

Human Relations Commission
Monday, March 28th, 2022
6:30pm

In Person 5127 Oakton St. Skokie, IL. 60077

MINUTES

Present: Michelle Reitman, Eileen Heineman, Moe Yanes, Deborah Arnold, Jim McVane, John Lavin, Sheila Crumrine, Louis Mercer, Alexander Chaparro, David Donegan, Swarupa Pahan, Amy Memis-Foler, Krishna Goyal, Dephnee Camilien, Marcos Levy,

Chair: Maria Monastero Bueno and Trustee Khem Khoeun

Not present: Jaili Fajardo, Anwar Haq, Pearl Rubenzik, Jeremy Segall, Karen Sherman, James Specker, Liasion Iris Barrios

Eileen Heineman, Evanston YWCA Equity Institute

This is the first time that we will be coming together for an in-person Stand Against Racism in two years. This year's ask: do something, not just come out for the event. This is an opportunity to think about what we do in Skokie to address inequities happening. Iris has signed up the Village on the national website to get signs/materials.

Invitation and encouragement to participate:

- Take action.
- Personalize message.
- Discussion inside of Village Hall to follow the Stand.
- Encourage your place of employment to participate.
- Coming to the Stand is important because it gives visibility that this is something that our community is thinking about and taking action on.

Stand Against Racism at Skokie Village Hall: April 27th @ 10:30 am - meet at 10:15am

Nationwide event that happens during the last week of April. Different events happening over 4-5 days.

The YWCA is promoting the Stand throughout the month of April. They may ask people to sign-up for the discussion following the Stand so that we can plan and have a safe number of people inside.

YWCA will have 21-day challenge and share a common pledge.

Pledge will have questions for people having conversations on the sidewalk.

Pledge: every day there is a different topic to read about, links, video, ways to move forward the issues of racism in education, racism in healthcare, etc.

Intersectionality & identity are things we're still learning about.

Part of the goal is to normalize conversations. Step back, know better, do better.

Maria asked for a show of hands who will be able to attending the Stand on April 27th. Majority of Commissioners indicated they will be attending.

The HRC will have a banner for the event. People are welcome to bring whatever signs they like.

Chair's Report: Abilities Lab, Douglas Center

Maria shared a bit about changes of Douglas Center over the years – currently 43,000 sq feet. She and other HRC Commissioners took pictures and shared them with Iris for a slideshow tonight. Unfortunately, Iris was not able to attend tonight. Hopefully, it can be presented at our next meeting together.

Maria shared information about the piece work that the clients at the Douglas center works on along with a reading area where clients can get help with reading skills.

Amy shared about the Coming Together quilt that is being made at the Douglas Center, which will be showcased from year to year at upcoming Coming Together events and used as a backdrop when we bring in an author. It is designed so that when people come in, they can add their own design to the quilt.

At the Douglas Center, there is dignity because people who work there earn money. They can buy more tiles and brackets for mosaic. They refurbish computer monitors. All of it gets resold and helps fund the Douglas Center. We hope our Commission can continue to work with them and support them.

Jon Lavin raised the issue about how a State of Illinois law makes it where shelter can't have contract workers – possibly tied to minimum wage issue. This is somewhat problematic for these programs where people can't get paid. Sheila asked about the distinction between piece work and hourly wage. Michelle brought up that this has been an ongoing debate within the community of people with disabilities – paying a higher wage for working people.

Maria mentioned that this would be an opportunity for Omar and Rifath to clarify to the HRC on what role we can play. There are so many ideas of what Douglas Center can do if people knew what they were doing. Why wouldn't I order from them vs. Amazon? Hope that by variety of people that went through the day, maybe more people know that they're there and consider the possibility of partnerships.

Eileen suggested adding an article to Skokie newsletter about Commissioners' impressions of their visit to the Abilities Lab. Maria asked for those who attended to share their impressions, that could be shared with Ann for the Village newsletter.

Maria was happy to see that there were people there demonstrating their work during the Ability Lab. Guests taking the tour of the facility were very impressed by how the staff helps each client use their abilities to work on the various projects at the Douglas Center.

Committee Updates

Block Party Coordinator Forum

Update from Alex.

Spoke with Officer Wilken. They're open to doing the same activities - the key thing is they would need a few dates. Potential date: May 15th.

Discriminatory practice with appraisals

Realtors and fair housing organizations have been tracking housing discrimination from the appraisal industry. An example was given where African American families had to remove cultural-specific artifacts from their home, prior to having it appraised. A Caucasian person requested to meet with an appraiser to ensure that their property was properly appraised. Government Affairs Director, North Shore Association of Realtors (from Barrington) have been exploring the issue. Minority families are walking away when they feel that property has not been properly evaluated. There was a request to see if the HRC wants to learn about the issue and invite them to participate. Alex mentioned that a State organization is running the data and that there are government affair directors in different areas, centralized in Springfield.

Open Communities (formerly Interfaith Communities) has done a lot of work on housing discrimination locally.

Alex went on to explain that a property appraisal has always been held at much higher level – that you can trust an appraiser to be unbiased. Now they are seeing anomalies where a property could not appraise at fair value. There are a lot of stories and information out there. This is opportunity for Commission to understand the issue better. Daphnee commented there are so many articles about biased appraisals. There's a lot of value to having Commission review this issue.

Coming Together

Visit Comingtogether.in to get more info.

Update on Mitchell Museum

Chairperson Maria Bueno provided updates on a follow-up meeting with last month's guest speakers: Kim Vigue, Director of the Mitchell Museum and Jasmine Gurneau, Director of Native American and Indigenous Affairs in the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion at Northwestern University.

Trustee Khoeun had invited a few Board members and leadership staff from Village of Skokie and Skokie Park District to meet with Kim and Jasmine, to learn how we can honor the history of Native Americans in this community, while recognizing the people who live with us today.

The Native American community is not a monolithic group. They have a consortium of tribes who do work together and represent different groups in the Chicagoland area. Kim Vigue and Jasmine Gurneau acknowledged they don't represent all of the Native American community and would be happy to help make introductions to consortium.

Question about timeline and process: Trustee Khoeun addressed that the decision about changing the Village seal rests with the Board of Trustees and the Mayor. The Mayor is aware that these conversations are happening and is open to learning. Kim Vigue acknowledged there was work to be done to undo the work of the previous Museum administrator - Kim is the first Native American director of the Mitchell Museum, and this is the first time they have a majority Native American board. There are some who believe the seal historically represents the Native American community at the time of its founding. There is not a specific timeline that this is happening. We want to do this thoughtfully and do it right.

Kim and Jasmine had provided examples regarding what the City of Chicago and Forest Preserve District have done to engage with the Native American community with a committee to review sculptures and Indian names of sites. We will continue to have follow up conversations as we figure out next steps.

Jon Lavin shared about Armond King (Neil King, son) who was a significant person in the changing of the name Niles Township to Skokie. Armond King was the Chair of Cook County Housing Authority and a driving force behind getting this Commission established to combat discrimination in real estate. Commissioners expressed interest in the history of how the name "Skokie" was selected for our Village and the history of the Village seal. Jon suggested inviting Neil King, Armond's son, to attend one of our meetings and to share what he knows about this history.

Jon missed last meeting and thought that the questions and conversations were at the highest level.

Next Meeting: April 25, 2022 at 6:30 pm. NOTE TIME CHANGE: 7:00pm
Village Hall
5127 Oakton Street, Skokie, IL 60077