

BLOOMINGTON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Minutes of July 27, 2020 Meeting

The Bloomington Human Rights Commission met on Monday, July 27, 2020, beginning at 5:31 p.m. via Zoom. Present for the meeting were commissioners Ryne Shadday, Byron Bangert, Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, Latosha Williams, Jacob Simpson and Pam Jackson. Commissioner Valeri Haughton-Motley was absent without notice. Also present were Mike Diekhoff, BPD Chief; Nicole DeCriscio Bowe, BHRC legal assistant and Barbara E. McKinney, BHRC director/attorney.

Call to order: Chair Shadday called the roll at 5:31 p.m.

Approval of minutes: Bangert moved that the minutes of the June 22, 2020 meeting be approved as presented. Calloway-Thomas seconded. Passed by consensus.

New business: To accommodate Chief Diekhoff's schedule, Shadday moved new business ahead of unfinished business.

Conversation with Chief Diekhoff: Chief Diekhoff talked about BPD's adoption of 21st century policing standards several years ago. He said BPD is a nationally accredited law enforcement agency, and only about 5% of law enforcement agencies are, including about 12 in Indiana. He said BPD started hiring downtown resources officers several years ago to help address issues such as homelessness, substance abuse and mental health issues and keep people out of jails. BPD partners with social service agencies that deal with housing, employment and mental health issue. BPD has a social worker working in the department, the first in the state to do this.

Calloway-Thomas thanked Diekhoff for attending and said she found BPD's practices quite progressive. She asked how the officers were doing. Diekhoff said that it's been stressful. They work to keep officers safe from COVID-19, and thus far, none have tested positive. They've gone to on-line reporting for things such as minor traffic accidents to minimize interaction with the public when possible, and they try to minimize interaction between employees from different divisions. Stress increased after the Floyd murder, he said. He said BPD is different from other law enforcement agencies in the state; it provides 4.5 times more training than required; it was one of the first to require body cams; it tries to be transparent with the B Clear data portal. But officers do get yelled at and flipped off daily. Officers have access to EAP services and to the social worker, who is also a licensed therapist.

He said he is concerned about some of the push for changes in policing; changes can't be made until replacements are in place. He said BPD created the downtown resource officer positions when federal money for mental health services declined. He said social workers don't want to go to crime scenes.

Calloway-Thomas asked why there is such a large police presence at Seminary Square. Diekhoff said that the park is a major hangout for people experiencing homelessness, and there's a lot of fighting, drinking and drug use in the park. There are also complaints that people in the park are not wearing masks, but BPD is not enforcing the mask rule. They are there to try to keep things calm.

Williams thanked Diekhoff for attending. She said she's been working with the county on issues with the sheriff's department and she respects BPD for being ahead of the curve. She asked about the bearcat and whether officers get training on implicit bias and crisis intervention.

Diekhoff explained the history of the bearcat. For years, BPD used an old Brinks truck without complaint from the public. When it broke down, they purchased a new one, which is not a military vehicle. It's not used offensively. Before it's deployed, he has to complete a lot of paperwork and a threat matrix. They have used the new vehicle five times, usually with people who have barricaded themselves in and are threatening to harm themselves or others. He said they have to have a vehicle like this if they are going to keep CRIT staff safe. He said he has been shot at himself, and he is going to do what is necessary to keep his officers safe. Without it, they would have to rely on Morgan County or the state police, who would take hours to get here and who would not want to take time once they got here.

He said everyone at BPD, including dispatch and records, gets training on crisis intervention and implicit bias. De-escalation training is part of all of their training.

Williams asked whether the records of officers who have been accused of brutality are public records. Diekhoff said some records are confidential by state law, but that may be reviewed by the legislature. He said they have a process for citizens to complain; only one did last year.

BPD is one of the few law enforcement agencies in Indiana that reports hate crimes, and Diekhoff has given presentations on the topic.

Shadday said that people are concerned that the bearcat could be misused by a different chief or mayor. Diekhoff said that could happen, but it is currently being used correctly. McKinney noted that an ordinance lays out how it can be deployed. Diekhoff invited the commissioners to view it.

Simpson asked if abolishing the police should be considered. Diekhoff said that the city's approach would likely be how to rely less on BPD. Some of that will likely be reflected in the 2021 budget.

Shadday asked if morale was low. Diekhoff said it sometimes was. Officers worked closely with the Enough is Enough organizers, with all protests, but some people still paint all law enforcement officers with a thick brush. He said they have to look across the street at graffiti that says all cops are bad.

Jackson asked how diverse BPD was, and if it's training manual was available. Diekhoff said they don't publish the policies, but they are available upon request. He said they have about 95 officers right now; five are African American; two or three are Latino; 11 to 12 are female.

Calloway-Thomas asked if the Black officers are happy at the moment. Diekhoff said he has not received any internal complaints, but they have been called traitors. They are in a difficult position. She asked Diekhoff how he was doing; he said his job can be frustrating, but he's very proud of his department. He said he believes they have a lot of community support, but the opposition can be very vocal, and they don't see how BPD is a leader in the state.

Jackson said BPD needs public relations interns and she can help with that.

Shadday asked McKinney to invite Melissa Stone, the social worker with BPD, to a future BHRC meeting.

The commissioners thanked Chief Diekhoff for coming.

Donation request from CCA: McKinney said that the CCA had asked the BHRC for a donation to its annual Gather 'Round the Table event. She said it was always a good event, although it might be virtual this year, and recommended that the BHRC donate \$100. Calloway-Thomas moved that the BHRC donate \$100 to the CCA event. Jackson seconded. Shadday took the roll; passed unanimously.

Second quarter director's report: After discussion, Calloway-Thomas moved that the report be accepted as presented. Bangert seconded. Shadday took the roll; passed unanimously.

Unfinished business

Facebook update: DeCriscio Bowe reminded the commissioners that they are welcome to submit items for the BHRC page. So far, we have 149 followers/likes. She urged the commissioners to share the page with their friends. In the last month, about 198 people viewed the page at least once. The number of

people who have seen any of the posts from the BHRC page at least once is 323. She shared what Facebook will share about views, with the most activity taking place between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. We've received only one question via Facebook so far, about a person who is a member of the county HRC. She said the most viewed posting thus far was Byron's letter to IU about the treatment of Japanese students and the HT article about IU's response.

Assignment of new case: Simpson accepted a new case alleging discrimination in public accommodations on the basis of race.

Other business: Bangert noted that Barbara Wolf, a former member of the BHRC, had died recently. She was a very active, engaged citizen with a focus on disability issues. He also noted that the MCHRC has had spirited conversations about how to better engage with the community and had discussed whether it might be possible for the BHRC and the MCHRC to merge. The BHRC members said they were willing to engage in that conversation if the MCHRC wanted.

Public input: No public input.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barbara E. McKinney', written in a cursive style.

Barbara E. McKinney, BHRC director/attorney