

Duluth Human Rights Commission Meeting
Wednesday, January 11, 2012
Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Brian Thorbjørnsen, Em Westerlund, Cindy Strange, Cruz Mendoza, Scot Bol, Margie Nelson, Rebecca Domagala, Michelle Naar-Obed, Scott Yeazle

Commissioners Excused: Sheryl Boman-Schneider and Robert Kaner.
Not Present: Allegra Henderson.

Others: Bob Grytdahl, Human Rights Officers, Robin Roeser, Duluth Police liaison.

Meeting was called to order by Margie Nelson at 5:07 p.m.

1. Approval of Minutes – *Cruz Mendoza moved to accept the December meeting minutes. Margie Nelson seconded. Minutes are approved.*

2. Speakers/Presentations

A. Guest: Ron Haglin, I.S.D. 709 Office of Education Equity Coordinator

Ron spoke to the Commission about attending the Duluth Indian Affairs Commission (DIAC) retreat, which was held for the first time in four years. At the retreat, members of DIAC spoke about the institutionalization of their group. They asked how they can best communicate with city staff, and what their role is within the city system. The group also engaged in some strategic planning, including a shift from magnet schools to integration specialists. There is much enthusiasm behind the push to close the achievement gap. Ron said that since the integration specialists have started in I.S.D. 709, he is hearing different things from families of color, who for the first time in years, have hope for a better future for their children. United Way has picked up the banner and are funding efforts to close the achievement gap as well. Ron encouraged folks to avoid the “paralysis of analysis.” His thought is that more energy needs to be put into seeking support from unlikely places to support the move to close the achievement gap, including seeking support from business owners and other Duluth community stakeholders.

B. Guest: Claudie Washington, Duluth NAACP

Claudie shared some of his history with the Commission. He began lobbying the Duluth City Council for a Human Rights Commission in the late 1970s. Meg Bye was the first Human Rights Officer for the City of Duluth, but unfortunately progress did not continue and expectations were not met. He encouraged the Commission to seek funding streams outside of the City and to champion issues of economic equity for minority and women-owned businesses.

Cruz Mendoza made a motion to request that the Mayor, School Board, and City Council step forward and ask businesses, neighborhoods, and community members how they are willing to partner with schools and what they are willing to share to promote academic

achievement, excellence, and equity. Cindy Strange seconded. The motion passed.

The formation of an Educational Equity Subcommittee was also made by Brian Thorbjørnsen and seconded by Rebecca Domagala. Motion passes. Scot Bol, Cruz Mendoza, and Rebecca Domagala have offered to be a part of that subcommittee.

Once the subcommittee has met to develop a platform, the Commission decided to send letters to elected officials to set up meetings about the issue of community support for addressing the achievement gap locally.

3. Un-Fair Campaign

The public launch for the Un-Fair Campaign is January 24th at 11:00 a.m. at City Hall. Steps are being taken to prepare partners for possible backlash. Steps are also being taken to stand in solidarity with people of color, to prevent violence, and to offer support to the community once the campaign is underway.

4. Project Save Our Homes

Adam Ritscher is leading a new local initiative called Project Save Our Homes which attempts to prevent foreclosures. There will be a forum about the project on Wednesday, February 1st at 7:30 p.m. at the Pilgrim Church in Duluth. The goal is to raise awareness about the foreclosure crisis and get folks involved in the movement. Project Save Our Homes is endorsed by several labor bodies and local organizations. *Cruz Mendoza moved that we support Project Save Our Homes, and Brian Thorbjørnsen seconded. Motion passed.*

5. Marriage Amendment Discussion

Margie Nelson drafted a letter to the editor to submit to the Duluth News-Tribune opposing the proposed marriage amendment. Commission members reviewed the letter at the meeting, and Margie will send a final draft around to the Commission for approval via e-mail. She will then submit the letter to the News-Tribune for publication, signed with the names of all Commissioners. Margie Nelson moved that the letter proceed in this way. *Michelle Naar-Obed seconded and the motion passed.* Bob Grytdahl and Margie will make final revisions before submitting the letter.

6. Commission Retreat

There was discussion to move the Commission retreat to the end of the regularly scheduled February meeting. *Margie Nelson made the motion to schedule the retreat at the end of the February Commission meeting and Rebecca Domagala seconded. Motion passed.*

7. Upcoming Community Events

- A. January 16 – Martin Luther King Day – March 11 AM, rally at Noon at the DECC
- B. January 24 – Public launch of “Un-Fair Campaign”
- C. February 7 – Minnesota Caucus Day
- D. February 21st – The new redistricting lines will be announced by a panel of judges.
- E. A five (5) week class for CDL certification both locally and over the road is being

offered by MNDOT at Fond du Lac. The goal is to recruit more drivers of color.
Contact Lonnie Susienka at 878-7527 for more information.

*Cruz Mendoza made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Rebecca Domagala.
Meeting adjourned at 6:31 p.m.*

Respectfully Submitted by,

Em Westerlund
Co-secretary

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