



Community Relations Commission
~ Minutes ~

Thursday, January 9, 2020

City Hall, Second Floor
Rockford, IL 61104
<http://www.rockfordil.gov/>

I. CALL TO ORDER

Legal Director Nicholas Meyer called the meeting to order at 5:37 p.m. A MOTION was made and SECONDED for Commissioner Eric Brown to act as Chair pro tem for the meeting due to Chair Todd Burton's absence. CARRIED 10-0.

A. Roll Call

Commissioner Name	Status
Eric Brown	Present
Todd Burton	Absent
Jurea Crudup	Present
Victoria De La Rosa	Present
Erin Hannigan	Present
Nikki Lynch	Present
William Martin	Present
Anquette Parham	Present
Ricardo Montoya Picazo	Present
Charles Prorok	Present
Jay Ware	Present

B. Acceptance of Proceedings for the Community Relations Commission meeting held on December 12, 2019.

Commissioner Hannigan made MOTION to Accept the Journal of Proceedings for the December 12, 2019 meeting. Commissioner Ware SECONDED the MOTION. CARRIED 10-0.

II. PUBLIC SPEAKERS

1. Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Elghobashy, the Imam for the Muslim Association of Greater Rockford spoke on behalf of the local Muslim community. He stated he is proud to be part of this great City and they are doing their best to serve the needs of the community they are part of, citing the example of a soup kitchen and shelter they recently built. He emphasized the Muslim community's belief in human dignity and equality and that all human beings have the right to live life with honor and dignity. Dr. Elghobashy welcomed Commissioners to come and visit the Muslim Community Center and Mosque and to speak with the Association about what help is needed in the community.

III. INFORMATION ONLY

A. Departmental Overview: Mayor's Office

Mayor Tom McNamara provided a presentation describing the work of the Mayor's Office and started by explaining that he sees his role as serving two primary objectives: 1) to drive direction around important issues by building relationships and convening people to in the community to bring awareness and solutions; and 2) to serve as a



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community advocate for what he and those who support him believe in. He welcomes anyone to speak to him about what is needed in the community.

The Mayor presented an overview of those who work in his office and their primary areas of responsibility. He also explained that he appoints each Department Head with approval by City Council except for the Police and Fire Chiefs; the Police and Fire Commission appoint them.

Mayor McNamara also presented information on the various boards, committees, and commissions that he appoints people for; these individuals must also be approved by City Council before taking their positions.

The Mayor then provided a general overview of the limitations of power as a non-home rule city. He explained that non-home rule communities can only do those things that the Illinois State Legislature explicitly states they are allowed to do. The Mayor stated that this is a critical distinction because it means he really has to work closely with City Council to find common ground because everything must go through Council. It also means that he must work hard to develop good relationships with state and federal elected officials in order to get things done that he believes we as a City need and want. He also must develop good relationships with other government leaders and elected officials to advocate for the City's interests, using the trustee program as an example.

The Mayor provided a summary of his key priorities and some of the things being done to advance them:

- **Public Safety**
 - Need more officers, more technology to fight crime, and more resources such as more school resource officers and more resources to address the issue of domestic violence
- **Economic Development**
 - Downtown growth with recent developments in retail, residential lofts, and hotels
 - Growth at RFD as our #1 economic engine (in 2017-2018 it accounted for adding 1,000 jobs)
 - Aerospace/advanced manufacturing; Rockford was just named 9th best place to work in manufacturing
- **Strengthening Neighborhoods**
 - Investment in transportation
 - Neighborhood revitalization plan
 - Added Neighborhood Specialist and Neighborhood Stabilization Officer
 - Land Bank, Vacant Property Registry and Trustee Program

The Mayor also presented the Guiding Principles City Council adopted in October of 2017. These principles serve as the foundation of the Council's work in serving the community.



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Mayor McNamara described the numerous Boards on which he serves. He concluded his presentation by expressing his desire to build a city that not only embraces and fosters its diversity, but also celebrates it. To aid this, the Human Relations Chapter of the Rockford Code of Ordinances was changed to, among other objective, create the Community Relations Commission.

The Mayor described the three things he hopes the Commissioners will do:

- Serve as ambassadors for the City
- Be conduits from citizens to the City Administration
- Bring change through offering best practices from other municipalities that we might implement in Rockford.

B. Departmental Overview: Human Services

George Davis, Director of the City's Human Services Department, provided a presentation describing the organization and work of the department. Information provided included:

Mission Statement

Human Services is a Community Action Agency serving Winnebago and Boone Counties in engaging, educating, and empowering people in poverty to build stronger communities through programs and partnerships.

History and Service Area

Director Davis explained that the Department became a public non-profit Community Action Agency under provision of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 when it was established as a City Department in 1975.

Board & Department Structure

- The Rockford City Council serves as the governing board of the Department.
- Consistent with federal regulations, the Department also has an administering/advisory Board of 15 public, private and client sector representatives appointed by the Rockford Mayor, City of Belvidere Mayor, and Chairs of the Boone and Winnebago County Boards.
- Program operations are managed by two service Divisions: Community Services and Head Start.

Human Services has 15 regular staff and a number of temporary staff and student interns that work at the 612 N. Church Street location. The majority of the staff works for Head Start, about 80 people total in the Head Start Division.

The Department's funding of approximately \$16 annually comes primarily from federal grant funds as well as some state grant funds.



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Community Services Division

Director Davis provided an overview of the work done by the Community Services Division, which falls into three general categories:

1. Community Health & Prevention, which includes:
 - Beverage Alcohol Sellers Servers Education Training (BASSET)
 - Summer Food Program (serves hundreds of children)
 - Direct Crisis Funding Assistance
 - Energy Assistance Programs (there are an average of 2,000 applications for energy assistance per month, many from working poor in the community)
 - Weatherization & Energy Savings Programs
2. Social and Economic Development Programs, which include:
 - Youth Organization Assistance Grants
 - Targeted Neighborhood Assistance Partnerships
 - Targeted Job Training Funding Grants (assisting approximately 50 individuals in training programs for jobs in CNC and other technology positions)
 - College Scholarships
3. Housing Programs, which include:
 - Homeless Prevention
 - HUD Continuum of Care Administration
 - Single Point of Entry to End Chronic Homelessness
 - City Sponsored Community Housing Development Organization Partnership

Mr. Davis explained that, with respect to the Department's work with the homeless population, it is their goal to get to functional zero, which means that that within 30 days of becoming homeless, an individual will be permanently housed. Each year the department attempts to focus on a subset of the population (i.e. veterans, youth, and seniors). The most prevalent subgroup in the Rockford homeless population are the disabled and seniors. Director Davis then presented information on the decline of homeless youth (unaccompanied 16-24 year olds), a recent subgroup the department has focused on.

Head Start Division

Director Davis explained that Head Start/Early Head Start is a federally funded program serving Winnebago County residents that offers comprehensive early learning, health and family support to children ages pre-natal to five years and their families who meet income guidelines.

Head Start/Early Head Start programs have the overall objective of breaking the cycle of poverty by preparing prenatal to school age children to be effective learners, achieve optimal health and assisting families to achieve their goals and aspiration for their children.

Through collaborations and partnerships with local agencies, the program consists of primarily home based and limited center-based services to pre-natal to age 3 year old children and families, which includes:



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- Pre-school education through part –day, full-day, home base and child care options.
- Child Development curriculum that addresses individual needs of children
- English and Spanish pre-school classes
- Limited door-to-door bus transportation available.
- Developmental screening for all children, mental health screenings and services
- Parent involvement, including volunteer opportunities, parent training and education
- Health services providing support and resources for medical and dental services
- Family Support Services provided resources to families in meeting their goals toward education, housing and job-related skills

Early Head Start consists of comprehensive services for pregnant women and children ages birth to three years old and their families including home visiting services, socialization groups, and childcare options. Director Davis explained that the Department's primary role with Early Head Start is to provide resources, referrals, and connections so that the families that have nowhere to turn to get the support that they need, and to know that someone will be there to advocate for them.

IV. OFFICERS REPORTS

Commissioner Ware stated that there is some friction related to the trajectory of the solar field that is going in on Horsman Street. There was perception that jobs would be offered by the growth of this industry, but that does not seem to be happening as people thought it would. Ware advised Commissioners to be aware that there will be conversations with Aldermen arising out of some of those issues.

Commissioner De La Rosa stated that she sits on the Immigration Committee for the League of Women Voters in Rockford. They are working on a project related to issuance of new visas and gaining legal status.

Commissioner Crudup stated that on January 24, 2020 the Awaken Foundation will have its first cohort of at risk youth going to the College of DuPage for their first Culinary Arts Class to begin a thousand hour apprenticeship program.

Commissioner Parham stated on Saturday January 19, at 9 a.m. at Rockford University in Regents Hall, Alpha Phi Alpha will host their annual Martin Luther King scholarship breakfast, which is both a scholarship fundraiser and an oratorical competition for students from Rockford and DeKalb area who are graduating. It is an excellent event and great opportunity to see some of our rising leaders and hear their oratorical skills. Tickets can be purchased at MAL1975.com

Commissioner Brown stated that coming up in a few months RAMP is doing a conference for students who have autism and their families at Kishwaukee College. Brown stated the conference is a great opportunity for students and families to learn about the diagnosis and find resources to build skills to transition throughout life.



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Nicholas Meyer, Legal Director, stated the City of Rockford just launched an app that gives real time information regarding snow plowing. Updates will be posted on Facebook also.

Director Meyer stated that coming up on February 4, 2020, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at Burpee Museum, the Mayor will be having a public meeting to discuss the progress we have made in Public Safety in 2019, and where the City is headed in 2020 and beyond. Next month the Fire Department will be presenting to the Community Relations Commission. Meyer reported that Mayors Night Out is also coming up. It is a night that the Mayor will be out at a bar or restaurant or coffee house, people can come and share and drink with him, and take a few minutes to share concerns with him.

Director Meyer stated the 2020 Census is coming up and the Mayor's Chief of Staff is heading the City's efforts at making sure everyone is counted. He will take a few minutes at the next Commission meeting to discuss what's being done. It is incredibly important that everyone is counted.

Commissioner Lynch Made MOTION to Adjourn. Commissioner Martin SECONDED the MOTION. CARRIED 10-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.