

MINUTES
WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE
APRIL 22, 2009 3:30 P.M.
BEVERLY LIVESAY CONFERENCE ROOM

Present: S. Martel Moore; L. Roberts; L. Holmes; M. DeSouza; B. Doling; P. Carey; C. DeMarco; R. DeLuca, K. Herrera

Excused: L. McBean-Clairborne, Chair; K. Belanger; A. Fitzpatrick; M. Lynch; K. Kephart

Staff: J. Mareane, County Administrator; K. Fuller, Deputy Clerk of the Legislature

Call to Order

The meeting opened at 3:35 p.m. Members of the Committee were asked to review the minutes for any corrections. No action was taken due to a lack of quorum.

Announcements

- Mr. Roberts announced the World of Skills event would take place from 9 a.m. to noon, April 23rd at the Holiday Inn. Over 33 employers, with most seeking to fill positions within their firms, will be present to meet with people interested in working. A large turnout is anticipated due to the attendance seen at other recent job fairs in our region.
- Ms. Holmes announced a Diversity and End-of-Life Care teleconference would take place at 1:15 p.m., April 29th at Cooperative Extension; following the teleconference a brief local discussion would take place from 4:00 – 4:30 p.m. The Tompkins County Working Group on LGBT Aging will show its community project entitled “Share the Care” May 7th at 7:00 p.m. in the Borg Warner Room of the Tompkins County Library for the award-winning film *Ten More Good Years*. The Annual County Office for the Aging Advisory Committee Annual Luncheon will take place at noon, May 13th at the Clarion Hotel. The Keynote Speaker is Dr. William Thomas, Founder of The Eden Alternative. At the Annual Luncheon two awards would be presented for the “Senior Citizen of the Year”, and “Outstanding Contribution by a Senior Citizen”.
- Ms. Carey announced there would be a “Farmers Market” held each Wednesday, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., in the commons area outside of the Human Services Building. Although the market would be utilized mainly by food stamp clients, it is hoped that the clients and vendors would have a better understanding of the food stamp process to enable them to comfortably accept and process the food stamp debit cards. The program, undertaken by the Department of Social Services and Cooperative Extension and will utilize Youth Employment Services summer work program youth. At the time the market is held a WIC clinic would occur at the same time to enable clients to make a single trip and utilize their WIC checks for fresh produce. The program is expected to begin on July 8th and continue through September. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance heard of the program and said Director David Hansell has tentatively indicated his desire to be present for the opening day. The market would not only offer the items noted, it would also include cooking demonstrations, recipes, etc., and be provided information on the various farmer market locations throughout the county.
- Mr. DeLuca reported earlier in the day on NPR a news story regarding reverse discrimination was covered. The story stated Supreme Court heard arguments on whether a New Haven, Connecticut fire department must promote personnel who outscored minorities on a promotion exam. Fearing a lawsuit, the department promoted no one. The Supreme Court will make a judgment on New Haven, who scuttled the test after it learned that no African-Americans and only two Hispanic firefighters were likely to be promoted based on the results. The question was whether a more appropriate testing method such as practical testing that is available would have been a better-suited choice. Mr. Roberts felt the decisions made could lead to a review of Affirmative Action. Ms. Carey noted if the county wanted a practical test a request to Civil Service would need to be made prior to the next test date, which is in two years.
- Mr. DeLuca spoke of having spoken to Broome County officials over the course of the last few weeks to offer assistance following the shooting of individuals. He spoke of a problem in crisis call center’s operations was having adequate translation for the many different languages associated with the calls from family members around the world. The center used the ATT translator system.

Discussion Regarding Broome County Tragedy

Ms. Martel-Moore spoke of having been in Broome County volunteering. It was noted there is a disconnect between the County and the school system, noting the school system is responsible for the ESL classes. Trina Newton, Assistant Superintendent for the school district, was in charge of the ESL Program, and had requested translators as the number of individuals in this field is limited within Broome County. As part of a public service group, Ms. Martel-Moore went to the area to assist Ms. Newton who coordinating with the crime victims program desired to have individuals on-site for the first day classes resumed at a temporary location. Ms. Martel-Moore was surprised to see that the volunteers there were all from Ithaca. She spoke of concern that there was not local representation by the County in the areas of Social Services, Workforce, Mental Health, etc. and as there was not direction to the volunteers, began to instruct them on what areas the individuals may need assistance in.

Ms. Martel-Moore spoke of the varied reactions of the survivors, noting the range was from not wishing to be associated with or address the issue in any manner, to those who very much wanted to share their experience. Another concern of those involved in the tragedy was employment; many did not wish to make it known they were involved. These individuals were looking for guidance on how to best handle questions that may come up. Overall, Ms. Martel-Moore recognized the need to take into account multicultural differences and needs in emergency situations.

Points of concern that arose out of the tragedy were: 1) the material provided to the individuals affected was only in English which posed problems due to the language barriers; 2) the inability to provide an adequate number of translators for the many different languages involved (Vietnamese, Serbian, Tribal African, etc.); 3) support service contacts were for Tompkins County agencies, which is not the appropriate agency to assist these clients.

Ms. Herrera said it is significant that the County sent a lot of resources to Broome County; it shows the organization within the community. She said one item requiring attention is to be prepared for the demographic shifts that occur, which has been shown by the events happening in Broome County. She also spoke of media coverage, expressing concern that the shooter was labeled as an immigrant, although living in this country for many years. She thanked Ms. Martel-Moore for her involvement in the much-needed assistance to our neighboring county.

Mr. Roberts suggested a future agenda item be cultural awareness as a part of emergency preparedness.

Ms. Herrera spoke of the possibility of writing and editorial regarding the importance of diversity could be undertaken to continue awareness; it could highlight the upcoming Diversity Roundtable and other local events.

Report

Ms. Martel-Moore announced the Legislature passed the resolution that provided funding to the Diversity Consortium Roundtable Event to be held May 7th. The resolution was a recommendation from the Committee. The event costs approximately \$12,000 and is anticipated to have approximately 300 or more participants. Several members of the Committee spoke of how his participation at a roundtable event he has recognized potential employees as participants as well.

Review of 2009 Spending Plan

The Committee received the revised spending plan. Following a brief review consensus was to accept it. The spending plan will now move forward to the Government Performance and Workforce Relations Committee for their information. As part of the review, Mr. Mareane provided a written

description of portions of work to be undertaken by the position outlined in the spending plan. He explained the work is part of the marketing plan and would provide information and mentoring to young individuals regarding the civil service process and test preparation. The Committee reviewed the description and offered several suggestions, including outreach be included for VESID and other agencies assisting disabled individuals. Ms. Carey noted some individuals with disabilities are not obvious, having an awareness of disabilities would assist in determining the correct assistance and/or modifications that may be required to make employment possible. Mr. Roberts noted many disabled individuals do not enter the workforce until a later age than others do. It was requested to amend language within the document that include a laundry list rather than a specific group.

The Committee briefly discussed what the appropriate location would be for the person in the position. Ms. Carey suggested that it would be worthwhile to house the individual in an area that would assist all youth, not just those who wish to work for the County.

Ms. Herrera spoke the positive aspect of having an individual who is immersed in the youth culture assist them in making connections that would enable them to seek out the appropriate means to employment in the field they desire. She would like a job that is fluid enough to withstand financial pressure without diluting the job. Ms. Herrera shared information of her employer encouraging brief discussions with prospective employees and how it puts them at ease with regard to some areas of concern; she believes it is something to be considered.

Civil Service

Mr. Mareane reported having a brief meeting with the City of Ithaca to discuss the proposed civil service initiative. Following the meeting amendments will be made to the concept paper previously presented to the committee to reflect recommendations made by the City, which he believes will make it a stronger proposal. He has spoken to Cornell Institute of Public Affairs (CIPA) to inform them the County is moving forward and want to have them use this initiative as a project.

Ms. Herrera inquired whether unions have been contacted. Ms. DeMarco said the CSEA union has been in discussions and that it does not appear that they are willing to support the effort at this time; additional research is being undertaken with regard to case law and litigation on the rule of ten. Although the union may not be against all aspects of recommendations to amend civil service testing regulations, it would not support a pass/fail system. Ms. DeMarco suggested a joint meeting in which each side could explain both viewpoints. She said there are concerns when an exam is used for promotional purposes as well. Mr. Mareane said it would be beneficial to know what areas could be problems and that allowing CIPA to move ahead may answer many questions.

The Committee would like to have a union representative who would be willing to address the Committee to provide perspectives.

Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on May 27th.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:02 p.m.