

CEO Gets New Monitor, Faces Uncertain Future

By Markeshia Ricks | Apr 5, 2018
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The city's Commission on Equal Opportunities finally has a new "utilization monitor" to visit construction sites and hold builders' feet to the fire for hiring women and minorities on building jobs. But who will lead the commission in the future remains uncertain.

Commissioners got to meet Charles Elbert, the man who will be their eyes and ears on the ground at construction sites, Wednesday night during what would have been their regular monthly meeting at City Hall. The meeting had to become a "workshop" where no business was transacted because the commission did not have a quorum.

The commissioners did not discuss a recent ruling by the state Board of Mediation and Arbitration that former CEO executive director Nichole Jefferson should be reinstated with back pay, or what that means for acting Interim Director Angel Fernandez-Chavero. The board sided with Jefferson's argument that the city unfairly fired her in 2015 based on false accusations of unethical conduct and withholding information. (Read more about the ruling from the New Haven Register's Mary O'Leary [here](#); back stories on both sides of the long-running controversy can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).)

Asked after the meeting how the commission might proceed in the face of the ruling, Commission Chair Gwen Newton said she doesn't know.

Asked about whether the city will end up rehiring Jefferson, Mayor Toni Harp said earlier on Wednesday that she also isn't sure. She said she's been in discussions with city Corporation Counsel John Rose Jr. on the matter.

"We're looking at all our options," including appealing the labor board's decision, Harp said.

New staff "utilization monitor" Elbert, a Waterbury native, comes to the CEO office after having been a substitute teacher for New Haven Schools for the last seven years while pursuing a master's degree in political science from Southern Connecticut State University. Prior to that, Elbert had spent about a decade working as an engineering technician for the Veterans Affairs Medical Center where he managed construction and prepared contracts.

"I've always wanted to be more involved in helping minorities get into construction," he said of what appealed to him about taking on the job. "There's a lot of work out there."

During the meeting, commissioners asked him what he has seen on his first week and a half. Until his arrival, the agency has relied on computer modeling and self-reporting by builders to determine whether they are complying with city-mandated requirements for hiring women and blacks and Latinos on government-funded projects. ([Click here](#) for a report on the previous meeting, where Fernandez-Chavero detailed the agency's tech upgrades.)

Elbert said he has worked on getting familiar with the city's ordinance and policies and calling sites about their compliance. He said he is headed to his first construction site Thursday. Elbert told commissioners that from what he's glimpsed so far, contractors and subcontractors need better assistance in connecting with women who want to work construction. And women who want to work construction need a better way of connecting with that kind of work.

Commissioner Ruth Henderson noted that once upon a time the city had an "excellent program" for training women for construction work. Though she didn't say Jefferson's name, Henderson was referring to the not-for-profit training program that Jefferson had started for the purpose of training women for construction jobs. All of that collapsed when Jefferson was fired almost three years ago.

Fernandez-Chavero said that New Haven Works is trying to fill that need but is in many ways starting from scratch.

"One of the challenges for the CEO to run such a program directly opens us up to too many questions because we're a regulator," he said. Commissioners will get a report on those efforts at their next meeting, he said.