Carbondale Human Relations Commission
Minutes – June 2, 2014
Carbondale Civic Center ~ 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Lauren Bonner, Joseph Brown, Peg Falcone, Jerrold Hennrich, Faith Miller, Karriem Shariati, Dora Weaver

Commissioners Excused: Les O'Dell

Commissioners Absent:

Study Circle Staff Present: Sarah Heyer

Guests Present: Rose Berkman, Chris Capps, Roseanna Dorsey, Melvin Holder, Charles Lamont, Mandy Lamont, Michael Levy, Joe Lyell, Eric McMillan, Elius Reed, Geoff Ritter, Tama Weil, Larry Young

Staff Present: Deborah McCoy

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Hennrich at 6:37 p.m.

Minutes

Motion was made by Commissioner Weaver and seconded by Commissioner Falcone to approve the minutes from the May 5, 2014, meeting with the corrections that Mr. Reed was present and where indicated, Ms. France should be Ms. French. Motion carried.

Announcements

Chair Hennrich announced that he would be away on National Guard Duty June 5 through June 21, 2014.

June 5: The Racial Justice Coalition will meet at the Church of the Good Shepherd at 7:00 p.m.

Public Comments:

Chair Hennrich read a letter from Lovely Varughese, mother of SIUC student Pravin Varughese who was found dead on February 18, 2014. Mrs. Varughese expressed the family's frustration resulting from the conflicting reports and responses received from the Carbondale Police Department, Coroner's Office, and Jackson County State's Attorney's Office. Mrs. Varughese indicated that the family wants to find answers, and justice for one is justice for all.

Larry Young, father of Molly Young, commented on the inconsistencies of information and reports regarding Ms. Young's death. Mr. Young stated that it has been 26 months since his daughter's death and he is speaking on behalf of 25,000 Facebook supporters from all over the world. Mr. Young stated that the Coroner was not allowed on the scene until 10 hours after the crime, and was told that because it was a crime scene, he could not enter. The Coroner's Report said that there was no blood present and the death was from an accidental gun

shot. Mr. Young stated that he questioned the motive of other telecommunicator staff who deleted Ms. Young's text messages where she was trying to reach Ritchie Minton. He stated that parents were not notified by the Police Department until noon, and did not notify Chaplain Bob Gray. Mr. Young questioned why the Carbondale Police Department was involved in character assassination of Ms. Young, and why the Sergeant on the scene let Mr. Minton wash his hands and change his clothes. The 911 call came at 9:00 a.m. and three witnesses were sitting on the front porch and were not interviewed. Three police officers were outside the apartment and would not let witnesses give statements. Carbondale Police were in the parking lot at 7:00 a.m., but the 911 call came at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Young commented that he questioned why dispatch would call 911 and not the other line. He stated that all actions point to a disconnect, and if an oath of office cannot be honored, then resignation needs to happen. There is an issue of how witnesses are treated, and victims are not treated with respect. Officers need annual sensitivity training on how to deal with victims. Last July a letter was received indicating the case was being closed because of insufficient evidence. There are no consequences for giving false information. The special prosecutor does not respond. Mr. Young questioned whether Carbondale has solicited information from the public. He stated that witnesses are afraid to come forward because they fear retaliation. The Police Department is not present to talk. The Public Access Council (PAC) with the Attorney General's Office uses technicalities to decline FOIA request. There is no dialogue. Mr. Young stated that it took seven hours to get a search warrant signed. Commissioner Shariati asked whether a Counselor/Chaplain accompanied the officers to the victim's home to inform the relatives, and thought that was standard practice. Mr. McMillan commented that Pastor Gray was informed his services were no longer needed. He added that the International Conference of Police Chaplains (ICPC) trains Chaplains on how to do death notifications, and that is something that is not taught at the Police Academy. Commissioner Brown commented that Pastor Gray was also released from the Chaplain's position at SIU-C. Mr. Young stated that there is a Special Training of Police Officers and Prosecutors (STOPP) and that the VAWA contains the Chrystal Brown Judgment Act for officers involved in domestic violence. Mr. Young indicated that Molly's death was called in to the TV station as a suicide. He stated the Varughese story would be on during Good Morning America on June 3, 2014, and Molly's case would be on Dateline when the court decision is rendered. He stated that forensic science is very clear, but it is being ignored.

Commissioner Falcone stated that she appreciates the recommendations training, and that the HRC can make recommendations to the City Council once it reviews the information. Commissioner Bonner asked whether an open letter to the City Council or Carbondale Police Department, indicating that certain sources are resistant to some of the issues, would be appropriate. She commented that there should be justice for everybody and people should not have to fight for it this hard. She wondered how many people are not standing up because they do not have the resources. Chair Hennrich commented that people will not come forward because they fear repercussions.

Mr. Holder stated that the HRC needs subpoena power. There are issues that need to be addressed, including the Gant situation. Groups can work together to come up with a plan to make Carbondale a better place to live.

Mr. Reed commented on statements, made by State's Attorney Mike Carr at the May HRC meeting, that he considered inaccurate (the 43 shots were fired on Jackson Street in front of 50 people and no one provided information about what was observed). Mr. Reed stated that he questioned several residents of Jackson Street and surrounding streets, between May 8 and May 14, 2014, and no one indicated that they had heard anything about the shots being fired or heard shots. Mr. Reed stated that he had submitted a FOIA Request to the Carbondale Police Department (CPD) on May 14, 2014, for the Incident Report on the situation where the 43 shots were fired. He received a response on May 21, 2014, stating that his request was denied because the matter was still under investigation. Mr. Reed commented on newspaper and other reports regarding Pravin Varughese's injuries and toxicology report. Mr. Reed stated that the confidential witnesses for the Varughese and Molly Young cases are white males and females, and not black males and females.

Commissioner Shariati commented that the trend for the Carbondale Times seems to be a case of discrimination. He stated that he is concerned with low level criminals' pictures being posted all over the paper, while those involved in high profiled cases are not pictured.

Study Circles Report

Neighborhood Action Group

Coordinator Heyer reported the group would be attending a public meeting on Tuesday, June 3, 2014, at the Civic Center, to discuss a permanent Farmers' Market.

Non-Violent Carbondale Project

The Non-Violent Carbondale group will meet on Thursday, June 5, 2014, at the Carbondale Public Library at 4:30 p.m.

Old Business

Law Enforcement Reports: No discussion.

HRC Responsibilities, Role, Charges:

Annual Report: The first draft of the report was disseminated. Commissioner Falcone suggested that an annual report be prepared for 2013 with intentions for 2014. Commissioner Miller suggested that a semi-annual report be considered for 2014. Commissioners agreed to review the report and be prepared for discussion at the July meeting.

Educational Campaign: Discussion regarding a Restorative Justice will be continued and a committee established.

Retreat: To be discussed at the July meeting.

Community Discussions:

Environmental Racism. No updates.

Partnering for Social Justice: No updates.

IMHRA Report: Commissioners Brown and Shariati presented reports on the background of the fair housing act and its implications, how municipalities are dealing with NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard), and the homeless population. Representatives from the Illinois Department of Human Rights were present and panelist represented the U.S. Department of Justice, HUD, Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance, Tri-Couty Regional Planning Commission, Governor Quinn's Office for Long term Care Reform, Illinois Collaboration on Youth, Helping Hands of Springfield, and Supportive Housing Providers Association. The keynote speaker was Jay Ready, Executive Director of the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Mr. Readey spoke on "Integrated Communities and the Wealth of Nations: Getting Ahead of the Wave of Demographic Change."

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New Business

None.

Next Meeting: July 7, 2014, 6:30 p.m.

Adjournment - There being no further business, motion was made by Commissioner Brown and seconded by Commissioner Weaver to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned.

Recorded by Deborah McCoy _____