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**CITY OF KALAMAZOO**  
**Civil Rights Board**  
**Wednesday, February 5, 2025 – 5:00 p.m. • City Commission Chambers**

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**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Madison Lukeman, Pamela Burpee, Sandra Calderon and Cathy Phason

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Sharda Sims (Unexcused)

**Ex-Officio Members:** Tanya Hewitt-Smith and Commissioner Hoffman

**CITY STAFF PRESENT:** Marcia Jones (Assistant City Attorney), Lal Tluangi (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Specialist).

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The Civil Rights Board meeting was called to order at 5:01 p.m. by Chair Phason.

**Agenda:** Director Calderon motioned to approve the agenda. Vice-Chair Lukeman seconded the motion. Motion approved by unanimous vote. Agenda adopted.

**Minutes:** Director Burpee motioned to approve minutes from June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024, supported by Vice-Chair Lukeman. Motion approved by unanimous vote. June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024, minutes approved.

Vice-Chair Lukeman motioned to approve minutes from August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, supported by Director Burpee. Motion approved by unanimous vote. August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, minutes approved.

**Public Announcements and Communications:** DEI Staff ask that board members check their emails for communication as that is the primary communication method.

**New Business:**

Update on the Ordinance Revision – Chair Phason stated that the Ordinance Review subcommittee recently met with City Attorney Leal and at the moment, the subcommittee is waiting to hear back from the City Attorney’s office regarding the edits the subcommittee made. Vice-Chair Lukeman commented that while she was not in attendance in the meeting, the ordinance revision is handed off to the City Attorney’s Office and the subcommittee. Attorney Jones shared that the revision is still being reviewed and that in late December, Governor Whitmer signed a legislation that would prohibited landlords from discriminating based on source of income. Chair Phason stated that the subcommittee has put in a lot of work and it has been a lot of waiting but the subcommittee wants to make sure that the edits are solidified for enforcement. Commissioner Hoffman added that in the meeting with City Attorney Leal, there was a lot of tension and she is concerned with the City Attorney not being willing to have open dialogue regarding the board’s authority to enforce the ordinance. Commissioner Hoffman shares that with current events, we can’t depend on the state and federal to enforce and it needs to be done on a local level. Commissioner Hoffman continued that with the establishment of the ordinance and board, it led to the creation of the DEI Department and the City Commission has codified the DEI Department’s presence in the City.

Civil Rights Board Attendance Bylaw – Vice-Chair Lukeman pointed out that the bylaw of the ordinance has an attendance requirement and three consecutive absences deems the member to be no longer a member of the board. Vice-Chair Lukeman shared that the board has had some issues with some members being frequently absent and she wanted to share that requirement with the public and discuss a current member that has exceeded the absences allowed. Chair Phason stated that Director Sims has exceeded the absences allowed and according to the bylaws, her seat is now considered vacant. Chair Phason continued to say that while the meetings may be short, there are a lot of background work and reiterated the importance of attending meetings.

Approval of 2025 Meeting Schedule – Chair Phason shared that the meeting schedule is still on a bimonthly basis starting with February and can be changed to monthly depending on agenda items.

Vice-Chair Lukeman motioned to approve the 2025 meeting schedule. Director Phason seconded the motion. Motion approved by unanimous vote. 2025 meeting schedule is adopted.

Ordinance Education Discussion – Vice-chair Lukeman asked for this topic to be discussed in the meeting as there is an education subcommittee and there is a need to educate the public about the ordinance as it is already in place even with ongoing edits. Director Calderon stated that once the board solidifies the educational piece, it is important to bring in community organizations that are connecting to the community directly so that information can be spread more. Chair Phason asked if the subcommittee is looking to start educating and Vice-Chair Lukeman replied stating that she would like the education subcommittee to begin planning and meeting in preparation for educating the community. Chair Phason stated that with the continued stagnation, education would be a great way to engage the community. Vice-Chair stated that while the board is editing the ordinance, the foundation of the ordinance is not and therefore, an educational piece can be done with the community. Chair Phason asked questions regarding the logistics of the subcommittee has to have dates put on record and then asked Director Burpee if she would be interested in being apart of the education subcommittee, to which Director Burpee said she would be interested. Attorney Jones replied to Chair Phason’s question and let the board know that the subcommittee can meet when they would like to meet and reminded the board that they can not have three voting members be in a subcommittee as that would represent more of the board as there are only four board members at the moment. Chair Phason shared that they are working on getting a full board and that would allow Director Burpee to join the subcommittee. Both Chair Phason and Vice Chair Lukeman asked if the subcommittee could have rotating members to which Attorney Jones said she would need to do some research to confirm. Vice-Chair shared that while it is important for the board to spearhead education efforts, it is important for the city to provide training on the ordinance to the board so that the board can have better understanding of the ordinance. Director Tanya said she acknowledges the request.

Civil Rights Board Applicant Nomination – Chair Phason shared that the board received Lewis Smith’s application and resume and asked the board for discussion. Commissioner Hoffman shared that Mr. Smith is a phenomenal advocate in the housing ordinance and would bring value to the board especially with a diverse perspective. Vice-Chair Lukeman disclosed that Mr. Smith is her tenant as he lives in a property, she manages but does not own. Chair Phason stated that she was able to know Mr. Smith when he interviewed for the City Attorney position and he has been a great help in getting the ordinance edited. Due to his previous residence being outside of the City of Kalamazoo, he was unable to join the board but is now a city resident so he qualifies. Director Burpee said she was impressed with his resume and would like him to join the board. Director Burpee motioned to move forward with recommending Mr. Lewis to the City Commission for approval for a 3-year full term. Vice-Chair Lukeman seconded the motion. Motion approved by unanimous vote.

December Complaint Log Update – DEI Specialist Lal shared that the DEI department has not received any complaints in 2025 but shared a complaint from December 2024.

### **Public Comments:**

**Andrew Chaponda** – Stated that there was news regarding Foxridge Apartments and one of the issues on the news was that city inspectors were consistently passing the inspections of the apartment even though there were many issues with the apartments. He requested that the board look into why the city keeps passing the property in their inspections when there are many issues cited in the report.

**Tobi Hanna-Davies** – Thanked the board for their persistence and progress they have made. Shared that ISAAC celebrated that there was the creation of the Housing Equity Ordinance four years that gives everyone a fair share of opportunity to getting housing. Continued to thank the board for editing the ordinance and shared that ISAAC will continue to support the board.

**Dr. Charlae Davis** – Stated that the organization of ISAAC will continue to support the board. Continued on to thank former Vice-Mayor Patrese for being the catalyst in the creation of the

housing ordinance. She continued on to state that she supports the edits and thanked the board for the work. She shared with the community to reach out to ISAAC if they have questions regarding the ordinance.

**Kaleb Beiter** – Asked the board if there any openings in the board and how to apply. Chair Phason responded that there is an opening and applicants can apply in-person or online.

**Miscellaneous Board Comments:** None

**Closing Comments:** Vice-Chair Lukeman reminded City staff that the ordinance states that investigation for a Civil Rights complaint is 91 days. Chair Phason thanked the people for coming to the board and emphasized that there are three seats open until a potential applicant has been approved. In response to one of the public comments, Chair Phason stated that from her understanding, properties would stage certain apartments for when inspectors when they visit for inspections. Vice-Chair Lukeman shared that from her experience, when a rental property certification is expiring, a city inspector inspects every unit in the address. It is during this time that landlords can make corrections and repairs and the city inspects again once repairs are completed. She continued to state that at the very least, the city inspector will go to each unit once and if at that time, the unit has no violations, inspectors won't revisit that unit unless there is another violation. Director Calderon asked if that included vacant units and Vice-Chair Lukeman stated that it did include vacant units. Director Calderon asked if someone was evicted during a complaint process, would that give landlords more time to correct repairs, Vice-Chair Lukeman shared that landlords/property owners have 30 days to fix any issue and another inspection is held if not all units meet the criteria, so process is continued until units are all passed. Commissioner Hoffman shared that the inspection department can be subjective and from her experience, the relationship between an inspector and property owner can affect the outcome of the inspection. Commissioner Hoffman continued onto address that the Foxridge Apartments is now HUD development and has exchanged owners many times, which makes it hard to hold anyone accountable which means that injustice can permeate in the property management. Commissioner Hoffman uplifted that the city has hired more inspectors which will help with caseloads. Director Tanya shared that this is why education is key in helping the community understand their rights and getting the lens of a landlord, not just tenants. Chair Phason lifted up the importance for the community to submit complaints and there is nothing the board can do without complaints being received.

**Next Meeting:** April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025, at 5:00 pm

**ADJOURNMENT:** 5:53 pm

Lal Tluangi, Recording Secretary  
Tanya Hewitt-Smith, Staff Liaison  
Stephanie Hoffman, City Commission Liaison  
Cathy Phason, Chair