

August 15, 2023: Human Relations Committee

Human Relations Committee – August 15, 2023 AT6:30 P.M.

Members Present:

Mike Blessum, Scott Burlingame, Denise Dykeman, Janet Mathistad, Lisa Olson, Miranda Schuler, Christine Staley, Travis Zabloutney, Lianne Zeltinger

Also Present:

Harold Stewart, Stefanie Stalheim, Lisa Jundt

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chairperson, Lisa Olson at 6:30 pm. The committee members were then given the opportunity to provide personal introductions.

Mike Blessum raised a point of order concern on the forming of the Committee and in the Human Relations Committee ordinance not being followed accurately. Co-Chair Olson went on to explain the direction the City Council gave to the appointed Committee, which was to make recommended changes to the ordinance and forward to City Council for approval. City Attorney Stalheim stated the intent of the Council was to create a hybrid Committee to review the charter and make recommendations to Council. She further stated if the Committee was not comfortable to continue with the task set by Council, that a motion could be made to return the ordinance back to Council for point of order and further discussion.

Miranda Schuler made the motion to continue with the meeting agenda and then follow Article 9 of the Human Relations Committee Ordinance at the August 29th meeting with officers taking seat on September 12th meeting. Motion was seconded by Lianne Zeltinger.

Blessum stated he believed the motion brought the Committee closer to the rules of the ordinance but asked that further action be immediately taken by City Council to give clarity for the Committee. Co-Chair Burlingame agreed in bringing the issue to Council for clarity, and to possibly address this Committee as more of an ad-hoc committee. Travis Zabloutney concurred that Council needed to take some form of action to modify the ordinance or the Committee would need to follow the ordinance as written. Blessum stated it may be better for Council to make revisions to the Committee as opposed to the ordinance, which requires multiple readings. Schuler opposed the suggestion to have this Committee reconvene as an ad-hoc committee, and believed the Committee was given clear direction to provide recommendation that would go back to Council for review.

Motion by Schuler, seconded by Zeltinger, failed by the following vote: ayes: Burlingame, Mathistad, Schuler; nays: Blessum, Dykeman, Olson, Zabloutney, Zeltinger; Abstain: Staley.

Mike Blessum made the motion to have the Committee cease work and ask the Council to align the Committee with the ordinance. Motion seconded by Miranda Schuler.

Blessum believed there should be a Committee of twenty members appointed by the Mayor and the Chair and Co-Chair should not be appointed by the Council. Blessum had no objection to the Committee continuing as an ad-hoc committee, but believed the Committee needed to continue in a path that would be seen as more correct due to the contentious nature of the ordinance. Co-Chair Olson stated she would be voting against the motion and believed the Committee could accomplish the task outlined by the Council, which was to provide recommendations. Mathistad also understood the Committee was formed to review the ordinance for recommended changes.

Motion by Blessum, seconded by Schuler, failed by the following vote: ayes: Blessum, Burlingame, Zabloutney, Zeltinger; nays: Dykeman, Mathistad, Olson, Schuler, Staley.

The Committee reviewed the proposed meeting dates for attendance. Janet Mathistad indicated she had a conflict on the August 29th meeting, Scott Burlingame indicated a conflict on the September 12th meeting and Christine Staley could not attend the proposed meeting on September 26th.

Co-Chairperson Olson briefly reviewed the meeting expectations which was to limit discussion to Committee Members and Ex-Officio Members. Olson reminded the Committee of the adherence to open meeting and open record laws. She stated that the Committee has confirmed the dates and there should be a quorum at the meetings. She stated the meetings would not exceed ninety-minute limit with the Co-Chairs alternating as leading the discussion.

Janet Mathistad made the motion to appoint Stefanie Stalheim, or a representative from the City Attorney's Office, as the parliamentarian for the meetings. Motion seconded by Miranda Schuler.

Blessum stated, as a point of order, the ordinance says the parliamentarian will be elected, but understood the Committee intended to move ahead as instructed.

Motion by Mathistad, seconded by Schuler, passed by the following vote: ayes: Burlingame, Dykeman, Mathistad, Olson, Schuler, Staley, Zeltinger; nays: Blessum, Zabltney.

City Manager, Harold Stewart, addressed the difference between human rights committees and human relations committees. He stated human rights committees are an appointed board that has a responsibility to hear appeals and potentially do investigations to determine if there are violations of human rights. The human relations committee, which is what is in defined in the City ordinance, typically has the intent to give representation of different demographics in the population, so as to provide a safe space and a welcoming community. He stated there is a distinct difference between the two types of committees and the Council's intent in this committee is to address the human relations aspect in the community.

Mr. Blessum stated that he believes the way the current ordinance is laid out, with a grievance process, points to more of a human rights committee rather than a human relations committee. Stewart went on to say that since this ordinance was created in the 1970s, many things have changed with regard to these issues. One of the changes is that a lot of states have taken on the role in the grievance process. He continued by saying, the City has the right to retain this role if they would like, but Council has tasked this committee to determine if they would like to see changes to the ordinance to align more with the human relations direction on community issues.

Miranda Schuler made a motion to clearly define the articles of the ordinance for each meeting, with Articles, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 12 to be separated in each meeting and grouped with other like articles for discussion. Motion seconded by Scott Burlingame.

Schuler stated that she believed these articles were the most contentious items in the ordinance and separating them would allow the committee to get through the articles without getting off topic so as to get through all items of the ordinance. Burlingame agreed that breaking the articles down with a clear agenda moving forward makes the most sense. Mr. Zabltney asked what would happen if the committee did not get through the agenda as posted. Co-Chair Olson answered by saying any remaining business from one agenda would be placed at the beginning of the next meeting agenda. She also said the committee could choose to have more than the six allotted meetings.

Lianne Zeltinger asked if the Committee was supposed to continue in the capacity of the Human Relations Committee as stated in the ordinance or a human rights committee. Blessum said he believed this is also a decision that is before this committee, as well as if the ordinance should exist at all. He went on to say his preference is for this ordinance not be in existence, as he believes this activity is not the role of city government. Schuler stated she believed the Council would have eliminated the ordinance if that was their wish, rather than appointing a committee to review. She went on to say the committee should finish the work that was assigned to them and update the ordinance to current terminology. Blessum continued by saying he believed the reason the current Committee was put into place was because the Council did not do its job by discussing and determining if the ordinance should exist at all. Denise Dykeman stated she disagrees with Mr. Blessum's determination on the role of government.

Mr. Stewart returned the discussion to the motion on the table. He stated he believed it was best to systematically work through the agenda in an effective way with a noticed agenda, where topics would flow into the next meeting if discussion is ongoing.

Denise Dykeman left the meeting at 7:32 pm.

Motion by Schuler, seconded by Burlingame, passed by the following vote: ayes: Burlingame, Mathistad, Olson, Schuler, Staley, Zeltinger; nays: Blessum, Zabloutney.

Mike Blessum made the motion the first discussion be around Article 1 (Name) to include the division heading (Division 4. Human Relations Committee) and Article 2 (Authority). Motion seconded by Lianne Zeltinger.

Miranda Schuler believed Article 2 would be the most contentious item and would be better placed as one of the last items to address in the ordinance. Scott Burlingame agreed that it would be best to establish what the committee is trying to do before addressing this issue. Blessum disagreed and believes the Committee needs to know what they are working towards and with what authority before working out further details. Janet Mathistad agreed that Article 2 should come later as the Committee has more discussion.

Motion by Blessum, seconded by Zeltinger, failed by the following vote: ayes: Blessum, Zabloutney, Zeltinger; nays: Burlingame, Mathistad, Olson, Schuler, Staley.

Miranda Schuler made a motion to first address Article 1 (Name), Article 3 (Objectives) and Article 10 (Officer Job Descriptions). Motion seconded by Scott Burlingame.

Motion by Schuler, seconded by Burlingame, passed by the following vote: ayes: Blessum, Burlingame, Mathistad, Olson, Schuler, Staley, Zabloutney; nays: None.

Co-Chair Olson recommended the Committee look at human relation committee examples as well as the two versions that were presented to Council by Alderman Jantzer and Alderwoman Evans prior to the next meeting.

Scott Burlingame made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Miranda Schuler and carried unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:49 pm.