

**Human Rights Board
Pinellas County
June 23, 2025 Meeting Minutes**

The Human Rights Board (HRB) met in special session at 10:00 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

René Flowers, Chair, County Commissioner
Ken Burke, Vice-Chair, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Lisa Arispe, Employees' Advisory Council Representative
Wade Childress, Chief Human Resources Officer
Julie Marcus, Supervisor of Elections
Jeff Rohrs, Chief Information Officer, Business Technology Services (BTS)
Adam Ross, Tax Collector
Amanda Smith, representing Barry A. Burton, County Administrator
Mike Twitty, Property Appraiser

Not Present

Barry A. Burton, County Administrator
Ricardo Davis, Unified Personnel Board Representative

Others Present

Betina Baron, Compliance Manager, OHR
Keiah Townsend, Assistant County Attorney
Tammy Burgess, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

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

CALL TO ORDER/ATTENDANCE

Chair Flowers called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. Staff conducted a roll call of those present; whereupon, Chair Flowers confirmed the presence of a quorum.

Chair Flowers indicated that OHR Director Jeffery Lorick is not present at today's meeting.

Addressing individuals observing the meeting, Chair Flowers requested that they leave the room when the Board begins its discussion; whereupon, Attorney Townsend, with

input by Mr. Burke, clarified that this is a public meeting; and that while the Chair can request that individuals leave the room, they may choose to stay.

Following introductory comments by Chair Flowers, Supervisor Marcus expressed concern regarding the process currently being utilized to select a new OHR Director, her perception of a lack of openness and transparency surrounding the process, and wording in recent HRB meeting agendas; whereupon, she noted that she has yet to receive any communication stating that Mr. Lorick is leaving the OHR.

In response to a query by Chair Flowers, Ms. Baron indicated that today's agenda was prepared by staff based on the vote taken at the June 3 HRB meeting; whereupon, Chair Flowers addressed Supervisor Marcus' concerns and provided details related to the timeline of when Mr. Lorick notified her and the Board of County Commissioners of his retirement, discussion at the June 3 HRB meeting regarding a process to select a new OHR Director, and the potential internal promotion of Ms. Baron.

Thereupon, discussion ensued regarding various topics, including the following:

- Transparency surrounding the selection process
- Decisions made at the June 3 HRB meeting
- Methods for appointing other County directors
- Succession management and planning

Chair Flowers indicated that she would like to amend the agenda to reflect the following: *Call to Order/Attendance, Presentation from Betina Baron for Consideration, Question and Answer, Discussion, Vote, and Adjournment*; whereupon, Mr. Ross made a motion to amend the agenda, which was seconded by Ms. Smith and carried unanimously.

Thereupon, Chair Flowers indicated that she will ensure that there is better communication going forward; and that future meeting agendas will be clearer so that the members may determine if they will attend or send someone on their behalf, particularly with regard to potential action items.

PRESENTATION FROM BETINA BARON FOR CONSIDERATION

Ms. Baron distributed her resumé to the members; whereupon, she provided details regarding her experience, current job duties, and potential future plans for the OHR Department.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

In response to queries by the members, Ms. Baron discussed various topics, including the following:

- OHR's promotion of employee and citizen rights
- Techniques for managing stress
- Internal and external communication strategies
- Leadership style and experience
- Relationship with the HRB

Ms. Smith left the meeting at 10:58 AM.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Twitty referred to a document provided by Ms. Arispe and indicated that it states that five OHR staff have asked that an open search be conducted; and that the five staff members also requested to have a role in the selection process, as they have in the past; whereupon, brief discussion ensued regarding whether OHR staff have previously provided formal input regarding the selection of a new OHR Director.

In response to a query by Ms. Baron, Chair Flowers clarified that the Board's discussion will include consideration of Ms. Baron as the interim or permanent Director, as well as the compensation related to each.

At Chair Flowers' request, Ms. Baron left the meeting at 11:15 AM.

Chair Flowers requested that the members provide input regarding whether to appoint Ms. Baron as the interim or permanent OHR Director. Thereupon, discussion ensued wherein the members provided the following input:

- Messrs. Childress, Twitty, and Ross provided brief comments regarding their confidence in Ms. Baron and expressed their support for her to serve as the interim or permanent OHR Director.
- While Mr. Rohrs provided brief comments regarding his confidence in Ms. Baron, he indicated that he is also weighing the risk of utilizing succession management rather than an open selection process.
- Referring to the document wherein five OHR staff requested that an open search be conducted, Ms. Arispe related that, since she represents the employees, she believes that an open recruitment process should be utilized.

- Mr. Burke indicated that he believes that the Board should appoint Ms. Baron as the OHR Director, citing her role in the successful resolution of many issues for the Clerk's Office.
- Supervisor Marcus provided brief comments regarding the complexity of the position and indicated that, in response to her earlier question to Ms. Baron, she received a process-based response when she was expecting a director-type response; whereupon, she noted that she would like for the Board to ensure that whoever is selected for the position is ready for the level of responsibility that the position requires.
- Chair Flowers provided brief comments regarding her experience with succession management, noting that leadership experience is often gained on the job. She also referenced recent conversations wherein Ms. Baron confirmed that she would be willing to attend training for the purpose of elevating her managerial skills; and that Ms. Baron also agreed to conduct an internal scale-up survey to gauge the culture and environment within the department.

Thereupon, discussion ensued regarding the ability to double encumber the OHR Director position and the process previously utilized to select Mr. Lorick as OHR Director.

VOTE

Mr. Burke made a motion to appoint Ms. Baron as the Director of the OHR. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ross. Following additional brief discussion, and upon the Chair's call for the vote to select Ms. Baron as the permanent Director of the OHR, the motion carried 6 to 2, with Ms. Arispe and Supervisor Marcus dissenting.

Thereupon, referring to a document titled *Office of Human Rights Director Salary Review June 2025*, Chair Flowers indicated that she requested that Mr. Childress provide information regarding the current salaries of Ms. Baron and Mr. Lorick; and that the document also includes details related to Ms. Baron's requested compensation, as well as a compensation recommendation from Human Resources (HR).

Following brief discussion, and in response to queries by Mr. Burke, Mr. Childress provided details regarding the OHR Director position's current pay grade, Ms. Baron's requested compensation, and the rationale for HR's recommended compensation, which is a 10% increase from Ms. Baron's current salary; whereupon, discussion ensued wherein Mr. Burke made a motion that the Board offer Ms. Baron HR's recommended salary of \$130,827.84, noting that the offer is final and non-negotiable. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ross.

Mr. Childress noted that Ms. Baron also requested that her annual leave accrual be moved to the ten-year mark. Following brief discussion, he noted that HR's recommendation is that her leave accrual remain the same since there is no existing amount of experience to match her ten-year mark request. Responding to comments by Messrs. Burke and Ross, Chair Flowers confirmed that Mr. Burke's motion is to proceed with HR's recommendation of \$130,827.84, under pay grade E35, and to maintain Ms. Baron's annual leave accrual rate at 160 hours; whereupon, following Chair Flowers' call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Burke made a motion authorizing Chair Flowers to extend the salary projection and offer to Ms. Baron. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ross and carried unanimously.

At Chair Flowers' request, Ms. Baron returned to the meeting at 11:51 AM.

Thereupon, Chair Flowers presented the offer to Ms. Baron and indicated that there will be regular check-ins to review her progress; whereupon, Mr. Burke noted that Ms. Baron would also be part of the senior management class in the Florida Retirement System. Following brief comments, Ms. Baron indicated that while she disagrees with the compensation amount, she accepts the position.

Chair Flowers noted that Mr. Childress will follow-up with Ms. Baron regarding any necessary paperwork that needs to be completed; whereupon, brief discussion ensued regarding the timing of Mr. Lorick's retirement and Ms. Baron's official start date. Responding to a query and comments by Mr. Burke and Ms. Baron, Chair Flowers also confirmed that she will announce Ms. Baron's promotion to the OHR staff.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Flowers adjourned the meeting at 11:58 AM.