

Humboldt County Human Rights Commissio
Minutes
Meeting of August 21, 2008
6 p.m. Conference Room A
Humboldt County Courthouse, Eureka, California

A. Attendance and Introductions

- a. Present: Altschuler, Brake-Mills, Botzler, Duncan, Lochtie, Munsee, Sanders, Shaffer
- b. Excused: Herbelin, Miller, Tharp
- c. Guests: Five

B. Minutes

- a. The minutes were approved as presented.

C. Public Comment

- a. A guest from Redway talked about the extensive police action against the homeless people in his part of the county. He described the raiding of homeless camps and said that the civil rights of people are being violated. He described the work of an informal group in the area trying to help the homeless by providing food and lodging. Shaffer questioned the relationship of this situation to the code enforcement issue, and the speaker agreed that they are related. Sanders referred the speaker to a meeting of the county code enforcement task force meeting at the courthouse the following day. Another guest, a long-time advocate for the homeless advised people to document these raids on the homeless camps and other forms of harassment. Her opinion was that the attitude of law enforcement personnel is that the homeless should leave the county or go to jail. She, herself, is producing a documentary to educate the community about the situation. She pointed out that although there used to be a county advocate for the homeless, there is none now. A third speaker spoke of increased harassment of the homeless in the county during the last year and expressed the strong feeling that something must be done to change ordinances that allow for punitive ticketing, towing of cars, and impounding of pets. A fourth person distributed information from the ACLU describing a suit settled by the homeless in Fresno for \$2.35 million. The issue was the seizing and destroying of personal possessions of homeless persons. This guest described a raid in the Arcata forest in which possessions were confiscated. In her opinion, law enforcement personnel are being inhumane. Sanders asked the guests what they wanted The Human Rights Commission to do. They asked The Commission to conduct an investigation of police behavior toward the homeless, to contact various law enforcement entities in the county to express concern about the

- b. violation of people's civil rights. Sanders pointed out that The Commission is not an action body but exists to advise The Board of Supervisors. One guest asked about the Grand Jury and was informed that it is a body with investigative powers. Sanders pointed out that this concern would be dealt with again later in the meeting as the topic was on the agenda.

D. Telephone Calls, Correspondence, and E-mails

- a. Munsee reported having dealt with six calls. Two were inquiries about the meeting time and place of The Commission. Two were about legal matters related to rental agreements. These people were referred to Legal Services of Northern California. One call was from a seemingly disoriented person who was referred to Semper Virens which he had recently left, and the final call was one to correct an address for future reference. Brake-Mills reported having taken one call which did not require any action. Miller was not present to report.
- b. Phone List for Coming Weeks
 - August 16 – 31 Brake-Mills
 - September 1 – 15 Sanders
 - September 16 – 30 Altschuler
 - October 1 – 15 Lochtie

E. Committee, Liaison, and Case Reports

- a. Finance (Shaffer)

Shaffer reported a current account balance of \$616.64. Sanders reported having received \$100 from Larry Glass which will be added to the account.
- b. Outreach and Education (Tharp)

Tharp was not present. Altschuler reported that he had not yet been able to find a source of funding for printing the resource cards. Brake-Mills said that she might be able to secure some funding. Altschuler moved that we go ahead with the printing of the cards, using the money procured by Brake-Mills if possible, and up to \$300 from our account if necessary. Munsee seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- c. Website (Munsee)

Munsee reported that the website has been updated with current information about commissioners. Also, a new link has been posted which includes information about the forums on community law enforcement review and minutes of the Law Enforcement Review Advisory Committee.

d. Recognitions

In recognition of this being Botzler's last meeting as a member of The Commission, Sanders read a proclamation in appreciation of the many contributions of Botzler to Humboldt County and Altschuler presented him with a card and gift from members of The Commission.

e.. Internship (Duncan)

Duncan continues to work on community recognition of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

F. Unfinished Business

a. Law Enforcement Review Advisory Committee (Botzler)

Botzler reported that this committee is working well under the leadership of Sanders. A number of ideas are under consideration. Both the use of an auditor and a citizen review committee are being seriously considered. Under discussion is the structure and scope of the program and the interaction of cities and the county. Sanders suggested that perhaps the code enforcement task force would be interested in coordinating with this committee. Lochtie will draft a letter to the task force describing the work of the Law Enforcement Review committee and inviting members of that committee to make contact for more information.

b. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Altschuler)

Altschuler reported having mailed 150 letters to various organizations and individuals in the community describing the plan to celebrate The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Humboldt Area Foundation will pay for the mailing. He received two responses offering to participate. Next he will do a press release and will focus on school districts, CR, and HSU. Lochtie will contact Gary Eagles and Bob Steffen to enlist their help. Sanders suggested doing presentations to chambers of commerce.

c. Annual Report (Botzler)

The annual report draft had been submitted to Commission members by e-mail before this meeting. Altschuler moved, seconded by Lochtie, that the annual report and cover letter as submitted be approved. The motion passed unanimously, and Botzler was congratulated on a job well done.

d. Homelessness in Humboldt County (Brake-Mills)

Brake-Mills reported on progress in organizing a community educational forum on the subject of homelessness. She found the

task to be complicated and almost overwhelming. After a lot of discussion, The Commission decided to scale back and to organize a special meeting of The Commission during which various concerned people will be invited to address The Commission on the subject of homelessness, the problems related to it, and some possible solutions. This will be an attempt to educate The Commission in advance of its making a plan to address the topic. Brake-Mills will contact Commissioners to find an acceptable date for the meeting and will organize the time arrangements and speakers. Munsee and Sanders offered to help with this.

- e. Mental Health Care in Humboldt County (Miller)
Miller was not present so this item was put off.
- f. Humboldt County Code Enforcement (Miller)
Miller not present – no report
- g. Immigration Issues (Miller)
No report
- h. Commission Meeting Arrangements (Sanders)
Meeting on the first Thursday of each month was discussed. All present could do that, but some commissioners were not present. The next meeting will be on the first Thursday of September, September 4. Munsee will contact absent commissioners regarding their availability, and a decision about a regular meeting date will be made.

G. New Business

- a. Declaration of conflict of interest forms (Sanders)
These forms were not available but will be at the next meeting.
- b. Appointment of Vice-Chair (Sanders)
It was decided to postpone this election until after new members have joined The Commission. In the meantime, Lochtie will serve as interim Vice-Chair and, as such, will address The Board of Supervisors to inform them of The Commission's plan to hold an educational special Commission meeting and the possibility of their being addressed on the subject at a later date.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Jean Munsee, Secretary

