

Kern County Human Relations Commission
Kern County Administrative Complex – Third Floor Multi Purpose Room
1115 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield
Tuesday, March 8, 2016 at 5:30 PM
Monthly Meeting Minutes

Present: Brady Bernhart (Ber), Louis Medina (Med), David Vivas (Viv), Jewelle Scales (Sca), Marcus Mitchell (Mit), Michael Caves (Cav)

Absent: Joseph Snyder

Others Present: Michael Goulart (Mg) Principal Human Resources Analyst, Nancy Renfro

Agenda Items: Called To Order at 5:30 Pm

1. Flag Salute: Commissioner Vivas.

2. Public Presentations:

a) Nancy Renfro, Faith In Action, stated that she is looking forward to working with the Human Relations Commission Ad-hoc committee.

3. Approval of Minutes:

Tuesday February 9, 2016. **MOTION to approve with corrections: Scales 2nd: Caves**

Vote: all ayes

4. New Business:

a) Discussion of Commission plans to explore a partnership with community groups regarding issues of community policing.

Sca) At our last meeting we talked about working with community groups that are concerned about use of force events that involve law enforcement in our community. An important take away from that discussion is that we need to do something that will represent a win for the community. We need to be able to do something that will keep people engaged in the process.

The Ad-hoc committee met and we discussed three process steps for moving forward. Commissioner Caves and I also had that chance to speak to Chief Williamson (BPD). As the chair, I like to have both sides of the story so that I can make good decisions. The credibility and the reputation of the Commission depend on it.

The Chief shared some things with us. He was concerned about rules at open community meetings and he is concerned about knowing what is going to happen in a meeting when he gets there. He does not want to feel like he is being surprised, and for the lack of a better term, almost as if the BPD is under siege and attack. He very much wants to engage with the community. He said that's what his department wants to do. What he doesn't want to do is be in a meeting that feels hostile toward the department and may send the wrong message to the community; that it is "this community organization vs. BPD."

(Cav) I think it goes both ways, both BPD's perception of community members that are present and community member's perception of law enforcement. It is that perception, whether it is accurate or not, that can derail the process. As an ad-hoc group we talked about the importance of establishing some ground rules or best practices so that we can work toward an achievable goal.

Some of the challenges for the BPD include pending litigation. If people want to discuss specific cases that have not worked their way through the system the community forum may not be the best venue for that.

(Sca) Marquez Equalibria with the Department of Justice is an industry expert in bringing people together to have these types of discussions with law enforcement. Marquez wants to help us put some ground rules together that would include things like, what do we do if members of the meeting step outside of the rules that are established before the meeting? He also wants communities and law enforcement to understand the perception of "I can't share this with you" and how this makes the community feel.

The first step is getting the Chief back to the table. He has trust issues and wants ground rules in place.

The second thing that we talked about is having something visible (ground rules) that apply to everyone in the community. The goal is to host a community meeting where we have an honest dialogue and both the public and BPD feels like we have accomplished something.

The third step is to continue to add more organizations to the community forum including the Kern County Sheriff's Department and the California Highway Patrol.

Having a meeting here in this building is not going to work. One of the things that your organization (Faith In Action) is great at is grass roots work and finding a place where people can meet "on their turf" and BPD comes to them. We would love to see that happen.

(Nancy Renfro) We have found that our most successful locations are churches. Churches are a haven and people tend to feel more comfortable in a church than in a public building.

(Med) A concern that I have, and something that I brought up in our meeting, is whether your organization is interdenominational just in regard to other Christian churches or to all faiths in general. You told us all faiths in general and I believe that, however perception is everything and your logo features a Christian church with a cross on it. Could that be a turn-off if you are trying to engage other faith communities?

Also, to hold the meeting in a church, it is a sanctuary but would everyone of every faith going to consider it a sanctuary?

(Sca) Another thing we talked about is having chaplains present.

(Med) That was another idea that we thought might help to diffuse things. They are someone who the police chief and others in law enforcement may respect. They are also trained in counseling and psychology and could help to diffuse situations. I am planning to reach out to Msgr. Braun and other chaplains to see if they will participate.

(Sca) Commissioner Medina, can you please talk about having a judge as a moderator in the meeting.

(Med) We could have a judge, someone who is very engaged in the community. Judge Tafoya as an example.

(Sca) So these ideas are not in concrete but they are just some examples of how the event could be set up.

I just want to reinforce that I think we need to create something that will give us a “win.” I do not think it would be worth the community’s time to just have another forum with no outcome.

(Nancy Renfro) These are great ideas and I will tell you that we do have a brand new logo.

(Med) How large have meetings been that you have had in the past?

(Nancy Renfro) 150-175 attendees and these are the people that are not coming to the police sponsored events. I don’t know that we felt that is was an extremely successful meeting. We had a follow-up meeting two weeks later to get feedback and we had 50 people there. They expressed that they wanted direct interaction with the police. I met with Chief Williamson as well. One of the things that he told me is that it is difficult for them to attend a meeting and not be able to respond to some questions. It makes them feel uncomfortable. I put myself in his position and I wouldn’t like it either. But, I do think there are some legitimate issues that have to be discussed.

Our conclusion is that we think there is a system that is at fault. Hopefully, what we can do together is address the system.

(Ms. Renfro read from a document provided by the National Chiefs of Police). She stated the document is very controversial but Faith In Action thinks that it can be used as a template for the way that law enforcement is conducted.

(Med) Some of the language that you read reminded me of my ride along. They have stuff posted on the wall at the detention center that talks about the responsibilities of law enforcement officers and the respect that they must have toward citizens. I almost wanted to take a picture of what I saw on the wall because that is what the mission is but that is not what the perception is that most people have about law enforcement officers.

(Sca) It could be great if the public knew that the mission statement is.

(Cav) I think part of the problem is that when an officer could have used deadly force but decides not to, it doesn’t make the news. Unfortunately, when there is an event that has

a pending criminal or civil case law enforcement won't speak openly about that case so you hear one side of a sensational story.

Some of the language is from a report by the civilian oversight commission in San Francisco. It includes what they see as best practices going forward and is related to the idea that we will not be able to talk about specific cases going forward. Something that you encounter in mediation or restorative justice like war crimes tribunals in Rwanda for example, one of the cornerstones of successful mediation has always been acknowledging wrongdoing and then forgiveness. This is one of the huge factors for us. We have to be cognizant of the fact that we probably won't be able to acknowledge wrongdoing on either side or get conclusive forgiveness.

We need to find a way to look at small steps going forward. That is one of the things that I like about best practices, they are not binding or obligatory but they help to get everyone on the same page.

It may make sense to break down into small working groups; a member of law enforcement, a member of the Commission, and a member of the community.

(Sca) Maybe one of the ways to have one-on-one communication is to break out into group to have a conversation. This may help us to see the heart behind the uniform.

(Cav) **Commissioner made a MOTION to charge the Human Relations Commission Ad-Hoc Committee to establish a plan for the HRC to facilitate an open dialogue between law enforcement and community groups in 2016. SECOND by Commissioner Mitchell. VOTE: All Ayes**

5. Old Business:

a) Discussion of "Piggybacking", Community Voices, Workshops.

(Sca) Our planning matrix tells us what we are going to do, who was going to do it, and then we follow up to see how we did.

Last year we attended the MLK breakfast, completed the Prop. 47 Resource Guide, Assisted Michael with review of the County EEO Plan, attended a BPD meeting, performed civic engagement, and attended Veteran's Stand Down.

We did not revisit Prop. 47 last year. I wanted to say thank you and kudos to all of the work that you did last year.

The community relations piece that we have taken on may take priority over other activities in the short-term but I do want to think about the voter registration event that we have discussed.

We also talked about having a community forum about understanding the Muslim community. I think that we may want to consider an event about understanding the Sikh community. We have a very large Sikh community in Kern County and there is often confusion about the differences between Sikhs and Muslims. I think that event may be more manageable and we may have a better outcome.

(Med) The Sikh community has not reached out to us but the Muslim community has. They have expressed some concerns to us about how they are viewed by non-Muslims so I don't think that we should forget that. They did come to us with a request.

(Sca) I don't think that we should forget that either but I don't think that this is a right time for hosting a forum. We talked about going to other peoples meetings and having a presence. I do not want to give the impression that we are disregarding that they came to us. But, I think that the event may be unmanageable. Since they have already reached out to us it may be time for us to reach back out to them. We may want to find something that they are doing and participate in their event.

(Mit) What was the request that they made to us?

(Cav) Basically for the Commission to help the community understand what the Muslim community is all about and to create greater sensitivity to them.

(Mit) Maybe it is a better idea to do a multicultural festival or forum to bring the community together. You could use food, culture, dance, etc... to bring down walls and bring the community together.

(Med) What about piggybacking on the annual interfaith event that happens at Bakersfield College? Maybe we can think about the Commission attending that function and creating a presence. To me that makes more sense and is more inclusive. I can find out when the event is going to happen.

I would also like to propose that for the fourth quarter activity we participate in the Veteran's Stand Down again. I also think we should try to strategically place our booth near the veteran's court tent. It may assist veterans that are trying to clear their criminal record to know that there is a Human Relations Commission. We could also have a copy of the Prop. 47 Resource Guide available.

(Sca) We will start the Ad-Hoc Committee for April. And we can add a voting event in the second quarter as well.

(Ber) I am interested in doing something related to sponsoring a positive political discourse debate.

(Sca) Maybe we could do that as part of the voter event.

b) Speaker invitation form

(Sca) We have talked about creating a form and a data-base to send out to community members. I have given you a template of the form and we can talk about it in the future.

c) Planning Matrix

As discussed

6. **Committee Reports:**

Tabled to 4/12/16

7. **Staff Report:**

(Goulart) I will be out of the office from March 26 to April 11. Please contact Keri Pharis in my office if you need any assistance while I am out.

8. **Commission Member Presentations or Announcements:**

(Med) The Community Action Partnership of Kern Food Bank will be holding its “Stuff the Bus” food drive on Friday March 18th, at Valley Plaza Mall, corner of Ming and Wible, from 4:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. They are looking for non-perishable canned or boxed food items. You can also drop off cash or check donations.

(Sca) The Friendship Advisory Board is recruiting for members. The Board is a subset of the Governing Board at CAPK with a focus on the Friendship House. We meet quarterly for one hour and focus on the tutoring program.

9. **Adjournment: Motion: Scales 2nd: Mitchell Vote: all ayes 7:05 p.m.**