



Cambridge Human Rights Commission
Thursday, October 5, 2023
Virtual Public Meeting

Present: Chair Judith Laguerre, and Commissioners Josh Stadlan, Stephen Curran, Mercedes Evans, Olinda Marshall, Stefanie Haug, Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, Kaileigh Callender

City Staff: Acting Executive Director Carolina Almonte and Director of Operations Sarah Binney

Absent: Commissioners Katie Stack, and Bonita Cox, Deputy Superintendent Frank Cabral

1. Call to Order:

- Chair Laguerre called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

2. Public Comment

- No members of the public joined.

3. Review and approval of March 2023 Minutes

- The Commission reviewed the minutes from the last Commission meeting on June 1, 2023. Commissioner Curran moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Evans seconded.

4. Staff report

- ED Report
 - Staffing Update - Carolina Almonte is the new Acting Executive Director.
 - HUD's 2023 Fair Housing Leadership Conference in Denver, Colorado – Recap
 - Mandatory HUD conference attended by AED Almonte, Commissioner Stadlan, and Chair Laguerre with FHIPs and FHAPs across the country to discuss prevalent fair housing issues and trends.
 - Miscellaneous updates
 - In a recent City restructuring, the Human Rights Commission is now positioned under the Office of Equity and Inclusion, alongside the Women's Commission.
 - AED Almonte discussed future planning for Commissioner trainings such as a mediation training, implicit bias training, and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity training.
- DOO Report

- Housing Information Drop-In Hours
 - Occurred on October 2, 2023, at the Main Library in Cambridge. A total of 27 attendees received housing assistance. Interpreters supported Spanish and Haitian Creole housing needs.
 - Attorney-Investigator Case Report
 - AED Almonte shared that there are currently 7 open cases. 2 cases were closed recently via settlement agreement and one was closed based on a lack of probable cause determination. 1 new housing discrimination case will be filed next week.

5. Old Business

- Update from Commissioners on Board/Commission connections
 - No meaningful updates.

6. New Business

- Commissioner Vacancies
 - A posting was recently advertised seeking new Human Rights Commissioners as there are currently a few vacancies. The deadline to apply is October 23, 2023. AED Almonte encouraged Commissioners to share the posting widely. The process will include interviews with AED Almonte and Chair Laguerre.
- City Council Policy Order – Amendments to protect Family Inclusion and Relationship Diversity
 - AED Almonte explained that the City Council is seeking to add two new protected classes to the Human Rights Ordinance and the Fair Housing Ordinance (“Relationship Status” and “Family Structure.”) If approved by the full Council, these new classes will protect polyamorous relationships, and other family structures and relationship types that were previously not protected in housing, employment, and public accommodations. Commissioner Padamsee Forbes asked if these protections extend to pregnant women. AED Almonte explained that pregnant women are already protected by the “Family Status” protected class.
 - Commissioner Evans expressed concerns about the investigative capacity of the Commission. AED Almonte shared that the posting for an Attorney Investigator will be posted shortly. Commissioner Callender asked about the difference between the newly established protections in Somerville and how they relate to Cambridge. Commissioner Stadlan asked if disparate impact could be investigated with these new protected classes. Commissioner Stadlan also asked protections apply to friends living together. Chair Laguerre asked if insurance would be required to cover polyamorous relationships. Commissioner Curran asked how these protected classes would be applied to unlawful relationships, such as polygamy and incest, and recommended clarifying in the definition of “Relationship Status”. Commissioner Curran asked if the protections apply to residents or just visitors, and Commission Haug asked for clarity regarding how

- “resident” is defined. AED answered these questions and shared that she will respond more fully during the next Commission meeting.
- Webinar in partnership with the IT Department – Role of Technology in Fair Housing: Opportunities and Challenges (October 17, 2023)
 - The Commission and the IT Department presented on the challenges that community members face with tech-driven barriers. The presentation explored how technology, such as algorithms and data-driven decision-making, can both facilitate fair housing practices and fuel discrimination. The webinar was well attended.
 - Multi-language Bystander Intervention
 - Commissioner Padamsee Forbes shared that she came across bystander intervention training and recommended that the Commission explore this training in the future.
 - Ideas from Commissioners/staff about fall 2023 and 2024 initiatives and focus areas:
 - Commissioner Evans discussed connecting the issues of Human Rights and bicycle safety.
 - AED Almonte proposed a collaboration with the Women’s Commission.
 - Commissioner Haug asked if Cambridge City Council candidates attend a Human Rights Commission meeting.
 - Commissioner Padamsee Forbes suggested reaching out to communities that do not know about the Commission, with a language access lens. Commissioner Padamsee Forbes suggested presenting about the Commission’s work in low-income housing areas.
 - Commissioner Padamsee Forbes suggested initiatives to reach out to migrants moving to Cambridge and people without internet access.
 - Commissioner Stadlan suggested a discussion about what to do with complaints that aren’t probable cause but involve bias/cultural differences.
 - Commissioner Evans suggested a Town Hall to talk about the anticipated changes to the Ordinances and expressed an interest regarding domestic violence in fair housing.
 - Future meetings – hybrid, virtual, or in-person (51 Inman Street)
 - Commissioners voted unanimously to move to hybrid meetings in the conference room at 51 Inman Street. Commissioner Marshall raised the idea of meeting the week after our regularly scheduled time in cases of lack of quorum. Other Commissioners and staff raised concerns of conflicting meetings with other Commissions and scheduling constraints.

7. Adjournment

- Commissioner Curran moved to adjourn at 7:42pm, Commissioner Haug seconded.

The next Commission meeting will be on Thursday, November 2, 2023, hybrid at 51 Inman Street and on Zoom.