

Changes coming for human rights group

By June Russell
Emerald Contributor

Eugene's Human Rights Task Force may present the city council with suggestions for structural and objective changes in the city's existing human rights program to increase the program's effectiveness and efficiency by the end of the year.

Since its creation in April, the task force, chaired by Mayor Jeff Miller, has been considering options for restructuring the five existing human rights commissions and brainstorming proper goals and revisions for the program as a whole, said Keli Osborne, staff person for the city planning office.

The task force expects to present its recommendations to the city council before the end of the year, Osborne said.

Eugene's human rights program is divided into five separate commissions. The commissions focus on the rights of the aging, minorities, people with disabilities, women and youth. The task force is looking at changing this structure.

One model the task force is examining would combine Eugene's current five-commission structure with the city of Salem's model of a one-commission human rights program, Osborne said, adding that the change would create a "supercommission" to direct the other five.

The task force listened to reports from the presidents of the existing commissions on the

advantages and disadvantages of the existing structure. They also examined models of human rights commissions in other cities, including Salem and Berkeley, Calif., Osborne said.

Lupe Quinn, a task force member, said they are "looking at human rights commissions and looking at what the city wants to make a commitment to."

As part of the revising process, the task force generated a value statement and brainstormed a list of goals the to which the program would be committed.

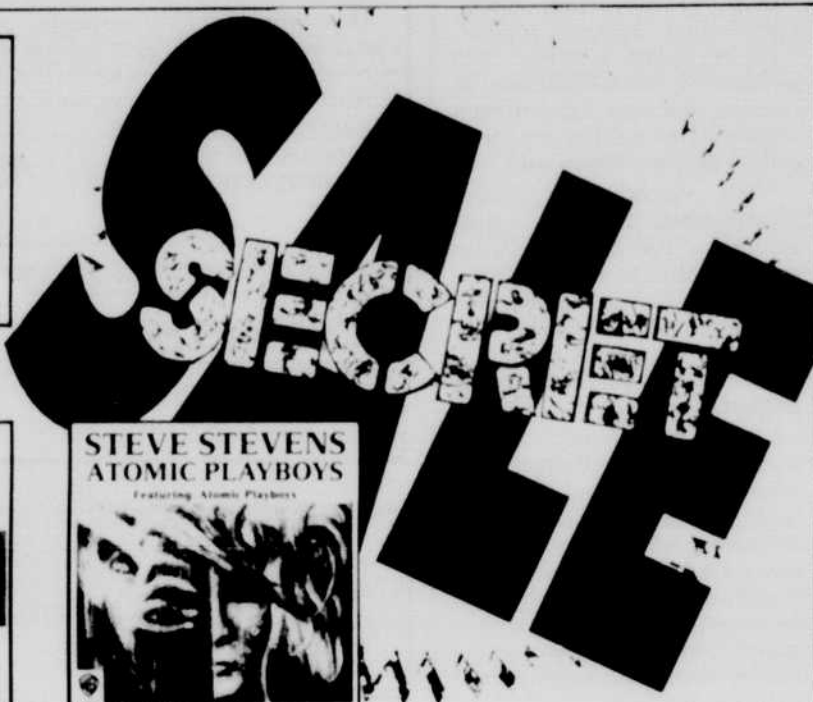
Among these commitments are making human rights a central part of every city program, respecting and reflecting cultural and individual diversity, fostering mutual understanding and promoting inclusiveness and justice.

The task force, Quinn said, hopes to make human rights a part of how the city does its work, to the extent that the statement of purpose "becomes real."

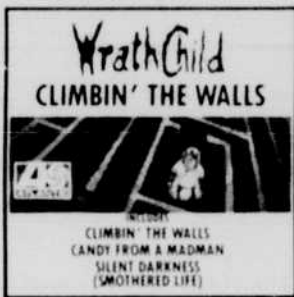
Quinn expressed concern about the accountability of the commissions to the people, and how the leaders of the commissions were chosen, citing them as problems she hopes the revisions will solve. Another problem, Quinn said, was the lack of support from the city.

"I think in the city we have Jeff Miller," Quinn said. "But he's not the whole city."

The revisions, Quinn said, will help ensure that "people will be treated fairly, regardless of who they are."



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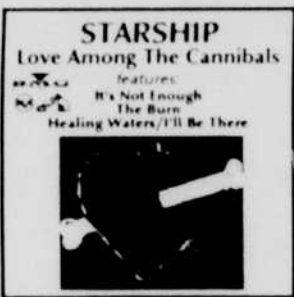
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