

## HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MINUTES

Approved: January 15, 2019

The Human Rights Commission met on Tuesday, November 20, 2018 at 5:00 p.m. in the Multi-Purpose Room at the Kandiyohi County Historical Society.

Members present were: Shelly Huseby, Fernando Alvarado, Shawn Mueske, Barbara Little, Jill Benson, Ben Larson, Richard Engan, Marlin Breems and Lilbon Clark arrived at 5:30 p.m.

### Item No. 1      Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Shelly Huseby at 5:00 p.m.

### Item No. 2      Approve Minutes of Meeting

Chair Huseby presented the minutes of the October 16, 2018 meeting for discussion. Commission Member Benson moved to approve the Human Rights Commission minutes of October 16, 2018 and Commission Member Little seconded the motion, which carried.

### Item No. 3      Public Comment

There were no members of the public in attendance who wished to comment.

### Item No. 4      Presentation – Jill Bengston Housing and Redevelopment Authority

Jill Bengston, Executive Director for the Kandiyohi County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) was present to describe the programs offered by the HRA. This was prompted from the prior meeting's discussion of the recent housing and workforce housing issues in Willmar. Ms. Bengston handed out an informational packet related to the agency and reviewed with the Commission. The HRA's mission statement is to promote and provide housing and development opportunities to revitalize our communities and improve residents' quality of life. The Board of Commissioners is appointed by the County Board and consists of seven members and two elected official liaisons, one from the City Council and one from the Kandiyohi County Board.

Ms. Bengston described the assistance programs offered and the eligibility requirements. Programs include tenant-based rental assistance, property improvement, business loan, surety deposit loan, and down payment assistance loans. She stated the HRA owns some properties as well as manages on behalf of other owners. They own Lakeview Highrise, Westwind Townhomes, and Country View Estates. They manage West Central Mental Health Housing with HUD program funding, townhomes in Willmar and nearby communities, Dana Heights, Welshire Townhomes and part owner of Highland Apartments on Becker Avenue SE and also all activities for McLeod County HRA Townhomes.

Ms. Bengston relayed plans for the upcoming 15<sup>th</sup> Street Flats development which is planned to be open in August of 2019 with 47 units consisting of one, two and three bedroom units for a variety of income levels and rent will be based on income. There will be ten units that are for long-term homeless households, five of those are targeted to meet the definitions of persons with disabilities.

Ms. Bengston stated most of their waiting lists are closed at this time. Once they open again, applications are received at their office. Notice is given publicly in the newspaper, facebook, etc. and

there will be a line out the door. Commissioner Mueske questioned what Ms. Bengston felt would be the greatest need for housing in Willmar moving forward. Her response was that she felt it would be getting more toward that gap of people that cannot receive assistance and the ones that cannot afford the higher rents. It was noted that there is a real need for student housing which falls into that same category.

Vision 2040 Housing Committee is discussing forming a tenant education program to help people understand how to take care of their apartments which will be helpful for the different cultural populations in the area. The protocol for tenant complaints was discussed along with accountability. Ms. Bengston explained the units are inspected and need to conform to HUD's housing quality standards. Going forward if there are complaints that are not getting resolved, tenants can make HRA aware and they will do an inspection. The document "Tenant Roles and Responsibilities" was discussed and the possibility of having it available in various languages.

Item No. 5      Overview of Topics for Discussion in 2019

This item was placed on the agenda from previous discussions to come up with ideas for a year of agenda items to include guest speakers and topics. The Commission was asked to bring ideas forward. Commissioner Benson brought up an exercise in her class pertaining to people of various political views and afterward one student brought up what appeared to be mass discrimination in her school and who would investigate. Would it be the department of education or the department of human rights?

A discussion of providing a forum about the Human Rights Commission and what resources are available was brought up and also how to have these resources available to the public in a place such as the City website. The website could contain links such as renters' rights, worker rights, vulnerable adults, immigrant rights, etc. Chair Huseby plans to contact the City IT department to see if this is a possibility.

Item No. 6      Other Business

Chair Huseby presented information related to the municipal ID from the City of Northfield. She has been in contact with the chair of their Human Rights Commission and he is willing to call in to the next meeting and relay information on how it came to be. They wanted all residents to feel welcome and a part of the community.

The Commission was updated on the GARE presentation held this fall. Commissioner Mueske attended the workshop and learned there are 93 communities that pay the membership fees with 40 of them being from Minnesota. During the session they discussed what GARE does and what they offer but indicated they are trying to reach smaller communities to form consortiums with regionalization to access resources. They decided on a national scale that southwest Minnesota would be a good place to do that. There is a good possibility this consortium may be formed and there will be a lot of resources available. They will be making this decision after January 1<sup>st</sup>.

The next meeting date of the Commission will be Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. A motion was made by Commissioner Breems, seconded by Commissioner Engan and passed to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 5:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Janell Sommers  
Administrative Assistant