HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
Minutes of October 5, 2009

Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center
Council Chambers       7:00 P.M.

PRESIDING OFFICIAL: Alderman Lionel Jean-Baptiste

ALDERMAN PRESENT: Delores Holmes, Jane Grover, Mark Tendam, Judy Fiske

A Quorum was present.

ALDERMAN ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: Nicola Whyte, Evonda Thomas, Kenneth Cox

OTHERS PRESENT: Rosemary Jean-Paul, Sharon Eckersall, Cheryl Schrader-Chukwu

CALL TO ORDER
Alderman Jean-Baptiste called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

Approval of the minutes of September 8, 2009 meeting
*Alderman Holmes moved approval, Alderman Fisk seconded.
Alderman Grover amended page 2, 4th paragraph to read… Ms. Jean-Paul replied the lease expires in 2013.

*Approved as amended 5-0.

Township of Evanston monthly bills totaling $172,624.10
*Alderman Fiske moved approval, Alderman Grover seconded. Approved 5-0

Alderman Grover voiced her concerns regarding the high costs of legal bills, which puts the Assessor over its budgeted dollars for the year. She urged staff to review how quickly the Township could be moved back to the Civic Center, which would result in a significant cost savings.

Victimization and Funding for Social Services Programs
Cheryl Chukwu (400 block of Dodge Avenue) is a victim of her neighbor who repeatedly has victimized her by robbing her home. She was infuriated when she found her victimizer was being represented by the Community Defender’s Office, funded by the City of Evanston Mental Health Board. The Community Defenders Office tried to discredit Ms. Chukwu, and as a victim she felt further re-victimized by their accusations.

Alderman Jean Baptiste suggested meeting with the Director of the Community Defender’s office to relay her plight, and to bring citizens input as to how the Defender’s office intervenes when an Evanston resident is being victimized. Also suggested was
Restorative Justice; Ms. Chukwu replied that they did try Restorative Justice, which did not work.

Alderman Grover advised Ms. Chukwu to speak to the Chair of the Mental Health Board. Alderman Grover apologized to her for the troubles and injustice she has experienced as a resident. She offered to speak to the Director of the Defender’s Office with her if she desired.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste invited Ms. Chukwu back when the Committee is considering the proposals for funding from the Mental Health Board.

Alderman Rainey of the 8th Ward spoke on Ms. Chukwu's plight. She knows the reputation and history of the young men who victimized Ms. Chukwu and she is completely supportive of Ms. Chukwu and knows that her neighbors are also supportive of her.

**Proposed Amendments to the Chapter 5 of the City Code, Human Relations Committee**

Alderman Jean-Baptiste reviewed the concerns that were brought up in the Human Services August meeting.

Joan Raisner co-chair of the Human Relations Commission gave a summary of her background, which included working for the Cook County Circuit Court as a mediator for seventeen years. Commissioner Raisner summarized the Annual Report submitted to the Human Services Committee. From March 2008 to February 2009 the Commission participated in the Mayor’s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and two committees were formed. The Housing Committee looks at foreclosures and the Mediation Committee explored alternative dispute resolution to increase civility and tolerance within the community.

Alderman Fiske asked who the mediators are; Commissioner Raisner replied that a list is available in the Health and Human Services Department. Evonda Thomas, Director of Health and Human Services added the volunteer mediators are current Cook County mediators in the office of conflict resolution.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked how many cases has the Commission handled. Commissioner Raisner replied staff handles mediation currently and a draft poster is in production which will advertise the Commission’s mediation services.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked for clarity on the Commission’s solicitation of businesses for SYEP. Commissioner Alan Gitelson stated staff requested that the Commissioners call businesses to secure them for employment of the youth during the summer for SYEP 2009.

Alderman Grover suggested amending the Bylaws to include a mission statement/purpose.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste pointed out the Responsibilities and Services section listed on the Commission handout *Introducing the Commission* are currently not being met. They do not “facilitate and participate in a variety of activities to include community wide dialogues on race relations, civility, activity, violence prevention, crime, accessibility, etc.
or address/investigate activities such as hate crimes.” Also, the Commission has not in recent years mediate and does not do so currently. He wants the Commission to realize who they are right now but more importantly how do they see themselves in the future. He suggested the Commission limit their scope so that those who would like to join will see a goal. They should set goals and aim to accomplish those goals each year. He felt the Commission should be aware of the different cases such as residents feeling victimized and try to open the avenues of communication between parties to prevent escalation.

Alderman Grover agrees with Alderman Jean-Baptiste that there are ways to raise the profile of the Human Relations Commission. She gave an example of a city in Wisconsin that has taken on a project of civility “Speak your Peace” which has a list of ways to promote civility. She suggested the Commission take on a civility project as a starting point and offered her assistance if needed.

Commissioner Margaret Lipman is also concerned as to the direction of the Commission; she suggested going forward realigning with the goals recently set by the Human Services Committee.

Commissioner Gitelson voiced concerns on the vacancies in the Human Relation Commission and the ability to move forward on issues without a quorum.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste would like to see a diverse group of people from different ethnic backgrounds and sections of the community on the Commission.

Alderman Rainey felt Ms. Thomas has a lot of responsibilities being the Director of Health and Human Services and also to the Committee. How can “we” expect her to give the Commission the leadership they require especially since they have had an Executive Director to lead them in the past? Commissioner Raisner felt the Commission receives great leadership from staff.

Alderman Holmes felt a deeper discussion either in Committee or as a Council is needed to decide the priorities of the Human Relations Commission in the community. She remembered when the Commission began and what it did accomplish; should the Commission be staff directed or go back to being almost a standalone entity.

Adjournment
The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nicola Whyte
Department of Health and Human Services