



LEHIGH COUNTY HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
(LCHRC)
MEETING MINUTES
September 10, 2024

The inaugural meeting of the LCHRC was held at 6:00 p.m. by Zoom video conference. A recording of this meeting is available at <https://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Community-Economic-Development/Human-Relations-Commission>.

ATTENDING

Angela Baio (AB), Amy Beck (AmB), Michael Blicher Jr. (MB), Liz Bradbury (LB), Tony Branco (TB), Andrew Gildner (AG), Guillermo Lopez Jr. (GL), Joyce Moore (JM), Luis A. Perez Jr. (LP), Christopher Raad (CR), Pas Simpson (PS).

Also in attendance representing Lehigh County: Catherine Roseberry, Assistant Solicitor

STAFF: Frank Kane (FK), Cyndi King (CK)

Absent: Joanna Armstrong (JA), Anthony Swartz (AS)

Public: Carmen Bell (CB)

FK called the meeting to order.

Roll call and introductions. Quorum is present.

New Business

Elect Chair and Vice-Chair

FK requested nominations for Chairperson. LP nominated LB; AmB seconded that nomination. There were no other nominations offered. GL made a

motion to close the nominations; JM seconded that motion. LB accepted the nomination and spoke about her qualifications to hold that position. Unanimous voice approval; motion carried.

LB asked for nominations for Vice-Chairperson. LP briefly spoke about his desire to work beside LB. TB nominated LP; AB seconded that nomination. There were no other nominations offered. TB made a motion to close nominations; AG seconded that motion. Unanimous voice approval; motion carried.

LB called for nominations for Secretary. LB edified the responsibilities of this position as helping CK get information out to people to be sure they know when the meetings are being held and any other kinds of communication being disseminated. The secretary will also help the LCHRC follow Robert's Rules and to serve as interim Chair or Vice-Chair if neither of those officers are present. The Secretary, as an officer and part of the Executive Board, is also present at meetings to determine the direction of the LCHRC. Upon these further clarifications of the duties of the Secretary, JM nominated herself; LP seconded that nomination. No further discussion or nominations. Unanimous voice approval of that nomination.

Citizen's Input on Agenda Items

LB acknowledged Section 704 (G) in the ordinance and asked the LCHRC to act on CB's long-standing request to be a non-voting advisor to the LCHRC. CB is a charter member from the Lehigh County Human Relations Advisory Council. GL made the motion; JM seconded that motion. CB briefly spoke about her qualifications to serve the LCHRC in this capacity. Unanimous voice approval; motion carried.

Discussion of Ordinance 2024-106

Lehigh County's Human Resources (HR) Department requested to be removed from the ordinance and to have LCHRC complaints filed with FK's Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) office. Discussion ensued. LB asked whether anyone was opposed to that change; it was the consensus of LCHRC to support that proposed change. FK will create the necessary paperwork for Law to craft an amendment to the ordinance changing intake from HR to DCED.

LB spoke about two specific levels of [a complaint.] A person (complainant) files a complaint either electronically or in paper form. FK and LCHRCC commissioners can rotate between investigations/ take turns investigating. LB does not want to codify FK immediately into the investigation role. Intake is the first level of an investigation. Ultimately, there may be instances of investigation where [the investigator] goes to speak with the respondent. Discussion ensued.

Create Systems Process for Administration of Complaints

LB stressed the importance for each member to read through the ordinance because it is comprehensive and instructs the LCHRC on everything it has to do. There is very little to be interpreted.

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission allows every municipality to establish its own non-discrimination law and its own commission. The LCHRC has choices as to how it moves forward. The LCHRC has the job of evaluating complaints, investigating complaints, and making judgements on complaints. Therefore, LB recommends LCHRC create its own complaint forms and LB cautions that it is a complicated endeavor. Until that form is created, an interim complaint form is going to be made available. LB proposes to use the state's complaint forms (attached to this month's agenda) reconfigured for Lehigh County with the county's protected classes mentioned and posted to the County's website as fillable forms to be submitted [electronically] to the County. LB intends to improve on the State's form to include better explanation of jurisdictional aspects of a successful complaint. LB proposed a Complaint Form Committee that will create new forms that will work better for the LCHRC. LB will serve on that committee and asked for other volunteers to serve on this committee and to work on these forms. AB, LP, AG, and TB volunteered. The plan is for the committee to meet, edit the state forms, and share the edited forms with the LCHRC via email before the next meeting. LB will welcome LCHRC discussion on the edited forms since [timeliness of producing the final version of the complaint will not be an issue because] the slightly reconfigured forms will already be posted on the DCED website for use if a complainant needs to file. CK will send out an email to schedule this committee.

Discussion ensued on whether a person could file a paper complaint in Lehigh County or whether only electronic filing will take place through the County's website. LB believes a person in Lehigh County should absolutely be able to fill out a paper form. LB envisions language on the County's website to

indicate communication with a LCHRC commissioner will be available to assist with jurisdictional questions or how to fill out the form. LB reflected that in many instances people do not know which protected class the discrimination they've experienced would fall under. TB suggested that a notarized affidavit accompany the complaint to eliminate "range wars" or frivolous complaints aimed at exacting revenge against a neighbor or another person. Discussion ensued. CR stated there is a provision in state law that allows a person to sign a legal document with the understanding that it is unsworn but still subject to legal authority. LB believes using that provision will work fine. Additional discussion ensued.

LB asked FK who the investigator will be. FK identified himself as the investigator. Upon investigating a complaint, he will put together a report of his findings, thoughts, and recommendations and share that document with the LCHRC. Discussion ensued. LB shared her experience having been an investigator [for the City of Allentown's HRC] that she found it rare if discrimination complaints could not be resolved primarily because [discrimination has] very specific legal circumstances. Usually, information is gathered and based on that information, a determination is made as to what the circumstance is; and it is [typically] resolved before it goes to the commission to decide. LB stressed that a complainant must bring evidence to the commission. It is not the commission's job to ferret out information; there must be proof of discrimination and it must be brought by the complainant to the commission.

LB called for a vote to use the interim complaint form (once Law has removed the state references and inserted the unsworn/falsification to authorities language at the end of the form.) LB reinforced that additional protected classes must be added to what is on the state's form and that LCHRCC protects people based on healthcare. LB suggested using the state's public accommodation form as a basis for the county's healthcare form. TB made the motion to use an interim complaint form to be crafted by Law and put on the County's website; LP seconded that motion. Unanimous voice approval; motion carried.

TB suggested forming a committee of two commissioners to visit the 26-municipalities in Lehigh County and getting on their municipal manager agendas to let the municipalities know what the LCHRC is and why it was formed. This outreach could prepare the managers so they are not unaware of the Ordinance if approached by the public.

AB interjected there should be a communications plan around everything. The public must be made aware of the LCHRC. LB suggested several ideas such as press releases and an outreach committee. FK added that the County has a wide-reaching communications operation to include social media, Facebook, X, and

perhaps other outlets in addition to a municipal manager contact list and a Congress of Government contact list. FK suggested waiting until the complaint form is finalized before LCHRC begins notifications. LB suggested a communications plan be the main topic at the next meeting.

Announcements

LB opened the floor for non-agenda items. CB notified the commission that Pennsylvania is moving toward becoming an age-friendly state. Governor Shapiro has signed the letter of commitment. Municipalities are encouraged to become age-friendly communities, too. There will be an Age-Friendly L.V. conference on Wednesday, November 20, 2024, 11:30 p.m. to 2 p.m. at ArtsQuest. Registration is required. Lehigh and Northampton Counties are part of an age-friendly network of local communities that have made a commitment to be and to remain inclusive, engaged, respectful, and to make a difference in the quality of life for older adults.

West Park will host an art show on Saturday, September 14. LB will have a booth at the event.

LB called for a motion to adjourn; TB made the motion. Unanimous voice approval. Meeting adjourned.

The next meeting of the LCHRC is October 8, 2024, at 6:00 via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia L. King