

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, June 17, 2025
7:00 P.M., City Hall, Council Work Room
301 King Street

Members Present

Marc Bendick, Vice Chair
April Breslaw
Lisl Brunner
Iulia Fratila
Matt Harris
Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson, Vice Chair
Kara Pitek
Tom Reeder
Sam Schwartz
Jon Thompson, Chair

Staff Present

Anna McClure, Investigator/Acting Director

Members Excused

Manisha Maniyar
Megan Prince

Members Unexcused

Conrad Sylvanus

Guests

Daniel Roth, Vice President, Del Ray Business Association

1. Call to Order/Introductions

Chair Thompson called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. Approval of May Minutes

Upon motion by Commissioner Schwartz, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Commission approved the minutes of the May meeting.

3. Guest: Daniel Roth, Del Ray Business Association

Chair Thompson introduced Daniel Roth, from the Del Ray Business Association (DRBA). He said that he and Mr. Roth talked about getting information and training on immigration issues to businesses in Del Ray, as well as the idea of a rainbow crosswalk in Del Ray.

Mr. Roth said he is on Board of Friends of Duncan Library, a non-profit, and serves on the DRBA as Vice President. He explained that DRBA advocates for businesses and collaborates with the City on events, which are often attended by people from all around the region.

He said one issue businesses are facing is worry and fear around immigration. Many businesses employ immigrants who have legal status and who are scared. Their kids are scared, they're scared not to be home when their kids are coming home, and businesses wonder what the impact is of employing people even with legal work status. There is an immigration attorney on the DRBA Board, who is working on training. They are still working on place and time, but they want to partner with the Commission. The library is also working on immigration issues, and staff is trained to protect attendees at ELL classes. They have spoken to the Mayor and Council about these issues. Mr. Roth spoke about how Del Ray brings people together from all around the world. Many business owners live elsewhere but choose to build their business in Del Ray.

Mr. Roth said that the DRBA Board had not discussed a rainbow crosswalk. He said that the DRBA wants to make sure anything they do is a celebration of the culture that is Del Ray. He asked about the thinking behind a crosswalk, noting that there are many different things they

could do that would continue to draw people to Del Ray. He said that being a welcoming community is already part of Del Ray's identity. He proposed thinking outside the box.

Chair Thompson explained that, after the Old Town crosswalk went in, commissioners heard from Del Ray residents and others that they wanted something like that for Del Ray. He agreed it should be reflective of Del Ray. He noted that there are budget constraints. Commissioner Schwartz noted federal transportation guidelines and constraints. Mr. Roth said he would want to think about incorporating pedestrian safety crossing Mt. Vernon Avenue; he believes a rainbow crosswalk would be safer. He said he doesn't just want to do what someone else has done, because that's not Del Ray. It should be something fun and unique that we haven't seen yet.

Commissioner Fratila suggested opening the idea up to the community for feedback and suggested doing more than one crosswalk, focusing on different aspects of Del Ray's identity. Commissioner Pitek suggested working with local artists on a mural. Mr. Roth noted that the throughline should be encouraging business patrons to come back or to buy a house in Del Ray.

Chair Thompson said that the next steps would be to go back to the DRBA to get more input on locations and themes, and to find out about artists who live in Del Ray. He proposed inviting local artists and community members to design the crosswalk, potentially a design competition. Mr. Roth noted the concern about the guard rails on what is permitted in a crosswalk. Commissioner Schwartz explained that the rainbow has a specific human rights connotation that brings this idea into the Commission's ambit, because they represent LGBTQIA+ rights.

Mr. Roth asked if there are other things they could do, like something in a park. He said the potential difficulty with the DRBA Board is doing something exactly like what was done before. There should be a discussion of how we use public space and what it is that we want to achieve. He said that will help us come up with what it will look like.

Chair Thompson talked about teaming up on training relating to immigration. He noted that the Commission and City have worked with the Legal Aid Justice Center, who provides resources and has a grant from the City. He explained the kind of information LAJC shared as part of their Know Your Rights training and noted that they brought resources to share. Mr. Roth said brought up what kinds of resources they might offer at the library and make sure are at the library's disposal. He noted that library staff are trained in using Narcan, for example. He stated that businesses are seeing the fear and how employees are affected. Additionally, costs are going up and because of what has happened to federal workers, people may have stopped going out to eat as much. He said the full storm is happening here and the DRBA would be happy to partner with the Commission to work on anything that can help weather it.

Chair Thompson thanked Mr. Roth for his comments and for speaking with the Commission.

4. Executive Committee

Chair Thompson reminded the Commission that the Pride Festival is on June 28. He mentioned the shirt the City is selling for Pride, which was designed by a local artist. He said he thinks they can still go forward with their petition for a new Del Ray rainbow crosswalk. Chair Brunner asked how the crosswalk idea came up. Chair Thompson said that when he has mentioned being on the Human Rights Commission, people have brought up wanting a rainbow crosswalk in Del Ray. The Commission discussed the issues Mr. Roth mentioned regarding doing something unique or different. Chair Thompson said that the DRBA President is very supportive of a rainbow crosswalk. He thinks the Commission can take the lead on this, and, they can pivot if

there is push back that people want a mural. He said that they have heard a lot of support for the idea of a crosswalk, including from Councilman McPike. Chair Thompson noted that several municipalities have done rainbow crosswalks, specifically, as a show of support, which is what spurred the original concept. The Commission further discussed different ideas and how to proceed, including a survey. Chair Thompson said that if they hear that people want something different, at the Pride event, the Commission can pivot.

5. Old Business & New Business

EEOC Guidance on Gender Identity Claims

Acting Director McClure explained new guidance from the EEOC about gender identity and/or transgender status discrimination complaints. The EEOC is de-prioritizing these claims and will no longer pay local agencies to investigate them. Acting Director McClure said this is not a funding concern for the Office, because they see very few of these cases. However, she is concerned about what it means for complainant's legal rights and whether the EEOC will still issue "right to sue" letters in these cases, even though the Supreme Court ruled that it is a form of sex discrimination under Title VII. She said that she has asked these questions, but the State, Local, and Tribal Program Coordinators the Office works with are awaiting clarification and said that there are many unanswered questions from EEOC leadership about what this means. She noted that the office can still investigate these claims under the Human Rights Code.

Report on High School Newspaper Status re: First Amendment

Vice Chair Bendick reported that the Commission sent a letter (attached) to the School Board and Superintendent of ACPS, as voted on, expressing support for the ACHS student newspaper and opposing the proposed newspaper editorial policy proposed by ACPS Central Office administration. He noted that, after a public backlash, the School Board sent the policy back to staff to start again. Vice Chair Bendick said the student editors are waiting for the new version of the policy that staff comes back with. He will watch the issue and report back. He said this was a nice example of the Commission acting swiftly on a relevant issue.

Chair Thompson mentioned that he had a chance to talk to a couple of members of the School Board and would like to invite the entire School Board to a future meeting to speak about various issues with the Commission, including gender neutral bathrooms and student-teacher conflicts. Commissioner Brunner shared that she took a tour of the Minnie Howard Campus and noted that the bathrooms were in an open layout and had individual stalls with no gender indication.

6. Election of Chair and Vice Chairs

Acting Director McClure explained that the Commission has elected the Chair and Vice Chairs in different ways in the past. In some years, the nominating committee presented a slate and then nominations could be made from the floor. If there were nominations from the floor, the Commission would vote. In other years, the nominating committee presented the names of all those interested, and the Commission voted on that list. After a brief discussion, the Commission proceeded with the latter approach.

Members of the nominating Committee, Commissioners Fratila and Pitek, said several people expressed interest in the Vice Chair positions, but several did so with contingencies. Acting Director McClure suggested that they read the list of all interested commissioners, who could then either confirm their interest or withdraw, as was their preference. Commissioners noted that the Chair still will appoint two board members and that anyone can attend board meetings.

Commissioners Fratila and Pitek said only Chair Thompson was expressed interested in being Chair. Upon motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Schwartz, the Commission voted to re-elect Chair Thompson as Chair by acclamation.

Commissioner Fratila read the names of those who expressed interest in the Vice Chair roles: Vice Chair Bendick, Vice Chair Palmer Johnson, Commissioner Breslaw, Commissioner Harris, Commissioner Maniyar, and Commissioner Schwartz. Vice Chair Bendick and Commissioner Harris withdrew their names from consideration. Acting Director McClure provided paper ballots to all commissioners present, explaining they could vote for up to two candidates from the remaining four. She collected and counted all completed ballots, with Commissioner Harris as witness. Acting Director McClure announced that Commissioner Schwartz and Commissioner Breslaw received the most votes. Chair Thompson asked those interested in an appointed seat on the board to reach out to him.

Upon motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Bendick, the Commission voted to accept the results of the vote and elect Commissioner Breslaw and Commissioner Schwartz as Vice Chairs.

After the motion passed, Vice Chair Palmer Johnson expressed that she felt the process had been unfair because the candidates did not speak on their own behalf prior to the vote. She asked how commissioners would know what each candidate had accomplished.

Liaison Reports

Commissioner Schwartz said he has spoken to the City Clerk about merging the HIV/AIDS Commission into the Public Health Advisory Board. He said that two members of Council are working with the Clerk's Office to streamline all City commissions. He said he told the clerk that there should be a seat on the PHA that addresses LGBTQIA+ community health issues, in general, including HIV/AIDS, but not only HIV/AIDS.

Commissioner Reeder said the Commission on Aging has continued working on the Ladrey redevelopment. He said that people have been receiving differing information. There is a proposal to move residents to the Alate, but Council is very negative about it because the City would have to guarantee the loan. Commissioner Reeder said there is not enough space at Alate. Vice Chair Palmer Johnson said the NAACP got a different report from ARHA. Commissioner Reeder talked about getting involved in the process for allocating the Fund for Human Services.

Commissioner Palmer Johnson reported that the Commission for Women received a presentation from AEDP staff regarding small businesses, particularly woman-owned businesses. 23.8% of businesses in Virginia are woman-owned. 27% of businesses in Alexandria are woman-owned is 27%. Virginia has a greater percentage of woman-owned businesses than any state, except Hawaii, where 24.7% of businesses are woman-owned. Alexandria has a greater percentage of woman-owned businesses than any state. She announced that, on June 28, there is an NAACP town hall featuring Congressman Don Beyer, City Councilman John Taylor Chapman, Arlington County Board Member Julius "JD" Spain, Sr., and Virginia Delegate Marcus B. Simon.

9. Announcements/Adjournment

Acting Director McClure announced that Paul Valenti had been hired as Director for the Human Rights Office and would start on June 23.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:51 p.m.