

Boston Human Rights Commission Public Meeting Minutes
December 1, 2023 at 6PM In-Person at City Hall
Hearing Room 801

Present:

Commissioners: Chair Reyes Coll-Tellechea and Commissioners Robert MacEachern, Anne Rousseau, Elijah Evans

Chief of Equity and Inclusion Mariangely Solis Cervera (ex-officio)

Meghan Crowley, Equity and Inclusion Policy Fellow

Others: No members of the public were present at this meeting

A. Introductions Approval of Minutes

1. Chair Coll-Tellechea called the meeting to order at 6:13pm.
2. July 26th meeting minutes: unanimously approved

B. Report from Reyes Coll-Tellechea, BHRC Chair

- Was invited to and attended a Department of Justice webinar on hate crimes in US in November
 - Continues connection with Department of Justice Division, Homeland Security, Division on Civil Rights
 - DoJ's information confirms research carried out by BHRC researchers
- Met in November with the new Director of Research and Policy for the E&I Cabinet, An Le
- Commissioners are awaiting info on reorganization. Continuing the conversation today with Chief Solis Cervera
- All terms as Commissioners have expired. We have lost 2 Commissioners in past years. We need to review Commissioners's terms and add two new Commissioners. We also need a Vice Chair.
- We need a few clarifications: review terms and ordinance
 - Commissioner Rousseau: Would Mayor Wu have to reappoint us all?
 - Chief Solis Cervera: She will reappoint.

- Commissioner MacEachern: Appointments used to be on website

C. Chief Solis Cervera's Report

- The Ordinance has not been updated. We would have to go through the process.
- Director An Le and I talked to legal and reviewed past conversations.
- Temporary plan: Director of Policy, An Le, will be the point of contact. Legally we can't name him or I temporary ED. When you email An, please cc Meghan and myself.
 - In the next 3 months we are submitting 2 job descriptions.
 - 1st description is something along the lines of a BHRC constituent service coordinator. This person's role: handling meeting logistics, project management, intake and referrals, this person will have to do documentation of complaints. I put a pin in this because I'm seeking funding for a different structure.
 - 2nd role is a research analyst. Role: conducting research relating to human rights, identifying experts (internal and external),
 - I want to promote the Human Rights Commission within the Equity & Inclusion Cabinet, so it is not an isolated office.
 - Commissioner MacEachern: Is it a question of reporting resources or aligning staff resources with overall approach? It would be good to see an org chart. Would this affect our independent voice?
 - Chief Solis Cervera: The position gives us the expertise to go through research planning and determine the future of BHRC.
 - Commissioner Evans: Would the Commission still have an ED?
 - Chief Solis Cervera: Yes, we were trying to see if legally, the title could be stamped to my name. Legally, we can't do that. So we have to search for an ED, who would be my direct report.
 - Commissioner Evans: So we would do strategic planning and then search?
 - Chief Solis Cervera: That would be my timeline.
 - Commissioner MacEachern: I see it as a promotion to bring it up the chain of command. It shows very good support from the administration. I'm comfortable with leaving a lot of stuff on the table for future opportunities. This is heading in a good

direction. I want to keep on the table that I view independence of this commission as the bedrock of its duties. If we had an ED, while directly reporting to you, not pulled into other depts.

- Chair: Caution about independence is a good thing to think about. Great consideration.
- Chief Solis Cervera: Any other thoughts? 2-3 months for roles. We can start a strategic planning process to find a person with expertise in this who can lead external engagement. Once staff is here and strategic planning is done or started, we are looking at FY25.
 - Chair: In the next 3 months, do you anticipate that we would continue meeting?
 - Chief Solis Cervera: If that's what you want to do, yes. What I can spend December ensuring job proposals are going through. Maybe we can connect virtually to see how things are going. The process will require a lot of meetings.
 - Commissioner MacEachern: Rough goal of spring to accept format. Identify needs of ED and goal to onboard in early summer so fall is staffed up. Strategic planning. Summer, interview & hire.
 - Commissioner Rousseau: I would like to roll that to a fiscal year so we have what we need in the budget. So it falls within the fiscal year calendar.
 - Commissioner MacEachern: I think it would be great if we convene a regional Human Rights symposium. A lot of cities and towns around Boston are dealing with similar issues. Human rights shouldn't know borders.
 - Commissioner Rousseau: That would be part of strategic planning.
 - Chair: We are starting to put together a meeting, at UMAss Boston, between MA Human Rights commissions and policy
 - Chief Solis Cervera: We can be sponsors
 - Commissioner MacEachern: If we (BHRC) convene it, we design it, we get what we want out of it
 - Commissioner Evans: I see the intentionality of the plan. I feel restructuring will allow for collaboration. Question of independence is important and should be prioritized in

strategic planning. It takes a while to hire people. It would be helpful for us to keep meeting. If we were to bring in a consultant, planning out RFP, I would want to be intentional about them. And hiring them if there's a candidate pool.

- Chief Solis Cervera: The suggestion I'm hearing is to continue meeting to come up with a proposal or I write something for you all to get input.
- Chair: I'm good with your plan. Before we get strategic planning going, get 2 people on board and a Vice Chair.
- Commissioner Evans: I feel like a big part of the strategic planning process is getting feedback from people affected by the Commission's work. That takes a long time. I wonder if it makes sense to hire a consultant, and do a stakeholder analysis.
- Chair: That's interesting. I wonder if we could, instead of our own analysis, use the City's constituent service specialists from the other 7 departments within E&I.
- Commissioner Evans: We distribute surveys to the departments and they can distribute.
- Chief Solis Cervera: Yes, that makes sense to me.
- Commissioner Rousseau: Strategic planner could have an objective view on who the stakeholders are.
- Chief Solis Cervera: I'm gonna wrap up this piece. We'll draft below \$10,000. I want to incorporate things you're bringing up in the proposal. Someone who can tell us about staffing/structure, Civil vs. Human Rights, identify stakeholders/landscape assessment.
 - Chair: Our stakeholders are whoever, no matter their status
 - Commissioner Rousseau: Preferably stakeholder would be women or minority
 - Chief Solis Cervera: What's the ideal profile? We want them to have expertise in something.
 - Commissioner Evans: Equity and Inclusion
 - Commissioner MacEachern: Someone who has worked in or around the government before. Someone who can write a politically savvy plan so it gets to live.
- Commissioner MacEachern: question about the Vice Chair. Is it an ordinance issue?

- Chair: It's in the bylaws.
- Commissioner MacEachern: I was under impression that you would be sworn in as Chair as Vice Chair
- Chair: The bylaws don't specify that.
- Chair: One more thing. Those two new Commissioners. We need representation of Arab and Israeli or Jewish communities who are interested in dialogue. That is my personal opinion.
 - Commissioner Evans: It's important to acknowledge.
 - Chief Solis Cervera: Maybe this happens at the end. I'm identifying next steps.
 - Commissioner MacEachern: Was the extension for covid meeting law codified permanently?
 - Chief Solis Cervera: Accessibility is the argument for why we want to keep the extension.
 - Commissioner MacEachern: When does extension expire?
 - Chief Solis Cervera: I don't know. Let me look into that.
 - Commissioner MacEachern: I'm a proponent for hybrid. I like the idea of an in-person piece.
 - Chair: If we are to have a meeting in January, I'm going to ask we move to the next item.

D. Discussion and vote on BHRC draft statement on the violence in the Middle East

- Chair: I received feedback from all commissioners. Commissioner Valentine sent extensive feedback. I have incorporated his comments. I would like to hear from all of you. Do we feel this is something that we should do?
- Commissioner Rousseau: My only question is that Commissioner Valentine feels it's skewed toward the brutality of Hamas. I don't see that.
- Commissioner Evans: In the 5th paragraph
- Chair: I agree with him. This was before the exchange began. My amendment would be "we call for the immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza"
- Chair: The next change I'm suggesting also comes from Commissioner Valentine. "BHRC condemns...." sentence, insert "brutal."
- Commissioner Evans: I'd use some different words. It's not substantive. The point about unevenness. I wonder why we're not speaking about that more. I wonder if this will resonate if we don't say what other people have not had

the courage to say. What does it say that we're not speaking to the unevenness more? Many more Palestinians have been killed. If anyone should speak out against people who don't have agency, it should be us.

- Chair: I hear you completely. When I was writing this I had the same thoughts. I was trying not to insert my opinion.
- Commissioner Evans: our government is supporting this. If we are to make a statement, I would want us to call out hypocrisy.
- Commissioner Rousseau: Add to the 1st paragraph "resulting in the..."
- Commissioner Rousseau: There's a genocide going on.
- Commissioner Evans: Is it too much to use that word?
- Commissioner MacEachern: It's impossible to use words to describe war. When you cause a reaction you don't get to dictate reaction. There's a moral right that's trying to be introduced to 2 moral wrongs.
- Commissioner Rousseau: That's why I think "killing of innocent Palestinians" fits better
- Chair: I think it's a genocide, but I want to release a statement. I'd rather release a statement than not. It's a moral condemnation of those that represent us.
- Commissioner Rousseau: I do think we have to name that innocent Palestinians are being killed.
- Commissioner Evans: From what Commissioner MacEachern said about the Human rights perspective, I want to take out names. Our job is to represent, from a Human Rights perspective, what's wrong about what's going on. I think it's important to highlight unevenness, but from a political side.
- Commissioner Rousseau: If we take out condemning Hamas, then we take the side of not naming evil. We have to condemn Hamas and name the actions of the Israeli government.
- Commissioner MacEachern: Part of me is saying we should always condemn war. There's gender bias that comes up when people say women and children, like males can't be innocent. Linguistic piece to divide and conquer. There's so many words in one sentence, one word can change everything. When we start peeling back the onion, the innate language we use has innate bias. I do believe that the concept of war is so hard that when we say it's ok to kill some and not others, we're heading down a bad path.
- Chair: If you're a resident of Boston, you want to see that BHRC recognizes their suffering.

- Commissioner Evans: It's not different than what I see in other places. We should have a different perspective.
- Commissioner Rousseau: At least we're saying something.
- Commissioner MacEachern: It needs to be issued as a press release, not just on the website. I see that with the realization that it could have a negative impact. I want to label that this will create dialogue. So many people have so many first hand experiences. It's very raw, very personal, and widespread.
- Commissioner Evans: I don't feel strongly enough not to put this out
- Chair: [read new draft of statement]
- Commissioner MacEachern: Should we intertwine Human Rights more?
- Chair: It's at the end, last sentence.
- Commissioner Evans: Can we change "call for" to "demand"?
- Chief Solis Cervera: I am very intrigued by where the 2 of you were going. Part of the training I did in November was focused on Human Rights. My life has changed, I feel differently about my job and how we approach it. This is a symbolic statement. What value can the statement add to an already sad narrative? I don't think you get rid of this, but I feel like people are hurting and there's something happening here.
- Commissioner Evans: Would it be too much to add "war is against Human Rights"
- Commissioner MacEachern: Not everyone believes this is a war. The Israeli government labeled this as a war. Hamas does not believe that. Hamas has an ideology that calls for an elimination of people. If you say it's a war that gives it a definable piece.
- VOTE:
 - Unanimously approved.

E. Meeting adjourned at 7:29pm.