

# Seattle Human Rights Commission **MINUTES**

Thursday, April 7, 2022

6:00–8:00 p.m.

[WebEx](#)

**Facilitators:** As listed

**Notetaker:** Schuyler Reid  
(Next month: Jessica Bhuiyan)

**Timekeeper:** Jackie Schultz  
(Next month: Allan Nyaribo)

**Commissioners Present (11):** Alexander Tang (Communications Co-Chair), Allan Nyaribo, Erika Chen, Jackie Schultz, Natasha Bennett, Roopali Dhingra (Appeals Chair), Schuyler Reid (5 Commissions Co-Chair), Tyrone Grandison

**Commissioners Absent (no more than 4 absent for quorum):** Julia Ismael (Administrative Co-Chair), Gunneta Chadha, Jessica Bhuiyan

**Seattle Office of Civil Rights Attendee(s):** Marta Idowu, Civil Rights Advisory Commission Liaison, Meredith Stone, Derrick Wheeler Smith (SOCR Interim Director)

**Public Attendees:** Howard Gale (Seattle STOP), Carolyn Bick (South Seattle Emerald), Valerie Schloredt (Seattle STOP), Jo Bechtold (Mockingbird Society), Castill Hightower, Jason Sykes, Elizabeth Stanton

Time	Topic	Presenter
6:00 - 6:05	Land Acknowledgement Call to Order and Roll Call <b>Public Comment/Introductions (1 min each)</b>  Castill Hightower - in 2004 her brother Herbert Hightower Jr was shot and killed by the Seattle Police while he was experiencing a mental health crisis. After more than 10 years, amicus status would be a vital step to ensure accountability by voting in amicus status.  Valerie Schloredt - it is important for SHRC to petition for Amicus status because people who are harmed by bad policing have no voice. We have made no progress and indeed may be going backwards.  Jason Sykes - Works with Seattle group for police accountability. Also here to urge the SHRC to obtain amicus status. We will bring a needed voice in front of the federal courts.  Submitted in writing: On behalf of the Proactive, Persistent, People for Progress, I submit this statement: "SPDs response to the protests following the death of George Floyd raise substantive questions about human rights abuses of Seattle citizens by its own police. The ability to peacefully protest is the cornerstone of our democracy and fundamental to the exercise of our first amendment rights. We ask that the SHRC seek amicus status before the Federal District Court to bring these and other abuses to the attention of the Court." Thank you, Donna Stringer.	Alex Timekeeper

6:05 - 6:10	<p>Approve <a href="#">March Minutes</a> *Needs vote</p> <p><b>Vote on March Meeting Minutes:</b>  <i>Quorum is 7 confirmed commissioners: YES</i>  Motion to approve March 2022 minutes by: Erika  Motion to approve March 2022 minutes Seconded by: Schuyler</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approved:  Alex, Allan, Erika, Jackie, Natasha, Roopali, Schuyler (<i>Ty joined after the vote was completed</i>)</li> <li>Opposed:  None</li> <li>Abstentions:  None</li> </ul>	Alex
<b>WELCOME!</b>		
6:10 - 6:30	Should we continue to keep the applications for the Commission open on a rolling basis?	Alex
<p>Schuyler: Sharing Julia’s position and capacity issues of the Administrative Co-chair managing that in perpetuity. It’s a big ask for one person.</p> <p>Erika: Hard to keep the application open on a rolling basis for Appeals Chairs as well, and making sure that people are onboarded with appeals training. Until we are at capacity or even over capacity, since we know people are leaving, leaving it open in some way makes sense, but we need some sort of priority deadline to get that “push” in place. It’s better to onboard people in groups, in a kind of “cohort.” We should defer to Julia’s capacity if she will be the one running recruitments.</p> <p>Natasha: Can we do a series of priority deadlines? Like we look now, and then again at a set certain date?</p> <p>Ty: What about setting two or three deadlines per year? So we just create two to three cohorts per year? We have a regular cadence and people know when they can expect being reached out to.</p> <p>Agreed to bring this approach to Julia as an option.</p>		
<b>COMMUNITY LEARNING</b>		
6:30 - 7:15	Seattle Office of Civil Rights Director: Questions and Answers	Alex Interim SOCR Director, Derrick Wheeler Smith
<p>Derrick Wheeler-Smith has joined us and shared his background growing up in Seattle. He shared that he is married and has three kids. His focus has been child wellbeing and community transformation work for the past 25 years. This isn’t the only opportunity of being in the same space together so he felt that it would be best to start the journey together by answering the questions in dialogue.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. SOCR sits in the Mayor’s office and as such has a line of accountability, reporting, and management to the Mayor. SOCR also has a responsibility to support the independent advisory boards that are the Commissions. Supporting both missions may not always be consistent and often are not. Your predecessor demonstrated an inclination towards optimizing for the Mayor’s office. What accountability steps and or mechanisms will you take to ensure that the Commissions are fully supported by SOCR and are not encumbered by the Mayor’s Office or SOCR when the Commission’s actions necessitate actions that neither Office may like?</b></li> </ol>		

Derrick: This question highlights what his 6 weeks in this role has shown me. The office is receiving information and resources from throughout the city. There's advocates and activists working in the office. There's external stakeholders. It's given OCR an identity crisis. The system itself is really structured to maintain the structural, racialized power. How can we own and accept that both the oppressed and oppressor lives inside of all of us. How can we create belonging? How can we build shared humanity to dismantle systems? I have seen us "break" instead of "bridge". We should lead with our values, focus on the shared purpose, and build the muscle to have courageous conversations when conflict happens. I have already started having conversations with the mayor about what to do when there is conflict. I don't think that we should just end on "let's agree to disagree." We should keep disagreeing until we have enough common ground to make progress.

**Ty: What are you willing to commit to as an accountability mechanism at this point?**

Derrick: My commitment is to bridge. I don't think we bridge in this work, I think we break. In the past administration, power was leveraged so things couldn't move forward. We need to be intentional about how we humanize this work. We really have to get down into the mud and into the productive bones. My commitment is to lead with our values, find shared purpose, and engage in hard conversations courageously.

**2. On the issue of the Legal Counsel that SOCR provides to help the Commission, is the Counsel's client the City or the Commission? If their client is the City, what measures are in place to ensure the objectivity and confidentiality of information shared with said Counsel from a Commission?**

Derrick: The City's attorney's office advises the city as the client. So they advise the city's departments and commissions as a part of the city. These are not legal entities that are separate from each other. Although the attorney-client privilege applies to the city as a whole, the attorney's office generally refrains from sharing communications from one entity to another. This applies to SHRC as well.

**Ty: I have seen situations where the city attorney has more kinship to the mayor's office and their advice isn't always in the best interest of the commission. Can you recommend a training to the attorney's office so they are aware that we are also covered?**

Derrick: That's a part of what I mean by saying we need to create a shared language, so that everyone understands that SHRC are also covered by this, when there is a gap and people aren't aligned, we can get aligned. I'm not saying to call people out, I'm saying to call people in. That's how we can make change.

**Ty: It's normally minority communities that are harmed and there's no accountability mechanism to enforce these issues and there's no harm reduction.**

Derrick: Often times when we are strategically placed, that the system sets up Heroes and Heroines and they get to go out and make decisions that affect everyone. What does it mean to increase accountability? There are 400 years of dysfunctional relationships here, and it's hard to just unravel that overnight. This will take work and partnership.

**Ty: I want to confirm that you are committed to having those discussions and to enforcing those mechanisms.**

Derrick: Yes. That's the work. And it will be mutual. We will also find moments to hold you all accountable to the work. We have to move away from this whole us vs. them. You all need to find ways to build a relationship with me, build that kind of rapport, and tackle these challenges together. Think of the possibilities.

**3. What are your top three strategic objectives that you want to get accomplished during your tenure?**

I've been in the role for 6 weeks. This is an important question, but in some ways it's a premature question. For me, the primary question that is asked is "what are we going to do?" but there is an important question that precedes that "who do we need to become?" Shifting from "destroying the things that harm us" to "building the things that heal us". I'm in a phase of assessing things. It's about figuring out what to do in the short term and then in the long term. Then move into a phase called optimization where we figure out what can have the biggest impact. It's a thoughtful process, and people who show up with all the answers, Heroes and Heroines, actually end up oftentimes creating harm.

**Public Comment: I'd rather see someone who is a hero than who is apathetic.**

Derrick: I have grown over time. I've become curious about what people might know, what insights do they have, what skills do they have across these different domains, community organizations, and departments to do what we need to do. We need to build those relationships.

**4. What are the ways that you see OCR, under your leadership, supporting the Commissions; above and beyond the Liaisons?**

This past year we have added two full time positions to the staff team. Positions to support the work of the advisory commissions. I'm shuffling resources around in order to create those roles. It's essential to the RSJ work and Commission work. Figuring out how to strengthen communications and relationships with the Commissions is essential. There's the work of Kyana Wheeler and the equity trainings & tools that she is working on. Commission staff are really working to foster these connections within OCR divisions but also beyond. How can we continue to build and create that change. It doesn't come from the top down, it comes from the community. We want to strategically figure out how we leverage that agency to bring about that change we are all working towards.

**Natasha: I wanted to ask a little bit more for your civion for the ongoing communication between the OCR and the Commission because it is part of our charter to advise on the issues of human rights in the city. In the past our recommendations haven't always been adequately heard or acted on by the city.**

Derrick: Oftentimes we witness communication break down because we haven't built the muscle to have these courageous conversations, so we have to normalize being uncomfortable. All perspectives are valid but all perspectives are partial. We need all of the perspectives to create the change. It's part of the hard work, to be able to show up in ways that speak truth to power but also operationalize the mechanisms. We don't rise to the level of our goals, we fall to the levels of our practice. You go in your corner and we go in our corner and the needle never moves that.

**Erika: Something that is really concrete that we as Commissioners have been asking for is Seattle.gov email addresses. We had a really scary incident last summer. Seattle IT will not commit to protecting us. Receiving threats in our personal email addresses is not protecting us and being subject to OPMA is harming us.**

Derrick: I don't have the answer to that. This is the first time I'm hearing of it. Is it a policy thing? Is it a practice? I don't know.

**Erika: They said it was too expensive and hard to administer.**

Derrick: I will look into it and learn more.

**5. Commissioners are volunteers. SOCR staff are full-time employees. These facts create interesting dynamics when it comes to doing the work of the Commissions. What mechanisms will be in place to**

**ensure that Commissioners have visibility into actions taken by SOCR that impact their Commission work?**

The commission liaisons should ensure that the commissions are aware of what is going on in OCR. That's really the purpose of the liaisons. Commissioners should feel comfortable reaching out to their liaisons to learn more about the work of OCR. OCR staff are also happy to join any Commission meeting to share what they are working on. We also know the Commissioners are busy. I'm happy to hear more about how to maximize time and operationalizing our practices better.

**Ty: When can you join to answer the rest of the questions?**

Derrick: I assume you gather monthly. So we can sync schedules and I can come back and we can continue with this conversation.

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE**

7:15 - 7:40

- Criminal Justice Task Force - discussion and vote on the Commission applying for Amicus status within a certain timeframe

Allan and Roopali

The existing mechanisms have not been holding police accountable. Gaining amicus status would allow us to do that. There are some concerns that were flagged in the Criminal Justice Task Force meetings: the time it would take to obtain the status, getting an attorney at no or low cost, the capacity of the Commissioners.

Ty: I've been on this task force and to the task force meetings to hear these discussions. It's really important for the community to do this and I will be voting yes.

Roopali: I've also been on the task force and I can definitely say that we will need another Co-chair on this task force because Guneeta has a conflict and had to step down. We will also need more than four Commissioners to get this status. I think we talked about an upward of 100 or more hours of work from the Commissioners. It is a collective effort.

Natasha: So the ask is for more capacity on the Commission to be a part of the task force? And that is in addition to the co-chair?

Ty: There are three different asks: can we take a vote if the Commission wants to pursue amicus status? Can we get another co-chair on the task force? Can we get more Commissioners to be on the task force? It's clear that the community would be really willing to help out with those 100+ hours.

Erika: The asks are really clear. But the question is when and how quickly? Since we amended the bylaws and I have been asking us not to box ourselves into the new positions and setup. We are down to 11 commissioners, with me and Jessica rolling off in June/July. I think we all want these things to happen, it's an amazing thing to do. So it's more about when and how and who?

Ty: We have had three conversations about that and it's a good point. In the end it's about the community and showing the justice system what is really happening. The pace we need to go can be dictated by us and the community organizations we work with. We can go through it slowly with them.

Allan: Inviting the expertise of Howard.

Howard: It's self-paced, but the court hearings would almost certainly be in June or July. It's a multi-step process. Step one is getting an attorney to do this pro bono. Jason has agreed to do that. Then we need to put together a brief on the amicus status. That can be as wide or as narrow as we want it to be. We have to remember the harm that the police in Seattle have inflicted on us. There's years of a lack of accountability we could address with amicus status.

Jason: The lift can be as big or as small as we want. When we make the ask through a 3 page brief, that is when you get to tell the court WHY you would be a good candidate for amicus. The timing is very flexible. You can come in whenever you want.

**Vote on obtaining amicus status:**

*Quorum is 7 confirmed commissioners: YES*

Motion to obtain amicus status: Ty

Motion to obtain amicus status seconded: Roopali

- Approved:

Allan, Erika, Jackie, Natasha, Roopali, Tyrone

- Opposed: None

- Abstentions: Alex, Schuyler

**COMMISSION DEVELOPMENT**

7:40 - 7:55

- Work Plan finalization and vote
- Recruitment update: extending application deadline to 5/1!

Alex

**Vote on 2022 Work Plan:**

*Quorum is 7 confirmed commissioners: YES*

Motion to approve 2022 Work Plan by:

Motion to approve 2022 Work Plan Seconded by:

- Approved:

~~Alex, Allan, Guneeta, Erika, Jackie, Jessica, Natasha, Roopali, Schuyler, Tyrone~~

- Opposed:

- Abstentions:

**Tabled for May 2022 to allow a finalized version for voting.**

Comment from Natasha: I'm wondering if we want to consider pausing other taskforce work (e.g. human trafficking & equity/unhoused) until we have more capacity to support these asks. I am guessing that would need to be reflected in the work plan.

**UPDATES, CELEBRATIONS, REQUESTS**

7:55 - 8:00

- Seattle Office of Civil Rights Updates
  - Anyone working on HRD should start meeting soon on the celebration. It's on December 8, 2022.
  - LGBTQ Commission wants to collaborate for Pride and is looking for volunteers. Schuyler and Alex volunteered, and Erika is a maybe.
  - Get Engaged is moving ahead and hoping to get our member confirmed soon.

Marta

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Alex

- Next month meeting date is May 5, 2022
- Submit April agenda items before April 25 to any Co-Chair

**CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT DATES - *What did we miss? Let us know!*****April 2022**

- Ramadan – 4/3 (sundown) – 5/1/22 (tentative dates, dependent on the sighting of the moon)
- Eretria Easter – 4/24/22
- Baisakhi / Vaisakhi (Sikh New Years) – 4/14/22 - generally celebrated on 13 or 14 of April every year
- Orthodox Easter – 4/24/22
- Ethiopian Orthodox Easter – 4/25/22
- Ugaadhi / Telegu and Kannada New Year – 4/13/22
- Baisakhi / Vaisakhi (Sikh) – 4/14/22
- Thingyan (water festival) / Burmese New Year Festival – 4/13-16/21
- Aluth Avurudda (Sinhalese New Year, Sri Lanka) – 4/13-16/22
- Songkran (Thailand) – 4/13-15/22
- Khmer New Year – 4/14-16/22
- Bun Pi Mai (Lao) – 4/13 or 4/14/22 or 4/13 – 4/16/22 \*please check with the local Lao community on when they observe Bun Pi Mai
- Bengali New Year, Pohela Boishakh – 4/15/22
- April – Arab American Heritage Month

**May 2022**

- Eid ul-Fitr – 5/2/22 or 5/3/22 depending on local practices, most observe the date on 5/2/22, US date is Monday, 5/2/22, Kenya observes the Eid on 5/4/22
- Children's / Boy's Day (Japanese) – 5/5/22 –annual date 5 May
- Vesak / Vesākha / Vaiśākha / Buddha Jayanti / Buddha Purnima / Buddha Day (Buddhist) – 5/16/22
- Kamehameha Day (Hawaii) – 6/11/22 - annual date 6/11
- Juneteenth – 6/19/22 – annual date 6/19
- Summer Solstice (northern hemisphere) – 6/21/22 @ 2.13 a.m. PDT, 9.13 a.m. UTC
- May – Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, Jewish American Heritage Month

**June 2022**

- Kamehameha Day (Hawaii) – 6/11/22 - annual date 6/11
- Juneteenth – 6/19/22 – annual date 6/19
- Summer Solstice (northern hemisphere) – 6/21/22 @ 2.13 a.m. PDT, 9.13 a.m. UTC
- Matariki, Maori New Year (New Zealand) – 6/24/22
- June – LGBT Pride Month