

## Adopted Minutes of HRC Meeting Tuesday, March 5, 2019

Members Present: Whitley, Walsh, Rodriguez, Fenton and Carella

Members Absent: Rossi and Melara

Staff Present: Caiazzi

The Meeting was called to order by Chairperson Carella at 5:45 p.m..

Carella moved to accept Proposed Minutes from HRC Meeting of February 5, 2019. Fenton seconded. All members present voted in the affirmative and the Minutes were adopted.

Caiazzi told the Commissioners that there were no new claims; she reported that “race” as a category on applications for housing was mandated by the federal government and, consequently, despite the CHA not relying on race in its selection process, the category was necessary for statistical purposes. Carella indicated that she reviewed the CHA’s handouts relative to selection criteria and had a more complete understanding although some of the methods were more challenging to understand. Carella being satisfied that she had no further specific questions for the CHA, Walsh indicated that she felt that the CHA put its best foot forward in addressing the HRC, trying to answer as many questions in a general way as possible without diving deeply into nuance. Caiazzi informed the group that she had received no questions from the HRC members since the prior meeting regarding the CHA’s methods; Carella suggested that any further issues related to housing selection needed to come to the HRC in the form of a formal investigation with specific complainants and specific issues.

Caiazzi handed out the City’s Wage Theft Ordinance and explained that it pertained to contracts between the City and vendors. She also handed out material from the Attorney General’s website regarding wages and time off, in the context of suggesting the HRC consider whether, and to what extent, it wanted to educate itself on wage issues affecting Chelsea’s population, some of who, through the Chelsea Collaborative, expressed an interest to meet with the City Solicitor. Rodriguez indicated that he had worked with the Collaborative on such issues and concluded that many people who felt they had been treated unfairly (for example, being fired or let go but never receiving wages they had earned prior to termination) did not want to attempt to rectify the injustice for fear of retaliation or their legal status in the United States. Caiazzi explained that the Attorney General’s Office fielded such complaints and had the power to enforce laws requiring payment of wages for work actually done. Moreover, wage laws applied equally regardless of immigration status. Rodriguez indicated that owners would have to charge more for their products or services unless they paid workers “under the table” and that the entire scheme (wherein owners cheated employees and employees took no action because some job was better than none) was part of the fabric of life for certain Chelsea workers.

Carella queried whether the workers would feel comfortable speaking of the HRC instead of, or in addition to, the Chelsea Collaborative. Rodriguez indicated that it was an issue of trust—the workers were more inclined to go to the Collaborative in the first instance because they were instinctively mistrustful of City Hall. Whitley wondered whether Rodriguez felt that all Chelsea businesses were conducted in this way or just Spanish businesses. Rodriguez felt that the larger employers did not have this issue, but certainly small businesses did and do. The Collaborative’s value was to reach out to both sides, explaining the other side’s position, and seek a mediated solution that minimized embarrassment for employers and maximized owed-pay to workers. Carella asked if what the Collaborative was doing for residents was the same thing that the HRC could do for them. Caiazzi indicated that, procedurally,

yes. Rodriguez indicated that the workers trusted the Collaborative and, for that reason, would be more inclined to start there than with the HRC.

Carella suggested that staff from the HRC reach out to the Collaborative. Fenton suggested the HRC offer whatever help it could in the Collaborative's effort, with the understanding that the HRC does not deal with generalities but rather specific complaints by individuals who need to disclose their identities in order for the HRC to properly investigate. Carella indicated that, if nothing else, the HRC may be able to shine a spotlight on the behavior complained of.

Turning to new business, Reverend Whitley mentioned that the Chief Justice from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court will be visiting Chelsea soon; perhaps the group could make a showing and discuss the wage theft issues Chelsea faces with him.

Carella moved to adjourn. Fenton seconded the motion. All present voted in the affirmative. The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.