

City of Lawrence
Lawrence Human Relations Commission
Special Meeting
June 29, 2017 – 5:32 p.m.

Minutes

Members Present: Carl Edwards, Mike Machell, Nicole Humphrey, Katie Barnett, Kait Perry, Sarah Bloxsom, Caleb Stephens, Martha Taylor

Members Absent (excused): Jacqueline Becks,

Staff Present: Toni Wheeler

Public Present: None

Commission Meeting Called to Order

Chairperson Perry called the special meeting of the Lawrence Human Relations Commission (LHRC) to order at 5:32 p.m. in the Carnegie Building, located at 200 West 9th Street, Lawrence, Kansas 66044. The meeting convened in the lower level conference room.

At its regular meeting on June 22, 2017, the Commission voted to call a special meeting of the LHRC on June 29, 2017, at 5:30 p.m. in the Carnegie Building to discuss whether the LHRC should submit a letter to *The Lawrence Journal World* editor concerning recent events reported in the national news. Commissioner Stephens specifically mentioned the acquittal of the officer charged in the death of Philando Castile in a suburb of Saint Paul, Minnesota and the recent shooting of Charleena Lyles in Seattle, Washington.

Chairperson Perry asked whether the minutes of the June 22, 2017, LHRC meeting were ready for approval. Ms. Wheeler answered that the minutes were not complete. She advised the minutes would be placed on the LHRC's August meeting agenda for approval.

As discussion on a possible letter to the editor commenced, Commissioner Machell moved to make the approval of the final letter by unanimous vote of the LHRC. Chairperson Perry tabled the motion until the LHRC decided what it will do with a letter.

Chairperson Perry asked Commissioner Stephens to summarize his intentions for the special meeting. Commissioner Stephens briefly stated that he wanted the commission to do something to honor the memories of Castile and Lyles and he thought a very short statement that he prepared would suffice.

The LHRC then discussed the possibility of presenting a final letter to the Lawrence City Commission. The process for placing an item on a City Commission agenda followed. The LHRC discussed the possibility that the Chair would read the final letter during the

City Commission's public comment section of the July 18, 2017, City Commission meeting.

A discussion of Commissioner Stephen's draft statement ensued. Commissioner Machell stated that he thought Commissioner Stephen's submittal was one-sided; Chairperson Perry expressed support for the short statement; Vice-Chair Barnett did not agree with a shorter statement and commented that it should be a more fully developed statement. Vice-Chair Barnett made a motion to work to revise the draft letter submitted by Commissioner Machell. Commissioner Edwards seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 7-1.

The commission members discussed and revised each paragraph of the statement submitted by Commissioner Machell. Vice-Chair Barnett moved to approve paragraph 1, as amended; Commissioner Humphrey seconded. The motion prevailed. Vice-Chair Barnett moved to approve paragraph 2, as amended; Commissioner Humphrey seconded; the motion prevailed. Vice-Chair Barnett made a motion to strike paragraph 3; Commissioner Stephens seconded; motion passed unanimously. The members present revised paragraph 3. Vice-Chair Barnett made a motion to approve paragraph 3, as amended; Commissioner Humphrey seconded; motion passed unanimously. A motion to approve paragraph 4 was made by Commissioner Bloxsom; Commissioner Stephens seconded the motion; the motion passed. Chairperson Perry moved to approve the letter, as amended, in its entirety; Commissioner Humphrey seconded; the motion prevailed unanimously.

Vice-Chair Barnett moved that the full text of the final, approved letter be included in the LHRC's June 29, 2017, meeting minutes. Commissioner Humphrey seconded the motion, and the motion passed. Commissioner Machell moved to authorize Chairperson Perry to read the final, approved letter at the July 18, 2017, City Commission meeting during the public comment section of the meeting; Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Edwards moved to authorize Chairperson Perry to submit the letter to *The Lawrence Journal World's* editor for publication; Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously.

Chairperson Perry thanked everyone for their work. Commissioner Machell made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Edwards seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:38 p.m.

To the Editor:

We are writing on behalf of the majority of the City of Lawrence Human Relations Commission. We are a community board consisting of nine members drawn from diverse racial, ethnic, commercial and other segments of the community, appointed by the Mayor of Lawrence. Our purpose is "To endeavor to eliminate prejudice among the various racial, ethnic and other groups in the city and to further goodwill among all people of Lawrence..." In this capacity, we feel it is appropriate to speak out and share our sympathies with the families of Samuel DuBose, Sylville Smith, Philando Castile, Charleena Lyles, and the many others who have faced similar losses.

We are concerned by continued reports of shootings of Black individuals by police officers. Statistically, it has been noted that Black individuals are nearly three times as likely to be shot and killed by police officers as White individuals. Protests nationwide underscore frustration with the judicial process in cases of officers being criminally charged for their actions and subsequently acquitted.

Lawrence experienced a similar tragedy with the killing of 19-year-old Black KU student, Rick "Tiger" Dowdell in 1970. Forty-six years later, retired Lawrence police officers and the family of Tiger Dowdell acknowledged the shooting and shared their experiences at an event sponsored by the Human Relations Commission. The City Manager, Tom Markus, has an opportunity to select a new Chief of Police. We sincerely hope that in these deliberations, he will choose a law enforcement leader who acknowledges the magnitude of these issues and the importance of avoiding the perception or application of prejudice and injustice in our community.

We acknowledge that for many members of the Lawrence community, the justice system is not working and they are justifiably fearful and angry with the current state of affairs. We hear you, see you, and believe your experience.

Our meetings occur the third Thursday of February, May, August and November at 5:30pm in the Carnegie Library Building. We welcome the opinions of the public either in this space or by attending our meetings in person.

Respectfully,

The City of Lawrence Human Relations Commission