

Duluth Human Rights Commission Special Meeting
August 25, 2011
Minutes

Commissioners present: Scot Bol, Cruz Mendoza, Robert Kaner, Rebecca Domagala, Michelle Naar-Obed, Scott Yeazle, Margie Nelson, Sheryl Boman-Schneider.

Commissioners absent: Jennifer Barry, Colleen Belk, Allegra Henderson, Cynthia Strange, Brian Thorbjørnsen, Em Westerlund.

Others present: Bob Grytdahl, Human Rights Officer, Robin Roeser, Deputy Chief of Police, Mike Tusken, Deputy Chief of Police, Candy Harshner, PAVSA, Kim Crawford, Lifehouse, and Kassie Helgerson.

The special meeting was called to discuss and recommend a course of action to the City Council for the purposed loitering ordinance.

Deputy Chief Tusken said he believed ordinance important for human trafficking. He said it is not a jail able offense because it is a City Ordinance. He said the Police Department would be willing to do an audit, and could give information to Bob Grytdahl on each ticket given out. Deputy Chief Tusken stated officers would be trained on how to use the ordinance. The ordinance has not been passed. It is tabled right now.

Candy Harshner, from PAVSA and the Duluth Human Trafficking Task Force stated she had a problem with the language that is used in the Ordinance. She said that instead of prostitution that the term should be commercially sexually exploited. She said many of the victims in this area are Native American girls, average age 12-14 years old. She suggested that the emphasis should be put on the johns and pimps. Ms. Harshner believes that this is a huge safety issue for victims and could put them in danger. She would like to work with the City Council and Duluth Police Department to make changes in ordinance. There were 65 young women they worked with last year. It is hard to get statistics as they don't identify themselves as victims. They see pimp as boyfriend/family friend, etc.

Kim Crawford from Lifehouse and Duluth Human Trafficking Task Force, talked about the youth at Lifehouse, who are abused, victims in some way, who often as teenagers don't have good social skills. Lifehouse has a good relationship with the Duluth Police Department. The concern is that youth can't afford to pay fine for ticket and may end up in jail, even though it is a petty misdemeanor. For them it is a big deal. She stated that it is important that the language in the ordinance fits the intent of the ordinance.

Ms. Crawford said she is in favor of an audit and assessment. She believes it is important to take into account who is going to be impacted by this.

Bob Grytdahl stated that the Commission could offer to do community focus groups about the

ordinance.

A motion was made by Margie Nelson to ask the City Council to table the ordinance until there can be more public discussion. It was seconded by Rebecca Domagala. Motion passed. Six - yes, two - no. No's were Robert Kaner and Scott Yeazle.

Robert Kaner believes that the ordinance is unconstitutional, that it is too vague, and is not enforceable. He believes it will be challenged and the City will be sued.

Commission will ask that the City Council continue to table the ordinance until there can be more public discussion that the Commission could facilitate.

Respectfully submitted by,

Sheryl Boman-Schneider
Co-secretary