



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Work Session
October 3, 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 6:38 pm
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Present
 - 1. Ernest Chambers
 - 2. Mary Bauer
 - 3. Kathryn Laughon
 - 4. Dawn Lawson
 - 5. Suzanne Lynn
 - 6. Jason Melendez
 - 7. Elizabeth Stark
- 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. Draft City policy recommendations
 - i. Commissioners reviewed the list of recommendations discussed during the 09-19-24 HRC Regular Meeting (available in the 10-4 agenda packet)
 - 1. Recommendations in bold text are priority
 - 2. Recommendations in regular text are for future consideration and may require more research and/or data
 - 3. Right to counsel is of particular interest
 - a. Commissioner asks about the scope of right to counsel protections
 - i. Could it include assistance for people who lose their vouchers as a result of eviction?

- b. Commissioner provides a summary of the history and scope of right to counsel protections and City's previous commitment that was tied to County's willingness to also fund
 - c. Commissioner asks if presenting more information during a Council meeting would help frame the issue and its importance to the community
 - d. Chair notes that it would be important to verify if any other local agencies are working on right to counsel initiatives
- 4. Commissioners highlight the importance of advocacy for year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter for people experiencing homelessness
 - a. Emphasize the need for family-friendly shelter
- 5. Commissioner emphasizes need for broad spectrum of available housing to create options for individuals and families with different needs and income levels
 - a. Commissioners state that majority of people in Charlottesville do not have income level to afford cost of living in the city
- 6. Commissioner states that individuals and organizations working on eviction prevention are not able to fully meet the needs of the community
 - a. Commissioner states that accessible counsel may change this landscape
 - i. Commissioner highlights difficulty that some individuals are experiencing with administration of vouchers and rent payment
 - 1. Commissioner attests that administration of CSRAP vouchers, which are funded by City, are of particular concern
 - 2. Commissioner says this issue may also be addressed by increasing accessibility of counsel
- 7. Commissioner highlights absence of homelessness supports in seasons besides winter despite unpleasant and dangerous weather at other times of year
 - a. Staff member states that there is dialogue around potential collaboration between City, People and Congregations Engaged in Ministry (PACEM), and Salvation Army to try to provide year-round shelter
 - i. Staff emphasize need to encourage partners to meet expectations of Human Rights Ordinance in the provision of services at a City-sponsored shelter
 - ii. Commissioner highlights importance that this shelter also contemplate need for shelter options for families

- b. Commissioner points out that any new shelter options would require years of planning, approving, building, etc. to be effective solutions to problems faced by unhoused individuals today
 - 8. Commissioner suggests subsidizing hotel stays as a potential short-term solution for those that are unhoused
 - a. City does this currently, but only to a limited population
 - 9. Commissioner asks about status of University of Virginia's (UVA) effort to house second-year students in campus housing as this could dramatically impact availability of affordable housing
 - a. Commissioner shares that some places use "Payment in Lieu of Taxes" system to address deficiencies in tax base resulting from UVA land purchases and use
 - i. Commissioner points out that there may be issues with this due to status as state university, but there are other ways they may still be able to contribute
 - 10. Commissioners discuss potential homelessness outreach coordinator position
 - a. **Staff member will ask about the status and availability of funding is for this position**
 - 11. Commissioner states that recommendation regarding City holidays is not closely related to other recommendations' theme of housing
 - a. Commissioner expresses concern that there may be unintended consequences of implementing a rotating holiday schedule
 - b. Commissioner suggests removing this from the list and revisiting later
 - c. Commissioners agree that it may make more sense to focus on housing recommendations as those are in line with their annual focus area
 - ii. Commissioners discuss framing and structure of draft recommendation letter
 - b. Work Plan drafting
 - i. Staff member provides update on conducting public hearing proceedings
 - 1. Commissioners discuss timeline of training, notice, and conducting hearing
 - ii. Updates to HRC Rules and Procedures
 - 1. Commissioner suggests adjusting timeframe of elections to align more closely with annual planning and expiration of terms
 - 2. Staff member suggests changing wording from "Strategic Planning Meeting" to "Annual Planning Meeting"

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. Todd
 - i. Ask City leadership about the status of homelessness outreach position
- b. Mary
 - i. Draft letter related to right to counsel
- c. Suzanne
 - i. Draft letter of recommendations, excluding right to counsel portion
- d. Elizabeth
 - i. Contact Shayla Washington to ask about homelessness outreach position

7. ADJOURN

- a. Meeting adjourned at 7:49pm