

MARION CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday May 6th, 2020, 6:30 pm

Virtual Meeting

Commissioners Present:

Chris Stoner
Okpara Rice
Frederick Brown
Danielle Brazant
Renaë Forsyth-Christy
Dave Baumler
Kim Eiler
Selita Jansen
Jenifer Tibbets
Bret Nilles
Kent Jackson

Commissioners Absent:

Staff/Other Present:

Amal Eltahir, City of Marion
Stefanie Munsterman-Scriven, Executive Director, CRCRC

I. Call to Order

Noting there was a quorum, Commissioner Jackson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

II. Roll Call/Introductions

Commissioners and staff introduced themselves.

III. Public Response

There was no public response.

IV. Director's Report

The newly appointed director, Stefanie Munsterman-Scriven expressed a strong desire to meet with Marion commissioners individually to hear about their vision and thoughts on Civil Rights endeavors.

Regarding COVID-19 impact on logistics, the Director said that staff are able to work remotely through May 15th on investigations and mediations with all outreach efforts being virtual. Cedar Rapids started two projects: story time reading on Facebook with temporary rights from publishers and a book club project. Commission is ordering books for those who are in need. Director is extending the invite to MCRC sharing that 20 people signed up for a "How to be an anti-racist" book. Commissioner Rice complemented the book club idea

describing it as creative. Director is also working with the university of Iowa , Iowa CRC, Dubuque CRC and the League of Human Rights agencies to draft a letter to the governor, making a statement and expressing concerns on COVID impact's racial disparity, specifically among brown and black folks and asking for the release of demographic data. The letter is inviting discussions on the underlining structural issues related to the systemic discrimination and its health implications. According to the director, recent data shows that in Linn county, one out of a 100 African-american compared to one out of a thousand whites contracted COVID.

Commissioner Tibbett cautioned data interpretation as she shared that United Way had recently split the race group into two groups: African American and Africans. Director will follow up on more detail in that regard.

Commissioner Brazant asked whether the Director has seen documentation on discrimination against Asians in Cedar Rapids. Director confirmed that there is an increase in shunning behaviors and stigma against Chinese.

Commissioner Tibbett expressed concerns about people in confinement and the fact that Iowa is not reporting on their status.

V. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Rice moved to approve the March minutes as presented. Seconded by Commissioner Forsyth-Christy, motion passed.

VI. Report from Chair

Commissioner expressed his disappointment on the racial disparity of COVID impact.

VII. Committee Reports

- a. Executive Committee*- Commissioner Brown stated that the committee met on April 22nd to set the agenda. Commissioners discussed inviting Cedar Rapids Executive Director to this meeting, COVID19 and shifting presence to social media.
- b. Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission Liaison* - Renae Forsyth-Christy
Nothing to report.
- c. Grants & Strategic Planning Committee* -Commissioner Brown stated that allocated funds were available for disbursement and the committee has not heard from recipients whether COVID-19 is impacting the use of funds. Commissioner Brazant reminded the commission that due to COVID, the committee might need to extend the deadline for report on use of funds. Committee will evaluate and continue to monitor status of funds. Commissioner Brown asked if COVID will be impacting the MCR budget. Amal confirmed that funding for the MCRC grant will not be impacted as the source of revenue for the budgeted amount is a dedicated funding that the city is required to set aside to be used exclusively for programs that benefit low to moderate income households.

- d. *Communication and outreach Committee -*
Due to COVID, commissioners will focus on social media presence and will explore the possibility of setting an independent Facebook page. Committee will consult with the city's communication manager.

VIII. **Unfinished Business**

- a. Partnership with the Marion Library
Commissioner Stoner informed the commission that the Marion Library programming is moved to be all virtual. Commission is interested in collaborating on hosting topics.

IX. **New Business**

- a. COVID-19 Impact
Commissioner Tibbetts shed some light on the extended impact of COVID-19 on the community regarding homelessness, domestic violence, and mental health needs. She shared that there is a moratorium on evictions with the rate being currently at one eviction a day, raising the question on community's readiness with the possibility of foreclosure and eviction rates going up because of COVID impact on incomes. The need for outreach efforts and support connecting folks with resources will be more than ever, suggesting collaborative efforts with Cedar Rapids.
- b. Virtual Book Club
Covered under the Directors report agenda item.

X. **Good of the Order**

Nothing to report.

XI. **Adjournment**

Commissioner Forsyth-Christy moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Baumler, the meeting adjourned at 7:26 pm.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 3rd, 2020 at 6:30 pm Via Zoom

Respectfully submitted by Amal Eltabir, City of Marion