

Sanctuary city? Human relations commission eyes policy

by **PAUL MORTON**

Associate editor

In the wake of a raid on a local restaurant that resulted in undocumented workers being taken away by immigration officials, the city's Human Relations Commission has recommended passage of a possible resolution to prevent the city from cooperating with immigration officials in deporting undocumented workers.

But the incident that prompted the discussion was not the Oct. 30 raid by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents on Casa Fiesta in Oberlin, when two undocumented employees were taken away. Commission chair Barb Mehwald said the panel received the resolution and began reviewing it shortly after a July 23 raid on Casa Fiesta, when five employees were arrested.

"We talked about it a little in September, and October," Mehwald said before Tuesday's meeting when the commission reviewed a new draft. "There's absolutely no rush. It requires a lot of discussion. We're trying to listen, ferret out, just make sure we do the right thing."

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The resolution would prohibit the city and any city official or employee from using any municipal funds or resources to assist in the enforcement of federal immigration law, except as required by federal or state law or regulation, or court decision. It would also prohibit requesting information on the immigration status of a person applying for services or benefits from the city, or giving out that information, also except as required by federal or state law or regulation, or court decision.

Mark Fahringer, chair of the Catholic Action Commission of Lorain County, who worked with the Human Relations Commission to write the resolution, said past city councils have supported the principles expressed with previous resolutions in opposition to the Patriot Act, and the Border and Immigration Enforcement Act of 2005. He said the current resolution doesn't prohibit the city from doing anything it is currently doing.

"We're not doing any of that right now," Fahringer said. "This is just putting it in

place officially. Between the resolution on the Patriot Act and the resolution on the Sensenbrenner-King Bill, we've basically already said what this says."

An earlier draft of the resolution included three paragraphs in the preamble referencing the 1858 Oberlin-Wellington Rescue of runaway slave John Price. Commission secretary Sharon Pearson said the final draft at Tuesday's meeting omitted those references due to objections to the comparison.

"Actually quite a few people felt this was not an exact comparison," Pearson said. "The main reason was that the slaves were brought to the United States against their will. Today the immigrants see the United States as the land of opportunity. They're not saying there are no similarities, but that difference

was pretty big."

Mehwald said the commission heard from supporters of the resolution Tuesday, as well as a group from Portage and Lake counties opposed to the measure. She said the debate went smoothly, with each person given three minutes to speak on the issue.

"We heard all sides of the argument, and we just took in what everyone was saying," Mehwald said. "And there was no contentiousness, even though immigration is a very controversial issue."

In the end, the commission voted 4-1, with Duane Anderson dissenting, to recommend the resolution to city council. Council president David Sonner, who was in Florida last week for a National League of Cities convention, said the resolution was not expected to be on council's agenda last night.

Editorial

Enforce all our laws

At a time when the American people seem finally to have broken the dividing wall of race, electing our first black president, it might seem out of place for us to write against passage of a resolution to protect illegal immigrants. But our objections to the resolution have nothing to do with race.

The resolution, recommended to city council by the human relations commission, would prohibit city officials or employees from cooperating with federal immigration enforcement efforts. It would even prohibit city employees from asking about immigration status on any application for benefits, services, or opportunities provided by the city, except as required by federal or state statute, regulation, or court decision.

When Oberlin police officers join the department, they are administered an oath to "support the Constitution and laws of the United States, the Constitution and laws of the state of Ohio, and the laws and ordinances of the city of Oberlin." The oath does not offer exceptions, but expects officers to support all of the laws.

Supporting the laws of the United States, the state of Ohio, and the city of Oberlin means more than simple enforcement. They are required to defend the laws and protect them from corruption or subversion, even by those with the noblest intent.

The United States is a nation of laws, without which we would fall into anarchy. Our police officers are expected to support and enforce all of those laws, not just those that are politically expedient.

By ignoring one set of laws — immigration laws — we establish an arbitrary double standard of enforcement and open ourselves to other dangers. Perhaps that illegal immigrant is in town to make contact with a drug dealer for a Colombian drug cartel, or to carry out some nefarious plan against the Federal Aviation Administration.

These scenarios are not so far out of the realm of possibility that we should ignore laws created to protect us from them. We urge city council to consider this when debating the resolution.