

NORMAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MINUTES

October 24, 2011

The Norman Human Rights Commission of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in the Study Session Room located at 201 W. Gray Street on October 24, 2011, at 5:30 p.m., and notice and agenda of the meeting were duly posted 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Commissioners Mary Drywater, Kay Ham, Lisa Schmidt, Marjaneh Seirafi-Pour and Teresa Turner

ABSENT: Commissioners Jose Dela Cruz, Tamara Pullin, Robert Ruiz and Cheryl Wattlely

STAFF PRESENT: Carol Coles

OTHERS PRESENT: Lt. David Teuscher
Rick Knighton, Assistant City Attorney

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Item 2, being:

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA OF THE OCTOBER 24, 2011, MEETING.

Commissioner Schmidt moved to approve the agenda of the October 24, 2011, meeting of the Norman Human Rights Commission, which motion was duly seconded by Commissioner Drywater, and the question being approving the agenda of the October 24, 2011, meeting of the Norman Human Rights Commission, a vote was taken with the following result:

YEAS: Commissioners Drywater, Ham, Schmidt, Seirafi-Pour and Turner

NAYES: None

The Chair declared the motion carried; and the agenda of the October 24, 2011, meeting of the Norman Human Rights Commission was approved.

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Item 3, being:

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 25, 2011, NORMAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING.

Commissioner Turner moved that the minutes of the July 25, 2011, Human Rights Commission meeting be approved, which motion was duly seconded by Commissioner Schmidt;

Items submitted for the record

1. Norman Human Rights Commission minutes of July 25, 2011

and the question being upon approving the minutes of the July 25, 2011 meeting, a vote was taken with the following result:

YEAS: Commissioners Drywater, Ham, Schmidt, Seirafi-Pour and Turner

NAYES: None

The Chair declared the motion carried; and the minutes of the July 25, 2011, meeting were approved.

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Item 4, being:

DISCUSSION OF ADDITION OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY AS A PROTECTED CLASS IN THE CITY OF NORMAN PERSONNEL MANUAL WITH RICK KNIGHTON, ASSISTANT CITY ATTORNEY.

Rick Knighton, Assistant City Attorney, presented language addressing the addition of sexual orientation to the City of Norman Personnel Manual. The language was worded in a way to prohibit all discrimination and provide that all opportunities be merit based. Knighton said the policy change should include harassment and that training and education would need to be provided in order to assure that everyone understands various levels of harassment and that it will not be tolerated. This language helps create an environment where all employees are respected and valued.

Commission Seirafi-Pour asked if this policy would apply to contract employees of the City of Norman.

Mr. Knighton responded that it would not.

Commissioner Schmidt said that the recommended language did take a step farther than that submitted before, but she was not sure that it went as far as the Commission had originally recommended. The Commission had requested that sexual orientation and gender identity be included as specific protected classes.

Commissioner Turner asked if it is believed that because specific populations are listed as protected classes that discrimination actually ceases to exist.

After discussion among the commissioners, the discussion was opened to visitors to the meeting.

Audience member Will Weir stated that he felt it was very important to enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity in the policies.

Audience member Steve Davis said that without the listing of protections, one is not protected. He asked that we consult the cities of Tulsa and Vinita and model our employment policy after those.

Reporter Joy Hampton asked if the City did not want to enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity because they did not want employees to have to share their sexual orientation.

Mr. Knighton replied that he felt that treating everyone the same was better than adding classes.

Audience member Marilyn Nicely said that there is a lot of confusion with sexual orientation and sex. There is a stigma attached with sexual orientation.

Audience member Cindy Cason stated that the items should be enumerated because the legal system had already intruded into the sexual lives of members of the GLBT community.

Audience member Glenda Peters said that children who are gay have to move away from Norman to be able to live their lives. As a parent, you want to protect your child. Why would we not add sexual orientation and gender identity to the Personnel Manual?

Councilmember Kovach stated that he was dumbfounded when he saw the language that was proposed tonight. This language was not what the Human Rights Commission recommended. It is ridiculous to do anything but enumerate. If this fight is not worth it, then no fight is worth it. He referred to the September 28, 2010 meeting where two Councilmembers called for a change to the ordinance adding sexual orientation as a protected class. He said the change to the Personnel Policy was a compromise.

Commissioner Schmidt responded that she did not remember Councilmembers actually calling for a change to the current ordinance in the September meeting.

Councilmember Kovach directed her to look at the tape of the meeting, specifically Councilmember Ezzell's remarks.

Commissioner Schmidt said that she had viewed the tape and did not remember the discussion specifically asking for an ordinance change.

Audience member Kay Holladay said that we needed to be careful how we stated certain things. The GLBT issue is a state of being, not a state of doing and much of the discussion tonight supported Mr. Knighton's emphasis on the need for more and better GLBT-related education and training.

Acting Chair Kay Ham said that the Commission felt that enumerating sexual orientation and

gender identity as protected classes in the Personnel Manual is important. It sends a message to people who might want to come into Norman. She asked Mr. Knighton to consider the suggestions of the Commission and to return to the November 28th meeting for further discussion.

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Item 5, being:

DISCUSSION OF MEETING ON NOVEMBER 28, 2011 TO CONSIDER NOMINATIONS FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD.

The Commission will meet on November 28, 2011 to consider nominations for the Human Rights Award.

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Item 6 being:

MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION.

Commissioner Ham reported that the YMCA had changed their policy regarding the family membership to include same sex couples.

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Item 7 being:

ADJOURNMENT.

Commissioner Schmidt moved that the October 24, 2011, meeting of the Norman Human Rights Commission be adjourned, which motion was duly seconded by Commissioner Drywater; the question being upon adjourning the October 24, 2011, meeting of the Norman Human Rights Commission, a vote was taken with the following result:

YEAS: Commissioners Drywater, Ham, Schmidt, Seirafi-Pour and Turner

NAYES: None

The Chair declared the motion carried; and the October 24, 2011, meeting of the Norman Human Rights Commission was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

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