



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Regular Meeting
August 15, 2024
City Space, 100 5th Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902
6:30 pm**

Click [HERE](#) to access rebroadcasts of past Human Rights Commission meetings on YouTube.

Click [HERE](#) to access an archive of past Human Rights Commission work on the City website.

1. WELCOME

- a. CALL TO ORDER
 - i. Chair, Ernest Chambers, called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm
 - ii. Chair holds moment of silence in honor of those harmed on August 11th and 12th, 2017
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Ernest Chambers
 - ii. Wolfgang Keppley
 - iii. Kathryn Laughon
 - iv. Suzanne Lynn
 - v. Heather Roberson-Gaston (arrived at approximately 6:55pm)
- 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

3. MINUTES

- a. Review of minutes from Work Session on August 1st
 - i. Vote
 - 1. In favor: 5
 - 2. Opposed: 0
 - 3. Abstained: 0
 - ii. Motion to approve minutes passes

4. BUSINESS MATTERS

- a. CHAIR UPDATE
 - i. Commissioners discuss recent news coverage of the Downtown Mall and homelessness
- b. OHR STAFF REPORT
 - i. Outreach Specialist provides update on language accessibility
 - 1. Complaint brochure is translated into Spanish, Arabic, Dari, Pashto, Nepali, and Swahili
 - a. Commissioners are welcome to contact Lily to discuss ideas for reaching speakers of these languages and distributing materials

2. Intake form is also available on the website in these 6 languages
3. Whole website can be translated into any language that Google allows through a tool on the website
- ii. Outreach Specialist is working on outreach materials and events to increase awareness of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and other federal laws protecting new parents
 1. Commissioners that would like to collaborate on this can follow up with Lily
- iii. Director provides update on hiring for Intake Specialist
 1. Offer of hire will hopefully be finalized soon
- iv. Director provides updates on cases
 1. Case 2021-4 settled in mediation and is now closed
 2. Case 2024-5 mediation reached impasse, and complainant withdrew complaint
 3. Case 2020-2 investigation is completed, and determination is in progress
- v. Director provides updates on Charlottesville Human Rights Ordinance
 1. City Council passed proposed amendments at their meeting on 8/5/24
 2. Director sent updated version to the Fair Housing Assistance Program staff and expects to hear verdict in October

5. WORK SESSION

- a. Legislative Priorities Recommendation letter
 - i. Outreach Specialist informs commission that additional legislative recommendations have been submitted by Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC)
 1. Anti-rent gouging legislation
 2. Legislation that strengthens the rights of residents of Mobile Home Communities
 - ii. Vote
 1. In favor: 5
 2. Opposed: 0
 3. Abstained: 0
 - iii. Motion to adopt spirit of letter passes
 - iv. **Commissioners will finalize wording of letter by 8/25 for submission to City Council by 9/1**
 - v. Letter will include the following recommendations:
 1. Access to Housing:
 - a. Limit application fees for rental applications and/or allow groups of tenants to submit a single application.
 - b. Require more transparency during the tenant screening process. Require landlords to list minimum criteria before an application and provide reasons for a tenant's application denial. Require any fee increases to coincide with the terms of a lease.
 - c. Require landlords to disclose to rental applicants a complete list of additional fees involved in renting as a separate document prior to the signing of a lease.

- d. Begin a state-sponsored voucher program to increase the accessibility of rental subsidies.
 - e. Support voucher portability, permitting voucher holders to apply a voucher outside of where that voucher was administered.
 - f. Increase state funding for rent relief programs.
- 2. Tenant Rights:
 - a. Reinstate 14-day pay or quit notices. Tenants are currently given 5 days to pay, or an eviction proceeding can commence. This legislative recommendation would expand the time tenants are able to pay.
 - b. Amend the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to allow tenants to raise unsafe or unsanitary conditions as an affirmative defense to non-payment of rent.
 - c. Increase protections against landlord retaliation. Include harassment, non-lease renewal, etc., as forms of landlord retaliation.
 - d. Require that critical lease information be made available in languages other than English.
 - e. Create an option for rental payment plans.
 - f. Allow indigent tenants to waive their appeal bond. This would grant indigent tenants the same rights that exist for indigent people in other types of civil cases.
 - g. Prevent eviction or threats of eviction as being used as methods of coercion for rent payments.
 - h. Include provisions in the VA Residential Landlord and Tenant Act and the Manufactured Home Lot Rental Act to prohibit mid-lease rent increases except in cases where the renter has agreed in writing that the proposed mid-lease rent increase is permissible.
- 3. A Focus on Mobile Home Tenant Rights:
 - a. Take rent control out of the Dillon Rule process and make it more possible for localities to add rent stabilization to their local control.
 - b. Improve manufactured homes (mobile homes) to give them the ability to buy their communities when an owner wants to sell. This would give tenants first right of refusal and keep a property as a mobile home park.
- 4. A Focus on Homelessness:
 - a. Support comprehensive probation reform bill that would offer more support to those experiencing re-entry.
 - b. Allocate Medicare and Medicaid funds for addressing homelessness and affordable housing.
 - c. Recognize homelessness as a protected class in the Virginia Human Rights Act and Virginia Fair Housing Law to prohibit discrimination based upon an individual's housing status.
 - d. Require that each county and city in Virginia maintain a

public shelter for individuals or fund a private equivalent.

5. Wrap-around Services:

- a. Support the development of increased services for those with mental illnesses and substance abuse.
- b. Increase public mental health care funding.

6. Other:

- a. Implement a progressive income tax and taxes for consumer services. The resultant increase in the tax base should produce a subsequent increase in funding available for affordable housing.

b. Commissioners discuss need for training to be prepared to hold public hearing if necessary

- i. Commissioner asks if cases filed under 2013 Charlottesville Human Rights Ordinance can utilize appeal process outlined in 2024 Ordinance if both parties agree

1. Director will look into this

- ii. Staff will determine feasibility and necessity of training options and arrange opportunities

6. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC

a. PUBLIC COMMENT

- i. None

b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC

- i. None

7. COMMISSIONER UPDATES

- a. None

8. NEXT STEPS

a. All commissioners

- i. Finalize wording of legislative recommendations letter by 8/25

b. Todd

- i. Format legislative recommendations letter and submit to Council by 9/1
- ii. Ask City Attorney's Office staff if cases filed under 2013 Ordinance can use hearing process of 2024 Ordinance

c. The HRC will not hold a Work Session on 9/5

9. ADJOURN

- a. Meeting adjourned at 8:08pm