

**CEDAR RAPIDS CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION
RETREAT NOTES**

March 19, 2014

6:30pm

Civil Rights Commission Office

425 Second Street SE

Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

Commissioners Present: Ms. Emily Bowman, Rev. Tom Capo, Ms. Tamara Cronin, Mr. Leland Freie, Ms. Barb Gay, Vice Chair, Ms. Paulette Hall, Ms. Salma Igram, Mr. Keith Rippey, Chair, Mr. Robin Tucker, Dr. Ruth White

Commissioners Absent: Ms. Laura O’Leary

Staff Present: Mr. John-Paul Chaisson-Cárdenas, Executive Director

Staff Absent: Ms. Stefanie Munsterman-Robinson, Investigator, Ms. Janet Abejo, Investigator, Ms. Monica Challenger, Education & Outreach Coordinator, Ms. Jeanette Gordon, Administrative Assistant, Mr. Zadok Nampala, Intern

Guests: Jim Warford, facilitator; Joseph Stutler, Marion Civil Rights Commission

Executive Directors Recapture of the Retreat (no votes were taken):

First I wanted to start with thanking all the commissioners including the Commissioner from our sister Commission in Marion. I recognize your dedication in giving so many hours of your time for our effort. You are Amazing!!!

I also wanted to recognize **Jim**, our facilitator from last night, for supporting our effort at no cost. Having him direct the meeting allowed me to listen carefully and ask the questions that will allow me to distill your will as the commission body.

Here is what I distilled from our conversation. I am reflecting it to you so that we can have a common understanding of where we are and where we are going so that I can better prepare the DRAFT tactical/strategic plan for your review.

1. **Need for a mission and vision.** After re-reading our statement of purpose (Chapter 69) it is relatively clear that our **mission** is

“To secure for all individuals within the City of Cedar Rapids freedom from discrimination because of age, color, creed, disability, familial status, gender, identity, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.”

I would argue that our **vision** is also delineated in Chapter 69 as: *“and thereby to protect the personal dignity of these individuals, to ensure their full productive capacities, to preserve the public safety,*

health, and general welfare, and to promote the interests, rights, and privileges of individuals within the City of Cedar Rapids.”

I would recommend that the vision simply be a modified version of that sentence.

“A Cedar Rapids Community that is welcoming, inclusive and preserves the personal dignity all people regardless of their age, color, creed, disability, familial status, gender identity, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation so that we all may fulfill our productive capacities.”

2. **Talking about CRCRC and the work:** I heard some folks asking us to provide some language for you to be able to speak about our work. I would remind you that you approved some talking points last year. They are below my signature for your convenience.
3. **Investigation and Compliance:** I heard a strong consensus on our effort to continue to enhance our investigation, compliance and mediation programs. E.g. hiring new investigators, lean process, online case management, etc.
4. **Community Outreach:** I had a strong consensus to continue enhancing our community outreach and education programs by:
 - a. Shining the light on issues of disproportionality. E.g.: State of Equity Process and Reports
 - b. Fostering community dialogue that promotes a welcoming and inclusive community. E.g.: Fair Housing Summit, partnerships with the city, media and other organizations such as the Casey Families Leadership Group, the PUSH Coalition, etc.
 - c. Increased training and technical support for government agencies, community organizations, etc.
 - d. Early intervention and community facilitation efforts where policies or practices may not yet be legally discriminatory but have the potential to be. E.g.: Fire truck issue, school to prison pipeline, academic achievement gaps, absent fathers/re-entry issues as related to incarceration, etc.
5. **Outcomes/Results:** The one area where we (the staff) still need guidance is in answering this question in a way that we can measure “***What will be different because the CRCRC is doing all of this work?***” (A.K.A: the result). Because the days are getting short before I must provide a tactical plan to you, and because we have no meeting in April due to the summit – I would like to propose that the staff put together some proposals for you at the May meeting (rather than giving you the full strategic plan). Get your feedback/approval and present the full plan at the June Commission meeting.

If I do not hear back from folks I will assume that my assumptions (above), proposals and timeline are a common understanding sufficient for the drafting process. That said, please remember that

you will still have a chance to review, discuss and modify and vote on the DRAFT tactical plan before it becomes effective.

Thank you and if you have any questions, I am available at your pleasure.

John-Paul Chaisson-Cardenas, MSW
Executive Director

General Knowledge Talking Points

Who we are:

The Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission (CRCRC) is the Local Administrative Law Agency charged with securing all individuals within the City of Cedar Rapids from discrimination because of age, color, creed, disability, family status, gender identity, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation in connection with employment, public accommodations, housing, credit and education.

What we do:

With the understanding that investigation and compliance is the floor not the roof of our efforts, the civil rights commission uses a three prong approach to its work.

The Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission (CRCRC) strategy is:

- **Civil Rights Discrimination Investigation and Enforcement:** The CRCRC, in partnership with state and federal agencies, enforces eight federal, state and local laws which prohibit job discrimination by private employers, labor organizations and/or state and local government agencies.
- **Community Outreach and Education:** The CRCRC serves as a source of information for individuals, employers, local government and community organizations related to anti-discrimination law and policy, the effects of discriminatory acts and practices, the well-being underserved and underrepresented groups and the communities with a protected status.
- **Strategic Identification and Partnership Efforts:** The CRCRC actively partners with local government, local employers and community organizations in their efforts to make sure that Cedar Rapids is a place where all of its citizens can experience dignity, fairness and the fruits of building a greater community now and for the next generation.



Additional concept to keep in mind:

Civil Rights law codifies the basic rights that all people of a society are supposed to have, e.g. the right to vote or to receive fair treatment from the law. It is the “bottom” or “the line we shall not cross” when it comes to decency towards our fellow community members. The commission’s work goes beyond investigation and enforcement. It goes towards making our community a place where we **all**, in the fullness of our diversity, want to live.

Submitted by John-Paul Chaisson-Cárdenas, Executive Director