



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER**

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Human Resources
Department No.: 64
For Agenda Of: 12/19/2006
Placement: Departmental
Estimate Time: 45 minutes on
12/19/2006
Continued Item: YES
If Yes, date from: 12/5/2006
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director(s) Susan Paul, Asst CEO/HR Director 568-2817
Contact Info: Ariana Villegas, EEO Manager 568-3402
SUBJECT: Potential Commission Merge Report

County Counsel Concurrence:

As to form: Yes No N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence:

As to form: Yes No N/A

Other Concurrence: N/A

As to form: Yes No N/A

Recommended Action(s):

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive a report, including staff and Commissioner feedback, regarding the feasibility of merging the Affirmative Action Commission (AAC), the Human Relations Commission (HRC), and the Commission for Women (CFW).
- b) Maintain the Commission for Women in its current configuration.
- c) Direct staff to work with the Affirmative Action Commission and the Human Relations Commission and other interested community parties to determine a new Commission's purpose and structure; and return to the Board of Supervisors with a newly-formed Commission.

Summary:

On October 3, 2006, the County Board of Supervisors directed staff to study the feasibility of merging the Affirmative Action Commission (AAC), the Human Relations Commission (HRC) and the Commission for Women (CFW). Each of these Commissions consists of 15 members appointed by the Board of Supervisors. Currently, there are a total of 25 Commissioners among these three groups. There are eight AAC Commissioners, six HRC Commissioners and 11 CFW Commissioners. All three Commissions are staffed by one full-time employee and one part-time employee from the County Equal Employment Opportunity Office. At this time, staff support is

limited to administrative assistance only. The following summarizes the methodology and steps taken to review this issue. Included is the general feedback from outreach efforts.

Background:

Since October 2006, extensive outreach has been conducted to determine the feasibility of merging the AAC, HRC and CFW. Staff met with each Commission at their regularly scheduled monthly meetings and a joint meeting of the AAC and HRC. Additionally, in October, the attached electronic survey was conducted soliciting Commissioner feedback was conducted. (Attachment I)

Further, two public workshops were conducted; one in Santa Barbara and one in Santa Maria. Notice of both forums was distributed in electronic and hardcopy formats to approximately 500 recipients of the Commissions' mailing lists. Event announcements were also placed in local newspapers, non-profit organization calendars, and community bulletins.

Lastly, an analysis of meeting attendance and frequency as well as work accomplished by the Commission was conducted. Attachment II is the Annual Attendance Report for each of these Commissions. Outreach efforts encompassed the following:

Commission Meetings

During the meetings staff conducted with the individual Commissions and during the joint Commission meeting, Commissioners expressed concerns regarding a potential merger. Two common concerns were:

- The unique goals of their respective Commissions would be diminished and make it difficult to address community needs.
- The potential loss of focus on women's issues.

Electronic Survey

An electronic survey was conducted with the Commissioners in October 2006. The purpose was to obtain perspective on the current status of their respective Commissions, collect feedback regarding issues expressed by Commissioners in previous meetings, and obtain ideas for a potential new consolidated Commission. Attachment III is the correspondence sent to the Board outlining survey results. Fourteen Commissioners responded to the online survey. Of the surveys completed, 29% of the responses came from the AAC, 29% of the responses came from the HRC and 42% of the tallied results came from the CFW.

Public Workshops

A public workshop was conducted in Santa Barbara and another in Santa Maria to obtain community feedback on the viability of merging the Commissions. Both forums were facilitated and included a brief synopsis of the Commissions' current state and challenges. Attendees were provided with the opportunity to voice their concern or support and provide their ideas regarding a merged Commission (i.e., role responsibility and function).

- A total of 34 participants attended the November 15th Santa Barbara Forum (12 Commissioners and 22 community members).
- A total of eight participants attended the November 16th Santa Maria Forum (2 Commissioners and 6 community members).

The following summarizes the feedback obtained through the various outreach efforts (meetings, survey, and workshop forums):

Current Commission Challenges

As advisory Commissions to the Board of Supervisors, the function and operating procedures of each of these groups are similar. While many Commissioners felt that they achieve quorum on a regular basis, there has been a growing concern surrounding Commissioner resignations, long-term vacancies, and quorum fulfillment. Each Commission has experienced difficulty at varying levels with these issues over the past few years. In addition to the challenge of limited membership, some members reported that the narrow scope of their respective Commission may have restricted their level of activity and left the Commissions in search of a new direction. In one case, the previous activities of one Commission seemed obsolete in that they duplicated the efforts already produced by the County Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Office. For this reason, the Commission began a process of modifying its purpose to reflect the current needs of the population it serves.

Some Commissioners attributed the current state of these Commissions to a lack of support. In their feedback, they commented on the high number of Commission vacancies and the length of time that positions remained unfilled. Commissioners felt that the vacant positions communicated a message to the public that the Commissions and their associated issues are a low priority. As a result, Commissioners have noticed a lack of community participation and/or interest in various sponsored activities as shown by the decreased attendance at annual events.

- **Affirmative Action Commission:**

In the previous fiscal year, the AAC held meetings in 8 of the 12 months. Since the passing of Proposition 209 in 1996, the Commission has periodically examined its purpose and has recently started to solidify an updated action plan. In this process, the AAC has attempted to interpret its duties in a new manner and supplement the actions of the County's EEO office. In Fall 2006, the Chair and Vice-Chair elected to suspend regular meetings until the conclusion of the merger feasibility study.

- **Human Relations Commission:**

During the Fiscal Year 2005-06, the HRC held meetings in 7 of the 12 months. With the resignation of the Chair and Vice-Chair in the early summer, the executive positions were left vacant and, to date, they have not been filled on either a temporary or permanent basis. Executive vacancies are not addressed in the HRC bylaws nor do they review how the Commission operates under such conditions. Two current HRC members felt that the Commission has not accomplished many activities in recent years and no longer functions as the "discrimination community watchdog" as it had in the past. Other Commissioners expressed an interest in resurrecting the activities that the HRC conducted in the past. The HRC elected to suspend regular meetings until the conclusion of the merger feasibility study.

- **Commission for Women:**

Last year, the CFW held ten regular meetings. Unlike the other two Commissions, the CFW has increased its membership with an influx of younger members and continues to actively recruit individuals on an ongoing basis. In addition, the CFW has created a three-year strategic plan which includes economic forums, updated service awards, and coalitions with other community agencies that address women's issues. This year, it has achieved quorum each month with only one exception.

The Concerns of a Potential Merger

Some respondents to this study expressed that it would seem unreasonable for one consolidated Commission to effectively meet the needs of the three different communities currently served. More than half of the Commissioners felt the mission statements of each Commission are “too different to merge to one single body” and could not conceive of a practical manner to preserve critical components in a consolidated charge. In reviewing the successful components of each Commission, the members reported that they had a clear idea of the Commission’s purpose and goals and felt that their action plan had been fulfilled and provided a beneficial service to the community it serves.

While all respondents understood the need to evaluate the Commissions’ efficiency, it seemed that a merger may be premature and different methods for change could be implemented. There should be a plan to review and update the mission statements of these Commissions on a regular basis. To address the Commissions’ current state, a special committee could be formed to measure the efficiency and restructuring needs. Commissioners felt that such a plan would be more beneficial than combining them into one group with a vague charge.

From the perspective of its members, the Commissions’ success over the years was attributed to “the commitment and congeniality of its members” and the reflection of diversity of local demographics in the Commissions. As such, the Commissions themselves pose as the County’s diversity advocate within the community. The potential merger would de-emphasize the importance of the issues that these three Commissions address separately.

The Opportunity for a Potential New Commission

Some of the Commissioners felt that the lack of activities and the decreased community response indicated that it may be time for each of these Commissions to “re-imagine and re-energize” its purpose, structure, and goals. There were several Commissioners who expressed support for the potential merge and felt it was a matter of fiscal responsibility and business efficiency. In reviewing the business perspective, some Commissioners from two different Commissions indicated that one or more of these Commissions could even be eliminated altogether. Overall, it was reported that the circumstances under which these Commissions were created have changed, and it is appropriate for the County to evaluate activities to determine if they are meaningful and necessary to the community they serve.

Of the advantages listed for a potential merger, most respondents reported that the staff support could be improved as it focused solely on the needs of one single Commission as opposed to being spread among the current three groups. Commission members also recommended that the level of required and funded staff assistance for the potential consolidated Commission should be expanded to include program assistance. There was one suggestion to create an executive-level position exclusively for the Commissions, with that individual reporting directly to the Board of Supervisors.

The idea of creating a “bold, new Commission” and attracting community buy-in during the creation process was also appealing to some Commissioners. With a fully seated Commission and an amplified level of support, the Commission may increase its ability to serve the community in an effective manner and potentially extend services to additional groups that were not included in their previous charge.

If the Board of Supervisors proceeds with the proposed merger, a majority of the respondents felt that the main purpose of the new Commission should be to educate the community and encourage diversity awareness programs. The mission statement should clearly outline the purpose, activities, and

performance measures of the Commission, with a promise of review and renewal every few years. The work plan of a new Commission should potentially offer a unique service that is currently not provided by other community organizations. For more meaningful appointments, it was also suggested that the expectations and time commitment of its Commissioners be clearly reviewed with the interested individuals during the application process and re-enforced during the orientation session.

Commissioners recommended that the membership structure of the potential new Commission remain at three Commissioners per district. There was one suggestion to create two separate divisions within the consolidated Commission: one for North County and another for South County. This would allow the Commission to address the detailed needs of those specific geographic areas, as the issues can be drastically different.

If the potential merger of these Commissions should move forward, all respondents agreed that the transition period should be clearly defined and communicated to all associated parties, including a practical time frame and identification of the roles current Commissioners would play in the process. Through such actions, the County could utilize the new Commission as a vehicle to achieve greater citizen participation and procure the interest of new parties, while upholding business efficiency of Commission operations.

Staff Recommendations

Based on input from these various sources, staff recommends that the Board of Supervisors maintain the Commission for Women in its current configuration. With increased membership and an established three-year strategic plan, the Commission for Women has demonstrated a high-level of activity in fulfilling its purpose. There was no rationale presented that demonstrated any benefit in the inclusion of this Commission in the merger.

Staff also recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct staff to work with the Affirmative Action Commission, the Human Relations Commission, and other interested community parties to determine a new Commission’s purpose and structure, and return to the Board of Supervisors with a newly-formed Commission. Both of these Commissions have experienced increasing challenges regarding quorum achievement, Commissioner resignations, and a clear performance plan. Given these circumstances, a potential merger of these two Commissions may present a viable solution and adequately meet the needs of these Commissions. Attachment IV is the Expenditure Status Reports for each of the Commissions.

Performance Measures:

NA

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: Yes No

Fiscal Analysis:

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<u>Funding Sources</u>	<u>Current FY Cost:</u>	<u>Annualized On-going Cost:</u>	<u>Total One-Time Project Cost</u>
General Fund			
State			
Federal			
Fees			
Other:			
Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

Narrative:

Staffing Impact(s):

Legal Positions:

FTEs:

Special Instructions:

NA

Attachments:

1. November 2, 2006 Memo to Commissioners regarding Electronic Survey
2. FY 2005-2006 Annual Commissioner Attendance Report
3. November 15, 2006 Memo to Board and Commissioners regarding Survey Results
4. Commissions' Expenditure Status Reports

CC:

MICHAEL F. BROWN, CEO

THERESA DUER, DEPUTY HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR