

CITY OF PORTAGE HUMAN SERVICES BOARD

Minutes of Meeting June 2, 2016

CALL TO ORDER: 6:33 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Staff liaison Elizabeth Money called roll: Diane Durian (arrived at 6:37 p.m.), Effie Kokkinos (aye), Ray LaPoint (aye), Elma (Pat) Maye (aye), Nadeem Mirza (aye), Edward Morgan (absent), Sandra Sheppard (aye), Fiorella Spalvieri (absent), Amanda Woodin (aye), and Lindy Nebiolo, Youth Representative, (aye). Maye made a motion supported by Durian to excuse Spalvieri. Motion passed 6-0.

STAFF PRESENT: Elizabeth Money, Neighborhood Program Specialist; Vicki Georgeau, Director Community Development; Randy Brown, City Attorney; and Bryan Beach, Assistant City Attorney

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Kokkinos moved and Maye supported approval of the minutes. Motion passed 6-0.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Draft Non-discrimination Ordinance: Woodin noted that two communications were received from citizens not in support of the Nondiscrimination Ordinance. She then opened the topic up for discussion. Community Development Director Georgeau indicated that the public hearing went well, a dozen citizens spoke, and almost 40 people attended the hearing. Georgeau noted that there had been no changes to the proposed ordinance and the only new material provided was the two citizen comments. Georgeau indicated that it was anticipated the Board would vote on a recommendation to City Council. Sheppard asked what responsibility the city had to respond to comments. Georgeau indicated that the public was requested to share their input and that the city does not typically respond unless there is a question or comment that merits a response and/or clarification. Mirza indicated that some people in the community feel the ordinance singles out and provides special treatment to a select group and that these protections should apply to everyone. Woodin added that she received comments from citizens that were focused on only the subject of bathroom use and that, like the citizens who feel this ordinance singles out a special group, education is needed so the public understands the full scope of the ordinance and the purpose. Sheppard added that the ordinance ensured everyone receives equal treatment by including protections for persons of the LGBT group that are already in place for others. Georgeau elaborated by indicating the ordinance supplements state and federal laws that offer protections to other groups of people that have experienced discrimination, and that the ordinance would also provide protections for the LGBT community, which were needed due to documented discrimination. Maye supported that statement by stating all communities need laws so that everyone is afforded the same protections and equal rights, the city is not making an exception, but including sexual orientation and gender identification protection along with everyone else equally. Durian stated that the public hearing was very effective due to the personal stories citizens shared and acceptance the Portage community has already demonstrated. Kokkinos spoke highly of Portage Public Schools and their efforts to be inclusive of all students. Sheppard asked if the ordinance would cover the public schools and Assistant City Attorney Beach indicated that school districts fell under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Justice. Kokkinos indicated she felt like there was a cultural shift between generations and noted that, based on public comment, older generations seemed to oppose the ordinance and younger generations support it. LaPoint stated that cultural shifts move forward slowly and unevenly, and education will be important in the future. Nebiolo agreed and stated that she finds people her age accept people and their sexual orientation or gender identity, and the topic of bathrooms and who is using them is not a concern. With no more discussion, Maye made a motion to recommend that City Council adopt the Nondiscrimination Ordinance as presented. LaPoint supported. Upon roll vote, the motion passed unanimously 7-0. While Nebiolo does not have a casting vote, she also recommended that City Council adopt the ordinance.

City Attorney Brown thanked the Board for their work and indicated the process went well with opportunity for the public to voice their opinion. Woodin also thanked the Board for their efforts. Mirza thought the experience was valuable to the Board and very educational. LaPoint stated that he thought it was important for the Board to continue their role as advocates for a more inclusive community, that education is now the focus should this ordinance be adopted, and that it was disappointing that the bathroom topic had taken over the conversation when so many important protections were covered – like housing and employment. The Board and city needed to remain focused on the larger issues at hand and the bathroom focus would eventually fade away. Brown indicated that was a great point and it was key to focus on the three core areas of protection. Georgeau stated that if the ordinance was adopted, the city would engage in further public education and outreach. Mirza asked for clarification on the next steps and Brown indicated the ordinance would be on the City Council agenda for June 14th for a first reading, with a second reading and vote on June 28th. While the Council would not hold a public hearing, citizens always have an opportunity to speak at every Council meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Kalamazoo Transit Authority LAC update - Maye: Maye provided information that the new Sunday service was being used but that there was a high cancelation rate. However, the grocery service (drivers assist passengers with carrying grocery bags) was being used more on Sunday. A discussion occurred about the community vans, the high demand for these vans, the process in which an organization could certify a driver and use the vans, and that it was a good program. Overall ridership was increasing for 2016 but no information was provided yet as to why it had increased. The Board felt the addition of so many new bus shelters and route changes could have impacted increased ridership.
2. Human Services Board Summer Schedule/Small Work Groups: Woodin stated that the Board typically did not meet in June and July. Money added that the Board could cancel their July and August meetings but that Red Ribbon Week preparation would have to start immediately in September or a small group could work on it prior to the September meeting. LaPoint added that working with the public schools on Red Ribbon Week needed to start at the beginning of the school year and that after the September meeting was too late. A discussion was had if Red Ribbon Week was still relevant and Nebiolo added that it was a big event in the elementary schools but not many events were done in the high school. Georgeau gave a brief history of the city's involvement and that ongoing substance abuse problems in the community remain a focus for the school district and the city. Maye proposed a small group meet in August and she, Nebiolo, and Woodin agreed to serve on it. Money stated that the Board typically also reviewed the grant funding process and criteria each year. The Board discussed the process and it was agreed that some of the questions needed to be reviewed and alternative submission guidelines could be discussed. Durian, Woodin, LaPoint, and Spalvieri were appointed to the small group to meet over the summer, with Kokkinos serving as an alternate. With that, Mirza made a motion to cancel the July and August regularly scheduled Human Services Board meetings, with the Red Ribbon Week and grant funding small groups to meet over the summer. Durian supported. Motion passed 7-0.

STATEMENT OF CITIZENS: None.

ADJOURNMENT: Maye moved and Durian supported adjournment at 7:16 p.m. Motion passed 7-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elizabeth Money,
Neighborhood Program Specialist