

EDINA HUMAN RIGHTS & RELATIONS COMMISSION
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2009
7:00 PM – MAYOR’S CONFERENCE ROOM

Members Present

Arnie Bigbee
John Cashmore
Lisa Finsness
Jessi Kingston
Bob Mayer
Meg Newell
Ralph Overholt
Russ Stanton

Members Absent

Shara Mohtadi, Student
Emma Weisberg, Student

Guests

Phil Duran
Meredith Pedroza

Staff

Susan Howl

OutFront Minnesota Staff Attorney Introduced and Welcomed

Phil Duran, Staff Attorney for OutFront Minnesota, and an intern, Meredith Pedroza, were introduced and welcomed. He shared the organization’s mission statement: "OutFront Minnesota's mission is to make our state a place where GLBT Minnesotans have the freedom, power, and confidence to make the best choices for their own lives." OutFront Minnesota is the largest organization of its kind in the state and is known for its work at the Legislature. The definition of a domestic partner is someone who serves a role in another person’s life without a legally-recognized marriage. Domestic partner relationships resemble married couples, and these partner relationships can be same-sex or different-sex.

Because of the immergence of AIDS in the 1980’s and its association with same-sex partners, insurance companies have been reluctant to allow partners to be added to health plans. Employers have worked with insurance companies to come up with a new concept: private employment-based arrangements regarding domestic partnerships. At this time, 3000 private employers offer domestic partner benefits. COBRA does not apply to domestic partners. Under the IRS, spousal benefits are considered fringe benefits; the federal government does not recognize domestic partnerships, but partner benefits are taxable income to employees. There is no standardized license for domestic partners, so employers must create their own. The greatest concern at this time is State law which points out that local government can only add employees’ spouses and children to their coverage by premium-based health insurance. Currently, municipalities are creating ways to define “family” and “eligibility” for a benefit plan, which would be less formal than a health plan.

What the City of Edina cannot do as a local government is to extend medical benefits to its employees’ partners; however, benefits such as sick time and leaves of absence might become possibilities.

What the City of Edina can do as a local government is to create a registry ordinance which would be open to everyone. This was done by Minneapolis in 1991 and by Duluth and St. Paul in 2009. This registry is considered symbolic in nature, and currently there is no federal movement in this direction.

The Commission might consider pioneering this on behalf of the City, bringing a registry to a centralized place in Edina for keeping signatures on file.

Member Finsness seconded Member Cashmore's motion that the Commission would prepare research as a first step to bring recommendations to the City Council—i.e. an Edina registry, revisions to the City's personnel policy and union contracts regarding non-medical benefits for employees' partners. The motion carried. Members Kingston and Cashmore will compile questions for Ceil Smith, Assistant to the City Manager, and Roger Knutson, City of Edina Legal Counsel, regarding the City's bargaining units and personnel policies.

Minutes Approved

Member Bigbee seconded Member Cashmore's motion to approve the minutes of July 7, 2009; the motion carried.

Member Bigbee seconded Member Overholt's motion to approve the amended minutes of July 21, 2009—changing "Ministry" to "Center" and adding Shara Mohtadi; the motion carried.

Member Kingston seconded Member Bigbee's motion to approve the amended minutes of July 23, 2009—adding Shara Mohtadi; the motion carried.

Co-Representatives Appointed to the Edina Community Council

Member Mayer seconded Member Newell's motion that Members Cashmore and Finsness be Co-Representatives appointed to the Edina Community Council; the motion carried.

Registration Confirmed for the 2009 Human Rights Day Conference & Forum

Because of Bremer mini-grants made available to the League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions, registration for Edina's Commissioners could be covered for attending the 2009 Human Rights Day Conference & Forum on December 4th. The Commissioners all indicated that they would be able to attend this event.

Proposed 2010 Human Services Budget Reformulated

Because of the recently-disclosed news that the human services budget for 2010 would be reduced by ten percent, the amounts for each provider proposed in July were revisited. Three motions failed due to lack of a second motion or a majority of nays.

Member Mayer seconded Member Overholt's motion to reduce the proposed 2010 human services budget by ten percent across the board—to the amount of \$82,381.50; the motion carried.

Member Finsness seconded Member Bigbee's motion to apply the ratio to each signified amount in order to balance the total; the motion carried.

Old Business Carried Over

- Revision and review of Commission Bylaws
- Contact with the School District regarding its Diversity Council
- New information regarding the Commission's domestic partner "project"

New Business Shared

On Tuesday, October 20th, the 2010 proposed human services budget will be presented to the City Council by Chair Stanton. It was recommended that the Commissioners be there to support him.

Meeting Adjourned

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell Stanton, Chair
Edina Human Rights & Relations Commission

RS/sh