



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Work Session
August 1, 2024
City Space, 100 5th Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902
6:30 pm**

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1. WELCOME

- a. CALL TO ORDER
 - i. Chair, Ernest Chambers, called the meeting to order at 6:33pm
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Ernest Chambers
 - ii. Wolfgang Keppley
 - iii. Mary Bauer
 - iv. Kathryn Laughon
 - v. Suzanne Lynn
 - vi. Heather Roberson-Gaston
- c. MISSION (recited by all): *Act as a strong advocate to justice and equal opportunity by providing citywide leadership and guidance in the area of civil rights.*

2. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC

- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
 - i. None
- b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
 - i. None

3. WORK SESSION

- a. Selecting state-level legislative agenda recommendations
 - i. Recommendations made during expert panels held on 6/6/24 and 7/18/24 will inform commissioners discussion and selection of recommendations to City Council
 - ii. The following recommendations were highlighted by commissioners during their discussion:
 - 1. Permanently extending pay or quit notice period to 14 days (currently 5 days)
 - a. Commissioner suggests providing context of existing pay or quit policy and explanation of suggested changes in letter to City Council
 - 2. Providing funding to 5000 Families, a state voucher program specific to families with children
 - 3. Limiting fees required for housing applications and/or allowing groups of tenants to submit applications together
 - 4. Requiring leases and other critical documents to be made

- available in languages other than English
- 5. Increasing fee transparency in housing application process and tenant screening process
- 6. Limiting security deposit costs and removing credit-based eligibility for reduced security deposit costs
- 7. Creating a screening process for housing applicants that prevents prospective tenants from paying application fees for units they are not eligible to rent
- 8. Requiring landlords to provide reasons for housing application denials
- 9. Increasing protections against landlord retaliation by including harassment and non-renewal of leases as prohibited forms of retaliation
 - a. Commissioner states that the Virginia Residential Landlord Tenant Act has particularly weak protections for tenants, and several Virginia cities have notably high eviction rates as a result; strengthening these protections is a priority
 - b. Commissioner points out that tenants must prove that landlord intended to retaliate, which is a high barrier
 - c. Commissioner discusses instating positive tenant right to renew lease
 - i. Commissioner would like to require landlords to provide valid reason for termination of lease
- 10. Allowing vouchers to be attached outside of jurisdictions that issued them
 - a. Director clarifies that under current policy, this is allowable at localities' discretion but is not required by state legislation
- 11. Allowing use of Medicare/Medicaid funds to be used for costs associated with housing and homelessness
- iii. Commissioner suggests that the HRC consider revisiting and prioritizing bills that were passed in the last session, but were ultimately vetoed by the Governor
 - 1. 201 bills were passed by both chambers and vetoed by the Governor
 - 2. Commissioner discusses HB 817, related to amending the Virginia Residential Landlord Tenant Act, which was vetoed by the Governor
 - 3. Commissioner discusses HB 993, related to Virginia Residential Landlord Tenant Act, which was vetoed by Governor
 - 4. Commissioner suggests including recommendation to create option for payment plan of back rent
 - a. This was included in a bill that was passed last session but vetoed by Governor
 - 5. Commissioner asks if there were any state bills from last session that related to providing additional funding for addressing homelessness
 - a. Commissioner highlights Delegate Katrina Callsen's

- support for a bill that provides support for those re-entering following a period of incarceration
 - b. Commissioner highlights Delegate Callsen's support for a bill that allows use of Medicaid and Medicare funds for housing
- iv. Director reminds commissioners that they can also review their letter from last year and consider repeating any of those recommendations
- v. Commissioner points out that some other states have "Homeless Bill of Rights," and Virginia does not
- vi. Commissioner suggests that letter to City Council include recommendations related to wraparound services to align with HRC's annual focus areas
 - 1. Supporting development of increased services for mental health and substance use
- vii. Commissioner asks if funding for shelters is usually provided at a federal or state level
 - 1. Director clarifies that funds can be provided by the federal government, state grants, and private donations depending on the type of organization providing homelessness services
- viii. **Wolfgang volunteers to begin compiling list of selected recommendations (shared via email)**
 - 1. Commissioner suggests including introductory paragraph to contextualize housing crisis in Charlottesville
 - 2. Commissioner suggests general statement of HRC's support for any legislation that provides additional funding for subsidized housing and voucher assistance
 - 3. Commissioners discuss whether it is more strategic to make specific recommendations or to encourage City Council to broadly support bills that will increase housing supply and tenants' rights with examples included
 - a. Broad overview can be included in introduction of letter
 - b. Specific recommendations will also be included
 - c. Director points out that bills that were ultimately sponsored last year tended to be more specific recommendations, and there may be value in echoing specific language used by other organizations making recommendations
- ix. Commissioners review and discuss 48 responses to the HRC's public poll conducted from 7/23/24-7/31/24 and highlight the following suggestions:
 - 1. Increasing shelter options, including low-barrier options
 - 2. Commissioner points out that member of the public echoed problems with landlords using non-renewal of lease as form of retaliation
- b. Commissioner asks about OHR research into potential source of funds discrimination
 - i. Director explains that this research involves data analysis of rents, payment standards, voucher administrators' records, and other sources
- c. Commissioners discuss when to develop City-level recommendations

- i. Can be discussed after submission of state-level recommendations to City Council
 - ii. Director notes that October may be best time for City-level recommendations as this is when budget process begins
 - iii. City-level recommendations should be related to City Council's direct sphere of influence
- d. Commissioner asks about potential upcoming public hearing training
 - i. Director is awaiting potential Charlottesville Human Rights Ordinance amendments and will work on developing this training after Council's vote on ordinance

4. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC

- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
 - i. None
- b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
 - i. None

5. COMMISSIONER UPDATES

- a. None

6. NEXT STEPS

- a. Wolfgang with support from Commissioners and Staff
 - i. Draft letter to City Council outlining legislative priority recommendations

7. ADJOURN

- a. Meeting adjourned at 7:43pm