

**Washington State Human Rights Commission
MEETING OF
September 27-28, 2007**

**Wenatchee Community Center
Wenatchee, WA
&
Red Lion Hotel
Wenatchee, WA**

MINUTES

September 27, 2007 – Wenatchee Community Center

ATTENDANCE

Commissioners: Ellis Casson, Chair Pro Tem; Deborah Sioux Cano-Lee; and Shawn Murinko. A quorum was present.

Staff: Marc Brenman, Executive Director; Idolina Reta, Deputy Director; Tanya Calahan, Executive Assistant to the Commissioners; Traci Friedl, Assistant Attorney General; Sharon Ortiz, Operations Manager; and S. Juanita Soto, Civil Rights Specialist.

Guests: Dennis Johnson, Mayor of Wenatchee; Robbie Scott and Ernest Radillo, Columbia Legal Services; Mary Miller and Bryan Ketcham, Office of Rural Development and Farm Worker Housing; Ruth Esparza, Northwest Justice Project; Jorge Chacon, Commission on Hispanic Affairs; Jaime Borgan, Northwest Justice Project; Allison Williams, Wenatchee Diversity Council; John Nebel, Marilyn Rosenberger, Buell Hawkins, Chelan County Commissioner; Don Gurnard, Wenatchee City Council member; Hugo Penngos, Roy S.; Alicia McRae; Marty Stierlen; Lavisara Edmundo Gonzalez, Jose Ramos; Evila Flores; Jose Fajardo; Juana Cervantes; Virginia Cruz; Nancy Juarez; Walfred Fajarde; Aida Bound; Esther Getancourt; Aaron Ruiz; Jose Pelayo; Jorge Torres; Mirna Diaz; and Kirk Mayer, Washington Growers Clearing House. Other individuals attended but did not sign in.

OPENING AND WELCOME

Commissioner Casson called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. He then introduced Commissioner Murinko who facilitated the public forum and introduced speakers. Language interpreters were provided for Spanish speaking attendees.

Commissioner Murinko introduced Mayor Dennis Johnson. Mayor Johnson welcomed WSHRC to Wenatchee. He spoke about diversity efforts of the City. He introduced Chelan County Commissioner Buell Hawkins and Wenatchee City Council member Don Gurnard.

OVERVIEW OF WSHRC

Marc Brenman provided an overview of the work of WSHRC and discrimination protections under the Washington Law Against Discrimination, RCW 49.60.

INVITED SPEAKERS

Commissioner Murinko introduced the invited speakers.

The first speaker was Robbie Scott of Columbia Legal Services who spoke about the work that Columbia Legal Services has done to address the needs of farm workers, specifically, safety concerns for farm workers in fields and lack of adequate housing for farm workers. Columbia Legal Services works to protect the legal rights of individuals from vulnerable populations that have limited resources like many farm workers. Mr. Scott highlighted a PowerPoint presentation regarding the challenges faced by farm workers and housing options for farm workers.

Mary Miller of the Office of Rural Development and Farm Worker Housing (ORFH) spoke next. He highlighted the work of (ORFH). ORFH is a non profit organization based in Yakima. They work to develop affordable housing for farm workers and other low income individuals from rural communities.

Ruth Esparza spoke about Northwest Justice Project's work to protect the rights of farm workers.

Jorge Chacon of the Commission on Hispanic Affairs spoke about the work still to be done regarding discrimination in Wenatchee and other communities.

Jaime Borgan of the Northwest Fair Housing Alliance (NWFHA) spoke about the NWFHA's work to investigate housing discrimination complaints, including those from farm workers.

Allison Williams talked about the City of Wenatchee Diversity Advisory Council. The group is voluntary and advises the City of Wenatchee regarding diversity issues in the community.

OPEN FORUM

Other members of the public spoke and shared their personal experiences regarding discrimination and diversity.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The Commissioners thanked the community for attending the forum. They expressed thanks also to Mayor Dennis Johnson for attending the entire forum and to the Wenatchee Diversity Advisory Council for providing meeting space and refreshments.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tanya Y. Calahan
Executive Assistant to the Commissioners

September 28, 2007 – Red Lion Hotel

ATTENDANCE

Commissioners: Ellis Casson, Chair Pro Tem; Deborah Sioux Cano-Lee; and Shawn Murinko. A quorum was present.

Staff: Marc Brenman, Executive Director; Idolina Reta, Deputy Director; Tanya Calahan, Executive Assistant to the Commissioners; Traci Friedl, Assistant Attorney General; Sharon Ortiz, Operations Manager; and S. Juanita Soto, Civil Rights Specialist.

OPENING AND WELCOME

Commissioner Casson called the meeting to order at 9:11 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Murinko made a motion to approve the August 23-24, 2007 minutes. Commissioner Lee seconded the motion. MOTION CARRIED.

ACTION ITEMS

The Commissioners discussed action items from the previous evening's public forum and made general comments about the public forum.

Commissioner Murinko asked about the best way to support farm worker housing initiatives. He commented that he visited farm worker housing on September 27, 2007 with Deputy Director Idolina Reta and Operations Manager Sharon Ortiz. Although some have complained about the farm worker housing, it is more attractive than the area housing occupied by non farm workers.

Staff will draft thank you letters to invited forum speakers.

APPROVAL OF CASE CLOSURES

The Commissioners approved all cases closure recommendations by consensus. There were 125 cases on the agenda for closure.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND MONTHLY CASE PRODUCTION REPORTS

Marc Brenman distributed monthly case production and budget reports to the Commissioners. He also provided copies of his monthly Executive Director report to those that did not have copies.

NEW BUSINESS

The Commissioners spoke about their monthly activities. Commissioner Lee met with Northwest Justice Project on the Native American civil rights project.

As stated previously, Commissioner Murinko toured farm worker housing in the Wenatchee area.

REMAINING 2007 MEETING DATES AND LOCATIONS

The Commissioners discussed the remaining meetings for 2007. Commissioner Casson suggested that the Commissioners move the October 26, 2007 meeting scheduled for Longview to 2008 when there could be a forum. Commissioner Hebert's comments were taken into consideration. Commissioner Hebert previously stated that a meeting in Longview was still a good idea even without guests. Sometimes just having a presence in the community has value. Commissioner Murinko made a motion to change the October 26, 2007 meeting location to Olympia instead of Longview. Commissioner Lee seconded the motion. MOTION CARRIED.

Discussion then ensued about the impact that many forums have on staff and the need to spread forums around the state.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Commissioners entered an Executive Session to discuss pending litigation with their assigned Assistant Attorney General at 10:30 a.m. The session was scheduled to conclude at 10:45 a.m. The executive session adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

RECONSIDERATIONS

Carla Burrill v. Central Washington University. Complainant and respondent representative Nancy Howard appeared via telephone. Deputy Director Idolina Reta summarized the case. Commissioner Lee made a motion to grant reconsideration to interview complainant's witness Ms. Pidegon to see if her testimony would change the no reasonable cause finding. Commissioner Murinko seconded the motion. MOTION CARRIED.

ACTION ITEM REVIEW

Tanya Calahan reviewed action items.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:33 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tanya Y. Calahan
Executive Assistant to the Commissioners