

**Human Rights Board  
Pinellas County  
June 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

The Human Rights Board (HRB) met in regular session at 10:01 AM on this date in the Fifth Floor Conference Room at the Office of Human Rights (OHR), 400 South Fort Harrison Avenue, Clearwater, Florida.

**Present**

Charles W. Thomas, Chair, Tax Collector  
Mike Twitty, Vice-Chair, Property Appraiser  
Lisa Arispe, Employees' Advisory Council Representative  
Tim Closterman, representing Julie Marcus, Supervisor of Elections  
Ricardo Davis, representing Joan M. Vecchioli, Unified Personnel Board Representative  
Teresa Del Rio, representing Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller  
Rodney Marion, representing Barry A. Burton, County Administrator  
Jeff Rohrs, Chief Information Officer, Business Technology Services  
Peggy Rowe, Interim Director, Human Resources

**Not Present**

Kathleen Peters, County Commissioner

**Others Present**

Jeffery Lorick, Director, OHR  
Keiah Townsend, Assistant County Attorney  
Betina Baron, Compliance Manager, OHR  
Teresa Ribble, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk  
Other interested individuals

*All documents provided to the Clerk's Office have been made a part of the record.*

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Thomas called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM, and staff conducted a roll call of those present; whereupon, responding to a query by Mr. Twitty, Mr. Lorick confirmed that those representing Board members executed a proxy form and have the ability to vote at today's meeting.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MARCH 14, 2023 MEETING**

Mr. Twitty made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 14 meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Arispe and carried unanimously.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No one appeared in response to Chair Thomas' call for public comment.

## **COUNCIL (PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES) MEMBER RENEWAL**

Mr. Lorick introduced the item, noting that Ms. Baron is the OHR staff member for the Council for Persons with Disabilities; whereupon, he requested that she provide a report on recent changes and updates.

Referring to a document included in the agenda materials, Ms. Baron indicated that all seven of the County Commission appointees to the Council were up for renewal; that there were three new appointees, with the remainder being reappointed; and that the Parks and Conservation Resources Department has been submitting plans regarding playground accessibility to the Council for input and feedback.

Mr. Lorick added that one of the Council's significant initiatives has been installation of Mobi-Mats at local beaches; that a ribbon cutting was held recently at Sand Key Park to celebrate the addition of a mat; that 14 mats are now in place at local beaches; and that the mats make beaches more accessible for persons with disabilities.

In response to a query by Chair Thomas, Mr. Lorick related that the Council acts as a consultant regarding accessibility issues.

## **ADA TRANSITIONAL PLAN**

Mr. Lorick provided historical information regarding the decision to seek a consultant for potentially implementing an ADA Transitional Plan and indicated that a consultant with experience working with jurisdictions of similar size was located and has provided an estimated cost; and that a letter from the consulting firm is included in the agenda materials; whereupon, he related that the County Administrator and Office of Management and Budget staff conveyed that they are not ready to move forward with the Transitional Plan at this time.

Responding to queries by Chair Thomas and Mr. Davis, Mr. Lorick indicated that it is his understanding that the County Administrator will be meeting with staff to discuss how to

move forward; and that an ADA Transitional Plan would be a comprehensive audit of the County as it relates to ADA compliance. A brief discussion ensued.

## **OHR BUDGET**

Mr. Lorick provided a summary of the OHR's budget proposal for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, noting a slight increase of 2.7% in Personal Services and an increase to Operating Expenses of 3.1%. He explained that the rise in overall operating expenses is due to the anticipated usage of the LanguageLine service and an expected increase in cost of legal services due to the volume of cause finding cases and the need for additional law firms to work on these cases.

In response to a query by Mr. Closterman, Mr. Lorick indicated that the breakdown of monthly data shows that usage of the LanguageLine service is across all County departments.

A motion was made by Mr. Davis to approve the proposed OHR FY 2024 budget. The motion was seconded by Mr. Twitty and carried unanimously.

## **PARTNERSHIP OUTREACH**

Ms. Baron indicated that grant funding from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allows for coordination of educational outreach efforts and provided information regarding a recent partnership event with the Property Appraiser's Office at the North Greenwood Recreation Center and an upcoming fair housing training event in partnership with Bay Area Apartment Association. She noted that the funding also provided the opportunity for the purchase of new OHR and fair housing brochures.

At Mr. Lorick's request, Ms. Baron reported that through additional HUD funding which focuses on training opportunities, the National Fair Housing Alliance will be conducting conciliation training for Pinellas OHR staff, as well as several other municipalities from Florida; and that the event will be held in July at the Pinellas County Supervisor of Elections' offices.

## **PARTNERSHIP – AMENDED CONTRACT/ENGAGEMENT LETTER**

Attorney Townsend provided an overview of an engagement letter which is sent to prospective legal providers, noting that additional attorneys are being sought due to the influx of cases that OHR is experiencing.

She reviewed a pricing structure amendment to the legal providers' contract, specifying that a \$6,000.00 flat fee, which includes 40 billable attorney hours, is being instituted over the former \$90 per hour fee; whereupon, she noted that the intent of the pricing amendment is to assist with attracting legal providers in the midst of inflationary issues.

Responding to a query by Mr. Twitty, Attorney Townsend, with input by Mr. Lorick, related that the contract contains an option for negotiation if an attorney indicates the need for additional billable hours; whereupon, in response to a query by Chair Thomas, Mr. Lorick briefly discussed reasons for the increase in cases.

## **ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY**

Mr. Lorick indicated that based on the discussion related to the anti-harassment policy at the last meeting of the HRB, he requested that the topic be placed on an agenda of the Unified Personnel Board (UPB) for a review as to whether the policy revision should be undertaken by the HRB; and that Attorney Townsend has also met with the attorney for the UPB to discuss the policy.

Attorney Townsend indicated that she would first like to answer a question posed by the HRB at the last meeting related to the authority of the HRB to govern the anti-harassment policy; whereupon, she confirmed that since the policy was implemented by this Board, it does have the authority to oversee and govern it. Attorney Townsend related that she would like to continue discussions with the UPB's attorney; that there appears to be interest by the UPB to develop an umbrella-type of anti-harassment policy; and that she would like to develop options for the HRB to consider regarding how it would like to move forward.

Mr. Lorick related that the attorney for the UPB has provided a template, which is included in the agenda materials, of what such a policy might look like and clarified that while the UPB may be interested in adopting an anti-harassment policy, it does not appear to be interested in being part of the procedural aspects which the OHR utilizes to conduct its investigations.

Responding to a query and comment by Ms. Arispe, Mr. Lorick confirmed that discussions with the UPB do not indicate that two separate anti-harassment policies are being considered; and that the suggestion to add continual action verbiage to the 365-day complaint timeframe in the policy will be made; and that he and Attorney Townsend discuss all suggestions for revision made by the HRB members; whereupon, Attorney Townsend noted that the policy is, at this point, a working draft.

A brief discussion ensued; whereupon, Mr. Lorick requested that no action be taken by the HRB at this time so that discussions can continue.

## **DIRECTOR REVIEW/SALARY INCREASE**

Mr. Lorick provided an overview of some of the member feedback included on his performance evaluation, including the status of the development of the diversity dashboard and a summary of OHR goals, initiatives, and successes under his leadership.

Chair Thomas commended Mr. Lorick's performance, noted the percentage of increase that he received last year, and indicated that he is well below the midpoint for his pay grade; whereupon, he proposed a 4 or 5% increase. Ms. Rowe concurred with the assessment of Mr. Lorick's performance and expressed her support for an increase.

A discussion ensued with regard to Mr. Davis' remark regarding the possibility that pay range adjustments move more quickly than Mr. Lorick's pay increases. Chair Thomas offered that the adjustments tend to be between 2 and 3%, with Mr. Marion reminding the members that some of the increases were in the form of a lump sum rather than increasing the wage rate; whereupon, a motion was made by Mr. Davis to provide a 5% increase to the salary of Mr. Lorick.

A lengthy discussion ensued regarding Mr. Lorick's current salary, the midpoint amount for his pay range, options for closing the current midpoint gap, special merit increases, equity adjustments, pay retroactivity, and the pay increase process historically utilized by the Board; whereupon, Mr. Marion, expressed that he would prefer that Mr. Burton, who is not present at today's meeting, be provided information regarding the justification and impact of an increase.

An additional brief discussion ensued, with Ms. Rowe recommending that the Board approve the 5% increase earlier moved by Mr. Davis; and that the Human Resources Department conduct a wage rate market study related to similar positions and develop a strategy for moving Mr. Lorick closer to the midpoint over time; whereupon, Mr. Marion expressed concern regarding members, such as Mr. Burton and Mr. Burke, not being present for this decision.

A motion was made by Mr. Marion for the Human Resources Department to conduct a wage market rate study, for the study information to be provided to the Board members, for all Board members to be part of any decision made regarding an increase, and for any increase to be retroactive to today's date. The motion was seconded by Ms. Rowe.

Attorney Townsend indicated that she will research retroactivity in order to assure the appropriateness of it in this type of circumstance.

Chair Thomas indicated that a special meeting of the HRB will be scheduled so as not to delay the discussion until the next regular meeting; whereupon, Ms. Rowe confirmed that between four and six weeks would be a sufficient amount of time for the HR Department to conduct the market study.

Upon call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

## **DISCUSSION**

None.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Lorick requested a motion to adjourn the meeting; whereupon, following a motion made by Ms. Arispe, the meeting adjourned at 11:08 AM.