

**Chairperson**  
Aaron Richman

**Vice-chairperson**  
Jacqueline Yang

**Clerk**  
Elizabeth O'Callahan



**Members:**  
Lilian Chukwurah  
Edward G. Robinson  
Tracey Weeden

**City of Worcester  
Human Rights Commission**

**Monthly Meeting Summary – Monday, April 1st, 2019, 6pm  
Worcester City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber, 4th Floor, 455 Main St., Worcester, MA**

**Members present:**

Aaron Richman, Elizabeth O'Callahan, Edward Robinson, Jacqueline Yang, Lilian Chukwurah

**Members absent:**

Tracey Weeden

**Staff:**

Jayna Turchek, Jamilex Rivas

**1. Call to order and introductions**

A quorum was established and Chairperson Richman officially called the meeting to order at 6:12 pm. Commissioners introduced themselves. The Chairperson welcomed the Commissioners and those present.

**2. Approval of February 4th, 2019 meeting minutes**

Commissioner Robinson Motioned to approve as written. Commissioner Chukwurah seconded. Motion passed with all in favor

**3. Old Business:**

**A. Continued discussion on Citizen Advisory Council voter registration requirement**

Chairperson Richman shared an update and summarized the history of the Commission's past discussion and involvement in requesting a review and potential modification to this eligibility requirement:

2017: It came to the attention of the Human Rights Commission that the Citizen Advisory Council has a voter registration requirement for residents applying to volunteer for city boards and commissions

- The Human Rights Commission requested the law department to review whether the requirement was part of the city's charter.
- Chairperson Richman was verbally informed that the requirement is a CAC rule. The eligibility requirement in the city charter is residency

January 2018: Chairperson Richman spoke to the Citizen Advisory Council at their meeting, along with a city councilor who strongly opposed changing the requirement



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- The CAC agreed to create a list of questions to forward to the law department before making a decision on this agenda item

February 2018: As relayed by the Chairperson to the Commission, the Citizen Advisory Council submitted the following questions to the law department for clarification:

- Does the charter require that only citizens can serve on boards and commissions?
- Does the charter draw any distinction between people of legal and non-legal statuses?
- Does the CAC have authority to impose own rules as to whom it may consider?
- The legal definitions of each of the following classifications including which classifications have the legal right to vote:
  - Citizen
  - Non-citizen
  - Permanent reside
  - Individuals with authorization to work or attend school
- Are there any legal obligations with regard to funding from grants, etc. that would be impacted by if the voter requirement were changed to allow non-voters to serve on boards and commissions?
- Are there any other positions in the city in which one must be a registered vote, citizen or resident to serve? (City council, etc.)
- Are college students considered residents?

February-March 2019: Jeannie Michelson has re-engaged with the law department on these questions

- As of the CAC meeting last week, there was no update from law department
- This item is on the agenda for the April 30<sup>th</sup> CAC Meeting with the hope that the law department will have answers to some of these questions by then
- Next CAC Meeting:
  - Tuesday, April 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting in Levi Lincoln Chamber, 6:30 pm

The Human Rights Commission identified in its prior discussion that this requirement has discriminatory impact

- 37,000 people in the city over the age of 18, not registered to vote
- Conservatively 20% of the city's total population
- Half of that number are actually citizens, but are not registered to vote
- Numbers provided by Worcester Research Bureau
- Disproportionately affects people of color and people who have a lower socioeconomic status

There is no precedent for this requirement in other similar municipalities

- In reviewing requirements for Cambridge, Fitchburg, Medford, Lynn, Boston, Lowell and Springfield, it was found nobody else has this requirement.
- Nobody in those municipalities had never heard of such a requirement
- There is no voter registration requirement to apply for job with the city – the requirement to volunteer is more strict than the requirement to be employed by the city

The requirement impacts productivity in contributing to the severity of the ongoing, city-wide problem of filling vacancies on boards:

- The Human Rights Commission itself couldn't meet in March due to lack of quorum
- In the last 12 months, the CAC has not been able to meet 5 times due to lack of quorum (42% of total scheduled meetings)
- Currently 41 vacancies; 100 vacancies is the average number, including 3 are on this board
- At least one person was interested in joining the Human Rights Commission, but was unable to due to voter registration requirement

Feedback from members of other boards and commissions:

- Would it make sense to try to do some surveying – formal or informal from this population?
- Signature gathering?
  - Potentially too intrusive, labor-intensive, potentially not worth the amount of work
- Networking for additional conversation?

- Encourage members of the community to attend the April 30th meeting

Additional Discussion

- Commissioner Robinson: Encourage the CAC to consider to keep the requirement in place for regulatory boards as they do make policy, but remove it for the advisory and executive boards (e.g. Election Commission)

**Public Comment:**

Deborah Hall, Worcester Resident in the 3<sup>rd</sup> district, also member of the Commission for the status of women, although not speaking on their behalf. Spoke to Chairperson Richman on this and suspects “there’s more xenophobia than anything else.” “We are a diverse community, so anybody interested in volunteering, we should be welcoming”

Diana Biancheria asked “What are the avenues of advocating and promoting looking for people for Commissions?” She recommended taking different avenues to advertise vacancies.

Chairperson Richman invited all members of the public to attend the April 30th CAC meeting to share these ideas, as advertising is part of the CAC’s mission.

**Follow-up:**

- Chairperson Richman is scheduled to meet with the City Manager
- Commissioners requested the law department come speak to the Human Rights Commission at the May 6th meeting.

**Next CAC Meeting: Tuesday, April 30th Meeting in Levi Lincoln Chamber, 6:30 pm**

**B. Follow up discussion on Worcester Tree Initiative Environmental Justice concerns**

See minutes from 10/15/2018

The city was awarded a CDC \$800,000 a year for 5 years grant to improve Latino community’s health in the city. Chairperson Richman wondered if some of this funding could go to the Worcester Tree Initiative

- Grant was applied for over a year ago, so the scope of the work may already be defined
- Director Turchek is meeting with DPH April 2nd to follow up

Could DPH work with the Worcester Tree Initiative to incorporate recommendations into existing plans?

- Worcester Tree Initiative recommendation to include trees into the DPH Complete Streets Policy
- Can HRC ask DPH to review/include trees in the complete streets policy?
- Invite someone from Complete Streets Policy and Worcester Tree Initiative

- The Worcester Tree Initiative will be giving Worcester State of the Trees forum together with the City of Worcester Dept of Public Parks
  - Clark University Conference Center
  - Tuesday, 4/25, 5:30-7:30 pm

Director Turchek reminded commissioners of items already on the May meeting agenda:

- Niko Vangjeli from Election Commission
- Law Department to be invited for response to CAC questions
- Planning for joint meeting with WPD in June

Follow up:

- Commissioners considering holding a second May meeting in order to allocate enough time to sufficiently address each agenda item

- Members of the commission should communicate following the meeting to coordinate availability for a potential second May meeting

**Motion:** Vice Chair Yang motioned to invite a representative of the Division of Planning and Regulatory Services, along with a member of the Worcester Tree Initiative to speak to the Human Rights Commission to discuss the Complete Streets Policy. Clerk O'Callahan seconded. Motion passed with all in favor

#### **C. Update on survey of community meetings**

- Meetings will be held with neighborhood officers and meeting organizers in the next few weeks
- Gathering feedback from all parties to further inform potential HRC recommendations ahead of annual joint meeting with Worcester Police Department on June 3rd

From February 2019 HRC Meeting Minutes:

- Data from Neighborhood Watch Meeting Surveys is anticipated to:
  - Allow successes for individual NWM to be replicated and standardized
  - Inform Additional Opportunities for HRC support
  - Inform Additional Dialogue with the WPD
  - Inform Rationale for HRC Recommendations

#### **4. New Business**

##### **A. Debrief Eleanor Hawley Human Rights Award Ceremony event**

- Chairperson Richman recognized members of the commission for their hard work in facilitating a successful award ceremony, with special thanks to Commissioner Weeden for her initiative, networking, management and extensive planning of the event
- Next Eleanor Hawley Human Rights Award Ceremony anticipated to take place December 2020
- Planning for the next award ceremony anticipated to begin ~August-September 2020

##### **B. Planning conversation for annual meeting with Worcester Police Department (June 3rd, 2019)**

- Discussed potential second May meeting to facilitate planning of this meeting

#### **4. Next meeting (May 6th, 2019): TBD**

#### **5. Adjournment at 8:09 PM**