and the meeting minutes. Also at this meeting the essay contest topic was chosen and information was sent to Kirkwood, Vianney and Ursuline Academy high schools. One aspect of the topic was to include a personal commitment as to what the essayist would do to address discrimination in Kirkwood. It was hoped that in this way the HRC would be able to find committed young people who would actively work toward HRC goals.

In October the training with Fred Falker took place. Over the weekend of October 23-24 two four-hour long sessions were held as the HRC worked to develop a strategic

plan that included a mission statement, a vision statement and common core values for the HRC now and in the future. The sessions were filled with energy, enthusiasm and ideas as members tossed out ideas, talked, laughed, discussed and reached consensus on a number of issues. The process remains incomplete at year's end but significant progress has been made on this crucial plan.

One aspect of the new ordinance was, along with an annual report, the creation of an annual symposium. A subcommittee has been established and the planning for a symposium in 2011 is well underway. It will involve a community wide forum addressing many issues in the Kirkwood community.

Also in November the Commissioners read and evaluated the 28 essays that were submitted. The participants and winners were recognized at the December 2 City Council meeting. Generous monetary awards were presented by The Kirkwood Rotary and Kirkwood High School.

In late November, three members of the HRC met with the faculty sponsors of the Meramec Community College International Club in hopes of fostering one or more joint activities. At this meeting it was learned that there is a distinct "town versus gown" divide at the college. The perception there is that this is a tremendous resource for the community which is not being utilized to its fullest.

At the last meeting of the year the HRC began making plans for a busy 2011. More publicity via the Webster-Kirkwood Times and an on line site (Patch.com), participation at a Meramec International Fair, continued development of the HRC Symposium, more

work on strategic planning, a new HRC brochure, a presentation by Police Chief Plummer to the Commission and a presentation from the leaders of the Gay Straight Alliance at Kirkwood High School are all scheduled. With the addition of new members, a new charge via the expanded ordinance and the restored energy and enthusiasm of the Commissioners, 2011 will be a very busy year

Submitted for the Kirkwood Human Rights Commission

Darnel Frost, Chair and Pete Nardie, Vice-chair