

BLOOMINGTON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Minutes of August 24, 2020 Meeting

The Bloomington Human Rights Commission met on Monday, August 24, 2020, beginning at 5:30 p.m., via Zoom. Present for the meeting were commissioners Ryne Shadday, Byron Bangert, Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, Latosha Williams, Jacob Simpson, Pam Jackson and Valeri Haughton-Motley. A quorum was present. Also present were Melissa Stone, social worker with BPD; Nicole DeCriscio Bowe, BHRC legal assistant and Barbara E. McKinney, BHRC director/attorney.

Call to order: Chair Shadday called the roll at 5:30 p.m.

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

Conversation with Melissa Stone: Shadday asked Stone to discuss her role with the Bloomington Police Department. Stone said she began working with BPD in March of 2019. Her social worker position was created at the same time as the after-hours ambassador position and the neighborhood resource specialist positions. She has a master's degree in social work and is a licensed social worker. She has experience working with people who have serious mental health issues and with IU students who have been crime victims.

She said that she may be the first social worker affiliated with a police department in the state. Social workers take on different roles when they work with police departments. At BPD, she works a lot with the downtown resource officers, sometimes called white shirts. She works with people with serious mental health issues and with the elderly. Sometimes older people call BPD repeatedly, thinking someone is knocking on their door when no one else is there, for example. She helps families know when it's time for an older relative to have a home health aide.

She also works with the families of juvenile offenders, who often feel ignored by the criminal process. And she reaches out to survivors after someone has died.

BPD officers recognize when she can be helpful. When they think she could be helpful, they ask the citizen if it would be ok for Stone to call them. If they say yes, she reaches out. Sometimes she's called to the scene of a crime, for instance when someone is threatening suicide.

She has a BPD car, but it's unmarked and does not have a siren. She often works solo, which is helpful. But the officers can be there if she needs them to be, and often they are nearby.

Haughton-Motley asked if she worked with the prosecutor's office much. Stone said she does not, except for the mental health court team and the victim services program.

Bangert asked if she mostly works in people's homes; she said yes. She visits people in their tents or camps when need be. It's best to reach people where they are, but she does have an office.

Calloway-Thomas asked if most of the people she works with are middle class. Stone said she didn't have numbers, but she said mostly they are probably middle class to upper lower middle class. They usually have a home and a job. But she has worked with wealthy people as well.

Jackson asked if she had gone through the implicit bias training that BPD officers go through. She said yes, and she likes that a lot.

Calloway-Thomas asked how Stone knows she has accomplished something, how she knows she has been successful. Stone said that can be hard to quantify. But she can tell, for example, that someone who used to call the police several times a day has not called in months because she helped them resolve an issue. Sometimes she gets verbal appreciation.

Shadday asked how many social workers Stone believes BPD needs. She said three. She said she works with the officers a lot; she has provided therapy services to some of them. She's on call for the hostage crisis team. She said BPD could use more social workers, including someone who wants to work with children.

Calloway-Thomas asked if Stone had thoughts about the impact of her work, how the country should handle these issues. Stone said that it's beneficial to her work that she doesn't have to bill anyone; she can take her time. She can work with people who need help but who have had negative experiences with Centerstone, for example. She said there can be a struggle between individuals who think they should be able to do what they want as long as they are not hurting anyone and people who see that the person would be better off if they were on their meds, for example.

Jackson said she understand a lot of these issues steam from reduced resources since the 1970s for low income housing and group homes.

Calloway-Thomas asked what happens if an officer leaves and then a safety issue arises. Stone said that she has a radio, and an officer is usually nearby. But the person she is working with doesn't see the officer, so it's a good balance.

Simpson asked what policy changes Stone might support. Stone said that a lot of people can't get jobs or housing because of felony records, and she supports making it possible for people to get those records expunged.

Calloway-Thomas asked for information about the ethnicity of the people Stone works with. Stone said her clientele is mainly white and a fair number of people from Asian and Middle Eastern countries, possibly because of IU. She said about ten to 12 percent of her clientele is Latino or African American.

Calloway-Thomas noted that police officers had been subject to some negative treatment recently and asked if Stone had experienced that as well. She said she had not been treated badly by clients. There are people in her field who think that a social worker can't work ethically with a police department. They don't understand how independent she is.

Jackson asked if Stone had data on when the police ask her to help compared to when they don't ask her to help. She said she did not, but it could be analyzed.

Shadday said that he didn't like the term defund the police, but asked what proposals BPD was making to reallocate its resources. Stone said BPD is asking for two more social workers and two more neighborhood specialists in the 2021 budget. Some council members have suggested that the social workers be part of CFRD or a new department. Stone said she values being part of BPD, making ties between BPD and the community.

Calloway-Thomas asked about people at Seminary Square park, how they don't wear masks. Stone said that she does some proactive work with people experiencing homelessness. She said that she knows some of the people at the park and will ask them where their mask is. She said so far, there has not been an outbreak of COVID-19 within the homeless community.

The commissioners and McKinney thanked Stone for coming.

Unfinished business

Facebook: McKinney reminded the commissioners that they are welcome to submit posting for the BHRC's facebook page.

Bearcat: Calloway-Thomas said she appreciated the chance to see the vehicle and talk to officers. She said it was eye-opening and more people should see it. McKinney said Chief Diekhoff hopes to get more people to see it.

New business:

2021 Human rights award and essay/arts contest: McKinney said that typically, the commissioners start discussing these two agenda items in August or September. The commissioners agreed to think about how these would work in the era of COVID-19 and to discuss them at the September meeting. McKinney will try to reach out to teachers to get their feedback.

Assignment of new cases: No new cases.

Other business: Bangert said that MCHRC is not interested in exploring the possibility of merging with the BHRC.

Public input: None.

Adjournment: Calloway-Thomas moved that the meeting be adjourned. Bangert seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara E. McKinney, BHRC director/attorney