

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

"To be one community filled with opportunity."

Human Rights Commission
P.O. Box 911 · Charlottesville, Virginia 22902
Telephone 434-970-3023
humanrights@charlottesville.gov
www.charlottesville.gov/665/Human-Rights



August 8th, 2023

Dear Captain Mark Van Meter,

We are writing to follow up on the Human Rights Commission meeting you attended on Thursday, July 20th. We deeply appreciate your responding to our many questions and agreeing to follow up on a few. We also thank you for follow-up with us via email on July 27th. We however still have some more questions.

First, we want to be clear that we believe there is a desperate need for additional housing for unhoused people in Charlottesville. For that reason, we have been enthusiastic about the Salvation Army's proposal to double the number of beds you offer, so long as there is a strong commitment to non-discrimination and a commitment to treat all prospective residents fairly. We submitted a letter to City Council on Friday, August 4th to support the expansion of the Salvation Army, below is an excerpt from the letter:

*The Charlottesville Human Rights Commission has identified Housing as a priority this year, per HRC **RESOLUTION #:** A23-1. The Commission believes that the Salvation Army's proposed expansion represents a positive step toward addressing the current shortage of local emergency shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness in our community. We additionally recommend that the City support emergency housing resources that are equitable and accessible to all Charlottesville residents regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, source of funds, sexual orientation, gender identity, status as a veteran, or disability, with specific concerns that have been brought to our attention for Charlottesville residents who identify as LGBTQIA+, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with limited English proficiency. We recommend that the City's support of the Salvation Army's proposal for emergency housing resources include ensuring services are equitable and provided in a nondiscriminatory manner.*

With these considerations in mind, we would therefore like to recommend that City Council approve the SUP to expand the Salvation Army of Charlottesville facilities.

We did, however, want to continue the conversation regarding several questions we discussed during our Regular meeting that you requested additional time to answer. Given the time you've been at the local Salvation Army, we understand that you are still learning policies and practices, so we certainly understand your need to respond after the meeting.

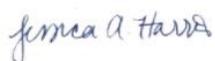
Over the years, Commissioners have heard stories of LGBTQ+ individuals and families who faced discrimination at the Salvation Army. For that reason, we are asking you to confirm your commitment to not only non-discrimination but proactively make a statement of inclusion for all LGBTQ+ unhoused individuals who may request your services now and in the future. We believe this may bridge historic distrust and help make all unhoused Charlottesvilleans feel welcome.

Here is a list of questions or concerns that we have:

1. We asked you specifically whether a transgender woman would be housed in the women's dorm section or the men's dorm section (assuming no apartment is available). *[For clarity: a transgender woman is a woman who was assigned male at birth]*. You told us that you would be happy to follow up on that issue and let us know your current policy.
2. Similarly, we are interested to understand your language access policy. You indicated that you have used other residents as interpreters when interacting with the Spanish-speaking families at the shelter. And you were unsure what your policy or practice would be relative to individuals who speak languages other than Spanish. We had concerns about the reliance of other residents to serve as interpreters for several reasons: it can violate the resident's confidentiality and result in poor outcomes if the individual serving as an interpreter is not adequately trained to serve as an interpreter. Being bilingual is not the same thing as being a qualified interpreter or translator. We strongly encourage you to adopt a language access policy that ensures all residents or prospective residents can be served appropriately and with dignity. If you do have any written policy related to Limited English Proficient individuals, we would ask you to share that with us.
3. We are aware that language matters. The words that we use can carry significant harm. When someone talks about safety in the context of transgender folks, it is important to be clear that it is the safety of the transgender individual that is the focus. In today's climate, it is too easy to hear "we need to protect others from someone who is transgender (or gay)." The word "homosexual" is also considered to be un-affirming. We strongly recommend "Safe Space" training for everyone who serves clients at the Salvation Army. There are a number of trainers in the area. PFLAG Charlottesville, for example, offers training at no cost. This is not intended as a criticism of anyone's intent - more an acknowledgment that words can easily cause unintended harm. We are all learning, all the time, about how to be affirming and supportive.

Again, we are very appreciative of the time you spent with us and your willingness to allow us to ask so many questions. We look forward to your response and, hopefully, to finding ways to work together.

Sincerely,



Jessica Harris
Chair
Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Commissioners:

- Jessica Harris (Chair)
- Ernest Chambers (Vice-Chair)
- Jeanette Abi-Nader
- Mary Bauer
- Wolfgang Keppley
- Kathryn Laughon
- Andrew Orban
- Suzanne Lynn
- Lyndele Von Schill