



City of Seattle



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 19, 2020 | 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via WebEx

Commissioners Present: Byram Simpson, Manuel Venegas, Kari Lerum, Deaunte Damper, Deepa Sivarajan, Nate Higby, Annabelle Backman, Chris Brown, Victor Loo, Jessi Murray

Commissioners Absent: John Rodriguez

SOCR Staff: Leo Segovia, Molly Brewer, Caedmon Cahill

Meeting Minutes recorded by: Deepa Sivarajan

Guests: Dominique Stephens (Mayor's Office), Steven Pray (future commissioner)

Welcome and Introductions

1. Welcome Steven, prospective commissioner!

Public Open Comment

1. No public comment.

Approve October and July Minutes and November Agenda

1. Motion to approve July minutes and October minutes with following edits. **Motion passes (8 in favor, 2 abstentions)**
 - a. Amend Byram Simpson's statement about a prior letter with the Mayor's Office – the letter was not concerning the consent decree but the Seattle Police Officer's Guild contract nullified by the consent decree.
2. Motion to approve November agenda with following edits. **Motion passes (100%)**
 - a. Change the sections led by John Rodriguez to Kari Lerum.
 - b. Change Social Media Committee report to Jessi Murray.

Report Backs

1. Public response to letter calling for Mayor Durkan's resignation

- a. Robust response to our letter included media hits by KOMO and Seattle Times among others
 - b. Community response included many emails
 - i. Many emails in defense of the mayor referred to her tenure as District Attorney prior to her time in the Mayor's Office
 - ii. Letter from Greater Seattle Business Alliance (GSBA) was also posted to social, which then led to a lot of supportive emails to the Commission that were from the same template but different senders
 - c. Social media posts about our statement also generated significant activity
 - d. We have now had two meetings in a row that included someone in attendance from the mayor's office
2. 5-chair meeting with the Mayor
- a. Attended by co-chairs Kari Lerum, Byram Simpson, and John Rodriguez; meeting was limited by both mayor's schedule and digital platform
 - b. Each commission was invited to make an introductory statement that was followed up with a statement by the mayor; a lot of the commission used their opening statements to ask questions as well
 - c. Many questions reflected what was asked in both the Human Rights Commission's letters and our letter, regarding the Jumpstart tax, the proposed task force for investing \$100 million in communities of color
 - d. Questions and comments from commissioners:
 - i. Byram Simpson: I personally was very frustrated by how that meeting ran and hope that there will be a follow-up.
 - ii. Kari Lerum: We only had a full hour and started late, but I was really happy to see the mayor's face in a Zoom square and was really happy to see the other co-chairs. I think it was a first step and I was heartened by the expression of interest and commitment by the mayor and deputy mayor that this is not a one-time thing but is an ongoing thing. The chairs from all the 5 commissions are hopeful that this is a beginning.
 - iii. Byram Simpson: I did give feedback that after the opening statements, the way that it played out that the mayor could really pick and choose what she wanted to respond to. I don't think that was intentional, so I suggested that commission participants be allowed to direct that portion where they wanted to prioritize the dialogue part for the next time. The deputy mayor stayed on from quite a while after the scheduled time to continue the discussion but unfortunately none of us were able to stay. I will say that so far, I have not seen actual follow-up proposing another date for a meeting, but I too am hopeful that this indicated that there is desire for us as advisory boards to be involved.
3. 5-chair quarterly meeting
- a. Attended by co-chairs Kari Lerum and Byram Simpson
 - b. Human Rights Commission and Immigrant & Refugee Commission chairs expressed frustration about the lack of depth that was able to be reached in the meeting with the mayor
 - c. Commission for People with disAbilities is officially changing their name to the Seattle Disability Commission!
 - d. Discussed proactive collaboration between commissions, particularly during this time of COVID-19 where we are more limited in how we can engage and hold events

- i. Byram Simpson suggested having a “super-committee” of one chair from each commission sharing monthly agendas with the others; a member of the Human Rights Commission is working to put together a Slack channel for the 5-chairs
- ii. Since we will have two new co-chairs tonight, should defer to what they want to do with the other chairs

4. Meeting with GSBA

- a. Attended by Jessi Murry, Chris Brown, Kari Lerum, Victor Loo, Nate Higby, Annabelle Backman, and Yazi Aceves, with Leo Segovia from SOCR taking notes
- b. Questions and comments from commissioners:
 - i. Jessi Murray: It started off with “what do we want to say about the letter and the letter response”. Annabelle and Nate did good job of capturing some nuance on how we feel like we need to act in situations where there isn’t unanimous agreement. I was personally frustrated by the timing of the meeting. After the letter we talked about opportunities to work together – I was excited about that part, and there were specific problems they called out that we can help with. But for me personally, it was a little uncomfortable that there were people who mostly voted no on the letter, so I didn’t feel like it was a particularly safe space to talk about that. GSBA’s chair said “we didn’t mean to imply you did anything illegal”, but it did imply that we had done something careless or short-sighted, and I didn’t feel that I could say that. I wish we had been able to meet as a commission before we met externally with another group.
 - ii. Victor Loo: Jessi, thank you for sharing that. I would say that I really like the fact that we can have opening dialogue in a trusting space. I voted no on that letter, and I have always been candid about that. That’s why I spent an email asking to postpone the GSBA meeting because it didn’t work for many people who work. Jessi, I would have been uncomfortable if I had been in your shoes because it was mostly people who voted no. I also wanted to reiterate that it’s important to have healthy conflict as long as it leads to healthy communication. I wish we had more time to debrief as a commission before meeting with GSBA, but I did feel that the second half of the meeting had everyone coming from a genuine and authentic space of wanting to work together.
 - iii. Kari Lerum: Jessi, I also noted that there was probably discomfort for people who voted no. I was pleasantly surprised by the tone of the meeting given how angry GSBA was at our letter. I appreciated that the chair was open to conversation. I am also someone who generally doesn’t engage with business and have never had much interest. I was surprised to hear that they identified as anti-racist and that they disagreed with many of the mayor’s actions. I also mentioned our desire to partner with groups that are committed to LGBTQ BIPOC communities.
 - iv. Annabelle Backman: I think that meeting went about as I expected to. There were times I felt that people were trying to relitigate the decision to sign onto the letter. That’s come up in a few different places and I think we would do well to accept that the commission took that vote and did what we did, and that is a matter of public record. Continuing to discuss that doesn’t change what we did and we should let it go. The portion of the meeting talking about future collaboration included well-intentioned statements about working together, but we didn’t come away with many actionable things, so it will remain to be seen

how useful that time will have been. The thing that I do want to call out is that everything that we talked about in that meeting – including how to engage and have input from the GSBA – we as a commission need to make sure that we are building scalable mechanisms for collaboration and outreach. We can't be creating relationships with one organization and not making room for other voices, because there are other community voices representing other parts of our community, and they need to be heard. Right now we're not doing a great job of getting any of them into the conversation, but we need to also open the door to others.

- v. Kari Lerum: I agree with Annabelle and I'm glad you brought that up to them.
- vi. Byram Simpson: I was not at the meeting but I want to comment on the scheduling. I was surprised that the date of November 17 was proposed at all because my understanding was that SOCR had asked GSBA to give some more options, and I had specifically asked for that. I didn't push it to be rescheduled once it was scheduled, but I was surprised given that there was an open question given that a lot of us do have day jobs and generally cannot attend workday meetings longer than half an hour at my lunch break.
- vii. Jessi Murray: I agree with Byram on scheduling – I thought there were more times coming, and once a date was locked in I didn't feel like I could push back.

Committee Reports

1. POC Stakeholders: Report by Victor Loo
 - a. Met with Bloodworks Northwest because there are still FDA restrictions on gay men to be able to donate blood, and working with them on advocacy on legislative actions
2. Commission Operations: Report by Manuel Venegas
 - a. Nothing to report since we have still not figured out a time to meet as a committee
 - b. On the retreat, if we cannot finalize the logistics of the retreat, it would be good at the end of this meeting to do some retreat planning
3. Social Media & Communications: Report from Jessi Murray
 - a. Decided not to meet this month due to people's schedules
 - b. There is an open question we'd like to discuss at the retreat given that now the committee is just Jessi Murray and Chris Brown, if we should just combine it with the Community Engagement Committee or if we should shake it up
 - c. Joseph Suttner has been offboarded from all the social media accounts and now Jessi Murray is in charge of those; Kari Lerum will also need to be offboarded
 - d. If other people are interested in helping post, we could use more content as well
4. Community Engagement Committee: Report from Nate Higby
 - a. Nate Higby and Deaunte Damper met and also have thoughts about shaking up the committees at the retreat
 - b. Follow-up from the Disability Justice event with the Seattle Disability Commission and Town Hall Seattle – the event went very well and have over 300 viewers live, plus more afterwards; lots of great comments!
 - c. Reached out to Queer the Land about having them come present to us in exchange for a stipend; they are interested and we are trying to figure out timing.
 - i. Discussion about what needs to happen for the Commission to spend our budget – Caedmon Cahill will check on the guidelines

Proposal to use remaining funds to hire a retreat facilitator

1. Each year we look into this as an option to have a facilitator for the retreat; we don't have to and have previously also had SOCR staff members or commissioners facilitate
2. If we can nail out a date for the retreat, we can start to create a scope and asking for bids
3. In our August meeting, we did start to look at potential dates including the second and third Saturdays of December
4. Questions and comments from commissioners:
 - a. Victor Loo: Do we have a dollar amount? I also have a recommendation for my fellow commissioners – I think it would be helpful to revisit our previous workplan before we identify a facilitator, especially because things have changed so much with the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - b. Annabelle Backman: So far this year we have earmarked a total of \$1,100 out of our \$2,000, but I believe that only \$200 of that has been actually disbursed.
 - c. Kari Lerum: Janet Stafford had sent an email saying that we had \$1,500 left to spend for the year, so I would assume that is what we have.
 - d. Annabelle Backman: I like the idea of having a facilitator as long as we have an idea about what we are going to get out of that – whether there are specific tasks or things that we want them to do – and that will be challenging without having nailed down the format of the retreat.
 - e. Chris Brown: I agree that there is always a chicken-or-egg approach to planning events and I think we just need to start somewhere. We could have someone to help facilitate discussion and team-building, or we could have a subject matter expert come in to talk on a specific topic. We might not end up using it at all because we have people with those skills, but also hiring someone from the community will show our intent.
 - f. Victor Loo: If we are hiring someone, I would like them to be from the BIPOC community to uplift our commissioners of color.
 - g. Jessi Murray: Given that we may not have a December meeting, we may want to allocate funds up to a certain amount and then
5. Motion to authorize Commission Operations Committee to spend up to \$500 to hire a facilitator for some or all of our annual retreat, with details to be worked out by the committee or the subcommittee delegated to plan the retreat.
 - a. Motion withdrawn.
6. Motion to authorize Commission Operations Committee to spend up to \$1,000 to hire a facilitator for some or all of our annual retreat, with details to be worked out by the committee or the subcommittee delegated to plan the retreat, and reallocating \$100 originally designated to the Social Media Committee for advertising. **Motion passes (100%)**

December meeting

1. Motion to cancel the December 17 regular meeting. **Motion passes (100%)**

2021 Commission Elections

1. Elections need to be public so they will be held by each commissioner writing their top choices in the chat.
2. Elections for chair/co-chair
 - a. Statements by candidates:

- i. Jessi Murray: I have been a chair previously and have good experience with how this commission runs. I have been on the commission for three years and it has been a bit of a trial by fire, but I have a lot of hope that we can continue to do good work as a commission. I'm a program manager by profession. I would be incredibly humbled if you would be willing to put your votes towards me again but I think we have fantastic candidates and would be excited to work with any or all of them.
- ii. Victor Loo: Thank you to Kari and Byram who convinced me to do this! As an individual who is an immigrant and gender nonconforming, once I am committed to do something, I put 110% into it. I work for the largest immigrant and refugee organization in the country, including representing Idaho, Oregon, and Washington in addressing health disparities for immigrant communities. I believe in uplifting the invisible in the community. Being an immigrant who grew up sleeping on my mattress with my family. I hope you will consider me, and I will plan to wear a different outfit any time.
- iii. Deaunte Damper: Being part of the commission this year, I have learned a lot about community unity, transparency, and accountability. Although some of our visions might be different, it goes to show who we are within the spaces of this commission through true representation of the LGBTQ community. Working under a microscope at another community organization, I've never had as much unity as I've had at this space. I would love to start to be your chair.
 - 1. Nate Higby would also like to nominate Deaunte Damper, who is really interested in striking up relationship between our community and our commission through the ambassador program.
- iv. John Rodriguez is also a candidate, but he is not in attendance at this meeting.
- b. Votes for chair:
 - i. Jessi Murray: 10 votes
 - ii. Victor Loo: 10 votes
 - iii. Deaunte Damper: 9 votes
 - iv. John Rodriguez: 1 vote
- c. Co-chairs for 2021 will be Jessi Murray, Victor Loo, and Deaunte Damper!
- 3. Election for treasurer
 - a. Statements by candidate:
 - i. Annabelle Backman: I think I made my pitch already when we were discussing allocation of funds so I will yield the floor!
 - b. Vote for treasurer:
 - i. Annabelle Backman: 9 votes
 - c. Treasurer for 2021 will be Annabelle Backman!
- 4. The election for secretary for will be postponed until the next regular meeting.

Seattle Office of Civil Rights (SOCR) Report

- 1. Report from Caedmon Cahill.
- 2. SOCR acknowledges that this has been a really trying time for this commission; we've seen all the letters you've received and have had a hard time reading those. There will be a letter forthcoming from Mariko but I want to see that we support you and absolutely believe that you are representing your constituents. It's been hard to see resignations because of these trying times when you are doing what you were brought here to do.

3. Janet Stafford is on parental leave and Molly Brewer will be staffing this commission while she is out.
4. Leo Segovia will be the policy liaison as well and would like to engage as the Commission does its next workplan. If it would be helpful for Leo to be at the retreat as well, Leo can absolutely be there.

Announcements, Reminders, & Roll Call

1. Joseph Suttner, Kari Lerum, and Deepa Sivarajan are all resigning from the commission. Thank you for your service, Joseph, Kari, and Deepa!

(END 8:33s)