

Human Rights Board
Pinellas County
December 9, 2025 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

René Flowers, Chair, County Commissioner
Lisa Arispe, Employees' Advisory Council Representative
Barry A. Burton, County Administrator
Maria Ciro, representing Wade Childress, Chief Human Resources Officer
Ricardo Davis, Unified Personnel Board Representative
Teresa Del Rio, representing Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Natasha Francis, representing Adam Ross, Tax Collector
Jeff Rohrs, Chief Information Officer, Business Technology Services (BTS)
Mike Twitty, Property Appraiser

Not Present

Ken Burke, Vice-Chair, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Wade Childress, Chief Human Resources Officer
Julie Marcus, Supervisor of Elections
Adam Ross, Tax Collector

Others Present

Betina Baron, Director, OHR
Keiah Townsend, Assistant County Attorney
Jessica Oakes, 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 10:01 AM; whereupon, staff conducted a roll call of the members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 2025 MEETING

Mr. Twitty made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Del Rio and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

In response to a query by Chair Flowers, Ms. Baron confirmed that there is no one present for public comment.

Ms. Baron indicated that a student from St. Petersburg College (SPC) is attending as a guest; whereupon, Taylor Schisler introduced herself.

WEB ACCESSIBILITY UPDATE

Ms. Baron referenced a document provided to the members and explained that, due to a ruling from last June, government agencies of 50,000 or more employees are now required to complete web accessibility updates, including to their websites, documents, and mobile applications, by April 2026. She indicated that staff has been in contact with BTS and the Communications Department with regard to navigating the guidelines; and that the document provided to the members contains a summary of the requirements.

Mr. Rohrs related that BTS has been working toward the standard for four years; that every website maintained by BTS, including attached documents, is fully compliant; that internet-facing mobile and web applications still need to be updated; and that compliance language has been included in vendor contracts for the past three years; whereupon, he noted that BTS is not responsible for some websites and mobile applications, including those managed by some of the Constitutional Officers.

Responding to a query by Mr. Twitty, Mr. Rohrs confirmed that paid applications which are internet-facing, and which serve the public, are required to meet the same standards. In response to queries by Messrs. Burton and Twitty, Attorney Townsend, with input from Ms. Baron, provided details regarding staff's ongoing efforts related to external links; whereupon, following brief discussion, Ms. Baron noted that staff is monitoring other websites to identify any changes, progress, or recommendations which may help determine whether the County's accessibility statement should be modified.

EMPLOYEE VOICE SURVEY

Ms. Baron referenced the Employee Voice Survey results included in the agenda packet and noted that the OHR's results have improved since 2017. She discussed efforts to improve employee morale and create a positive work environment and provided brief comments regarding categories which received lower ratings, such as compensation and welcoming employee involvement in decision-making; whereupon, during discussion regarding the survey results, Ms. Baron provided details regarding the time period during which the survey was conducted.

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD) / EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (EEOC) UPDATE

Ms. Baron indicated that the OHR immediately received communications from federal monitors once federal operations resumed; and that HUD has begun assigning case numbers again. She related that while the OHR has yet to receive vouchers from HUD, a voucher has been received from the EEOC; that staff is awaiting an update from HUD regarding whether additional grant funding will be available to the OHR for laptops or partnership funds; and that training funds received from the federal government have decreased; whereupon, Ms. Baron noted that payment for last fiscal year's case processing is anticipated to be received soon; and that the OHR is entering new case processing periods for both HUD and the EEOC.

Chair Flowers referenced Ms. Baron's comments regarding decreased training funds being received from the federal government and noted that she asked Ms. Baron to look into other training resources which may be free or less costly; and that required training for staff will be resolved budgetarily; whereupon, Ms. Baron provided brief comments regarding free training opportunities, for which she requires attendance by OHR staff on a regular basis.

PINELLAS COUNTY COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES UPDATE

Ms. Baron noted that the County Council for Persons with Disabilities recently met; and that she is in communication with Council Chair Jody Armstrong to find staff or volunteers who are able to complete beach access surveys, which are required following the re-installation of mobility mats at Madeira Beach; whereupon, Chair Flowers suggested that Ms. Baron reach out to the Mayor of the City of Madeira Beach or to the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Ms. Baron provided clarifying information regarding the beach access surveys' scope and completion requirement and the way in which the initiative to install mobility mats at Pinellas County beaches originated.

Following brief discussion, Chair Flowers noted that those who are interested in volunteering to assist with completing the beach access surveys may contact Ms. Baron.

TAMPA BAY FAIR HOUSING CONSORTIUM SCENARIOS

Ms. Baron noted that the OHR is a long-standing member of the Tampa Bay Fair Housing Consortium; and that, in order to provide the members with visual examples of discrimination complaints that the OHR receives and investigates, she would like to present several skits which were previously created by the Consortium's collective membership; whereupon, she displayed several videos featuring scenarios which depict different forms of discrimination. In response to comments and queries by the members, Ms. Baron also provided clarifying details regarding the manner in which the OHR would respond to each scenario.

Mr. Burton indicated that he will be meeting with Ms. Baron to discuss a request from the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) to review the OHR's functions; whereupon, lengthy discussion ensued regarding the services offered by the OHR and their impacts on residents and potential options for providing such services without an OHR.

FISCAL YEAR 2025 YEAR END REPORT

Ms. Baron referred to a document titled *2025 Human Rights Board Report* and provided detailed information and statistics regarding the following topics:

- Investigation of unlawful discrimination complaints
- Phone calls to the TDD and County accommodation line
- Use of the LanguageLine service for translation requests
- Projected revenue from HUD and the EEOC
- Processing of wage theft cases
- Training and outreach activities

Ms. Baron also provided brief comments regarding the need for more modern telephones in order to ensure that calls to the TDD and County accommodation line can be answered properly; whereupon, in response to comments and a query by Chair Flowers, Ms. Baron provided additional information regarding wage theft cases.

Thereupon, Ms. Baron also referenced an email attached to the agenda packet and noted that it highlights a success story of a local business that addressed an accessibility complaint submitted to the OHR.

OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS UPDATE

Referring to earlier comments by Mr. Burton regarding the BCC's request to review the OHR's functions, Chair Flowers indicated that, in the spring, a workshop will be held, and a presentation will be provided to the Commissioners regarding the OHR's operations, impacts, and budget. She provided brief comments regarding the value of the OHR's services and encouraged the members to attend the workshop in order to demonstrate their support; whereupon, Mr. Burton briefly discussed plans to compare the structure and funding of the OHR's services with those of other local governments and noted that an outside firm has been contracted to assist with compiling the information.

Thereupon, Ms. Baron indicated that she is continuing to meet with individual Commissioners; and that she recently had a positive and informative meeting with Commissioner Scherer.

DISCUSSION

Mses. Ciro and Francis provided input related to information which they believe could be included in the presentation that will be provided to the BCC; whereupon, in response to a query by Ms. Arispe, Mr. Burton provided brief comments regarding the authority of the BCC and clarified that discussions with the Commissioners regarding the OHR relate to the budget for 2027.

Mr. Twitty reported that the Pinellas Realtors Organization has merged with the Suncoast Tampa Association of Realtors.

Thereupon, Ms. Baron provided brief comments regarding the extensive support for the OHR at the State, Federal, and local levels and indicated that hundreds of letters expressing support have been received.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Flowers adjourned the meeting at 11:20 AM.