

Human Rights Commission LGBTQ Rights Task Force: Meeting Summary

June 26, 2019

Task Force Members	Present/Absent	Guests
Danielle Meyer, Chair	P	Bella Borja, Human Rights Commissioner (HRC)
Alexandra Dass	P	Teresa Rollings, Oregon Employment Department
Erin Hull	P	Dan Atchison, City Attorney
Byron Kimball	P	Sarah Strahl, City Librarian
Daniel Rollings	P	Norm Wright, Community Development Director
Mike Watters	A	Nicole Dyer, student
Staff		Krista Aquinas-Gallagher, HRC
Gretchen Bennett	P	Tricarico Schwartz, HRC
		Wilma Marchbanks, HRC, for a portion of the meeting
		Felicia Bechtoldt, HRC, for a portion of the meeting

1. Call to Order, Welcome and Review of Agenda

Chair Meyer welcomed the group; introductions were shared.

2. Public Comment

None provided.

3. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Rollings moved the approval of the May meeting notes. Commissioner Dass seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

4. Oregon Employment Department: gender identity and expression

Teresa Rainey, Equity and Inclusion Officer, State of Oregon Employment Department, shared the department has 1100 – 1200 employees and serves many in the community. She requested input on draft procedures related to gender identity and expression. She asked that input be provided within two weeks in order to be considered in this draft.

Chair Meyer noted the group can give input and also communicate with members of the LGBTQ community. Teresa emphasized it would be important that as the document is shared, that people know it is a draft. Chair Meyer asked if the Salem Police Dept. training bulletin, of related topics, can be shared with Teresa; Gretchen will check. Chair Meyer suggested connecting with the Department of Motor Vehicles who has discussed some similar topics.

Member Kimball noted the thoroughness of topics included. Commissioner Borja offered edits. Chair Meyer expressed appreciation for the department's work to clarify procedures.

5. Salem Public Library: Welcoming and Inclusive Services

Norm Wright, Salem Community Development Director, and Sarah Strahl, City Librarian, shared the upcoming plan to seismically retrofit the main branch of the library. They are here to ask how, in the new space, they can make our library as welcoming and inclusive as possible. A PowerPoint presentation was provided. Norm spoke to the library's core services of welcoming spaces, collections, outreach/events, technology access and customer assistance. A temporary space will be needed for at least 18 months.

Norm noted the group has been working since November with a relocation committee which includes Councilors Hoy, Lewis and Library Advisory Board member Stark. The group researched locations and is left with one option available to continue providing services. The site was formerly known as Capital Press, and is owned by Salem Alliance Church. The space is move-in ready, and the team is running out of time. Access, building safety and life systems such as egress, are examples of criteria considered in site selection.

Warehouses were one type of building looked at, Norm explained, but these are built with different requirements, given they aren't needing to house a large number of people. Over 1,000 persons a day come through the main branch, and aspects such as exiting in case of emergency, bathrooms, and other features must be considered. The bond funding provided for the retrofit project is not able to be used for renovating temporary space, nor is there time to do so.

Sarah shared the location is in an active part of town at Broadway and Market and is on a major bus line. There will be free parking while at this interim space. There will be some viable meeting rooms available. There is also a loading dock; given the lack of overall space in the facility (going from 90,000 square feet to 15,000 square feet) a functional loading dock is key to acquire materials from partnering libraries as well as to stock outreach vehicles.

Sarah spoke to the importance of ensuring everyone is welcome in the new space. She discussed past activities such as the table in conjunction with Transgender Day of Remembrance and spoke of methods such as pins worn to express personal pronouns.

Norm and Sarah and the library renovation committee are at the Commission to request an answer to the question, "How can we make our library space as welcoming and inclusive as possible?"

Chair Meyer thanked Norm and Sarah for presenting and shared she has always been impressed with the library as a regular patron.

In answer to the question, she said the way to be welcoming is to learn what the published policies are of the owner of the space as to their inclusion of all persons including LGBTQ communities. She expressed strong opposition to leasing the space without clear, published statements demonstrating commitment to inclusion of LGBTQ communities by the building owner.

Commissioner Rollings expressed great hesitation, feeling it doesn't look well to collaborate with an organization that is hostile to LGBTQ communities; as President of the local chapter of PFLaG, he said he receives reports of concerns. He shared he is hearing of kids who are directly affected by bias experienced. He was concerned city tax dollars would go to an organization that does not align with the library's values of inclusion.

Commissioner Aquinas Gallagher expressed she felt it is wrong, and a stand must be taken. She spoke of an example of a person who expressed concerns to her, who is gay, and opted to leave their previous affiliation with the church.

Commissioner Schwartz spoke of reports of hateful things in a local blog and of concerns/complaints she has heard from people in the community. She raised the recent scheduling of a specific group at the library, who had been known to express hate.

Gretchen paused the conversation, and observed that everyone in the room shares a common goal to be welcoming and inclusive to all, and, to have a library space during the seismic retrofit.

Commissioner Watters was unable to be at the meeting; he submitted written input; copies of his email were shared with all participants. His input was noted.

Gretchen inquired if the complaints discussed related to places of public accommodation? She noted the community blog includes a statement from the church, which clarifies that the church does not ask questions in the hiring process related to LGBTQ, that it operates its public spaces to be open to everyone. She noted the right of faith based organizations to freedom of religion, a factor the Human Rights Commission also works with.

The group spoke of the dependence of the community on the library, and that there aren't other options. Gretchen expressed significant concern of not having a library for the many who depend on the space especially in winter months or for critical help such as technology access.

An idea of a statement emerged. Members and Commissioners discussed the idea of making a strong statement of concern. Gretchen inquired what the statement would be based upon, given the freedom of religion and the lack of substantiated complaints received.

Gretchen spoke of criteria for what goes into a statement or a recommendation. When contemplating these it is helpful to ask questions such as what the impact will be (no library during winter months?), what the recommendation is based upon, and to always be accurate. It is difficult to take indirect or secondary reports, and from that to imply founded discrimination.

A brief recess was taken.

The group clarified that the lease agreement would allow the City to control what signs were up in the space; Norm indicated yes.

Commissioner Aquinas-Gallagher shared she would not go to the library if the site is chosen.

Chair Meyer clarified the process. Norm noted that this option is emerging as there is not another option. City Council makes decisions on lease agreements. Chair Meyer spoke of understanding the need, and putting value on people, not spaces.

Commissioner Rollings inquired about purchasing processes. Norm explained it works much like local house hunting wherein they are free to research from multiple brokers and places, not limited to those who apply or come to them. He spoke of the exhaustive search undertaken these past months.

Commissioner Schwartz urged everyone to think about what is right, not only about what is legal.

Member Kimball acknowledged the difficulty. He encouraged keeping open discussion. He encouraged the library to commit openly in forward facing ways with the LGBTQ community. Commissioner Watters' email also contained a suggestion along those lines if this was the only space available.

The group discussed looking at it through the lens of the Human Rights Commission at their next meeting, July 2.

Commissioner Borja indicated the group should also address the question the library staff asked, which is how the library space can be as welcome and inclusive as possible? She does not want to not see a library.

6. Debrief/Planning related to Chapter 97

Chair Meyer announced Chapter 97 amendments were unanimously advanced from first reading to second at the City Council meeting. The second reading/vote for enactment is scheduled for July 8.

7. Member Remarks and Announcements

Commissioner Rollings spoke of heightened security needed around the country for PRIDE events. He requested the SPD be made aware; Gretchen will do so. Required security has also been provided for per permitting processes.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Gretchen Bennett, City of Salem staff.