

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 15, 2020 5:00 p.m.

Attendance: Justin Carbonella, Brandie Doyle, Ed Ford, Ava Hart, Sanji Lawrence, Debbie Ruimerman, Howard Thody, and Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

Excused Absence:

Absence: Henry Fernandez and Precious Price

QUORUM: *Yes:* X *No:*

Call to Order: Chairperson Carbonella called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. Nyaunu Stevens of NCCJ was in attendance via conference call. Others present were Beverly Lawrence and Betsy Morgan of the Racial Justice Coalition, and Evan Davis.

Public Session: The commission welcomed new member, Commissioner Sanji Lawrence. Two guests were present to witness her welcome to the commission. Commissioner Lawrence thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve on the commission. She said that she has served on a lot of other organizations and recently ran for Board of Ed. She added that she and Beverly Lawrence are cousins.

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Minutes: Chairperson Carbonella asked for a motion to approve the Revised Agenda for January 15, 2020. Commissioner Ford motioned to approve the Revised Agenda for January 15, 2020. Commissioner Doyle seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried. Chairperson Carbonella asked for discussion on the February meeting. Director Jackson said the reason why that is on the agenda is because one of the community dialogue dates falls on the same date as the meeting. She added that the January dates for the dialogue weren't working either. Nyaunu Stevens offered to send someone else to conduct the January session, but Director Jackson said this was her work, so she needed to be the one to conduct it. Therefore, both dialogue sessions are scheduled for February, and one of them is on the commission's scheduled meeting date. Additionally, at the January Common Council Meeting, Councilman Pessina asked that one of the dialogue sessions be held at the Community Health Center. The Community Health Center was able to accommodate one of the dialogue sessions. They will work to disseminate the information in the North End. Director Jackson's office will invite the 40 people who attended the focus groups and the additional 40 on the list from the first ask. The revised dates are as follows:

- February 10, 2020 at the Russell Library (snow date February 18, 2020 at City Hall)
- February 19, 2020 at the Community Health Center (snow date February 21, 2020 at the Community Health Center)

Therefore, Director Jackson explained the decision before the commission is to either cancel or reschedule the February 19th meeting. Chairperson Carbonella said he could see value in cancelling

the meeting, especially with the expectation that commission members who are a part of the affinity group attend the community dialogue. Also, it would give NCCJ some additional time. However, the benefit of meeting right after the community dialogue would be that they'd have a fresher debrief from the experience.

Commissioner Doyle said she was hoping for a reschedule because she wanted to bring up the issue of the census to the commission, and it's time sensitive. She continued that she feels as though there is space for this commission to make a difference in the accuracy of the census. She said she reviewed the data from the last census and that it struck her as quite inaccurate. She said she finds it hard to believe that only 13% of Middletown's population is black. It could make a very big difference in this community if they had a more accurate count. One of the issues raised in NCCJ's work already is the representation in the leadership of the City. Representation is sought according to existing demographics, but those demographics could be wrong. The problem is that the census will be kicking off in March and be in full effect in April. Then, it's done. So, if the commission skips the February meeting, it may miss an opportunity to assist in obtaining a more accurate count, which could lead to more representation in the community. Director Jackson asked what that contribution would look like and what is the expectation of the commissioners. Commissioner Doyle said she hadn't come to a conclusion on that yet and hoped that the commission could work together on that. She referenced a presentation by Izzi Greenberg, saying that groups at risk of undercount are children under five, children five to nine, black residents, Hispanic residents, and renters, all of which she thinks would have a dramatic impact on Middletown's count. She added that she has a limited understanding of this, but she was told that there can be a reluctance to self-report in communities of color because of how that information has been used against them in the past. Also, most of the people who are employed to conduct the census are white, so people of color may not feel inclined to answer the door and give personal information about their households. She said she had two ideas. First, they could advocate for people of color being hired to conduct the census, especially in communities of color. Second, though she doesn't know how to go about this, they could somehow help people feel safe sharing information. Also, there's a climate of concern about the information being used against people, especially with the threat of the citizenship question. Also, it's largely going to be conducted online this year. Therefore, the Federal Government is banking on the notion that people will freely go to the website and self-report. She continued that whatever role the commission would play would be whatever the members decide; however, she sees the potential for a huge impact on Middletown. Accurate numbers could affect how representation is calculated and how federal dollars are distributed.

Director Jackson said that the mayor is putting together a Middletown census committee, and she advised him that she would like to be on it as the president of NAACP. Also, Carl Chisem is in the process of getting someone from the census to do a presentation at February's NAACP meeting. She also advised the commission that 13% for the black population is not too far off. She's more concerned about the Hispanic population and the immigrant population being undercounted. She asked Commissioner Doyle what role the commission would play in making the census more accurate. Commissioner Doyle said she hoped the commission could amplify the initiative and efforts in place and that the commissioners have a strong reach in the community. She added that she hadn't heard of the census committee. Commissioner Ford explained that the issue of establishing the committee will come before the Common Council in February for approval. He suggested that Commissioner Doyle, Chairperson Carbonella, and Director Jackson approach the mayor and offer the efforts of the Human Relations Commission to further assist in the work of the census committee. There was further discussion of how the commission members could assist the census committee. Commissioner Hart

recommended putting together a letter to the mayor about the commission's desire to help make the census more accurate and its willingness to work with the census committee. Commissioner Doyle suggested that the commission could further disseminate any materials the census committee puts out regarding the importance of participation. Chairperson Carbonella agreed that the issue is important, and vulnerable populations see the census as threatening. Commissioner Doyle agreed with Commissioner Hart's suggestion of drafting a letter and framing it as a racial equity issue. Commissioner Doyle said she would write the letter. She asked for an example of a letter that was from the commission to the mayor, and Chairperson Carbonella said the most recent example would be the letter from Commissioner Price. He said he would have Commissioner Price forward it to Commissioner Doyle. Commissioner Doyle asked if the commission would have to get together to vote on the letter or could it be done over email. Director Jackson said it could be done through email. Because not everyone responds to email in a timely manner, Commissioner Thody proposed that Commissioner Doyle can draft the letter, and as long as Chairperson Carbonella, Commissioner Doyle, and Director Jackson have read it and agree on it, it can then be sent to the mayor.

Motion: For the record, a motion was made. Commissioner Thody motioned that Commissioner Doyle draft a letter to the mayor suggesting the Human Relations Commission be in touch with the census committee. The letter can be disseminated to the commission members electronically. Final approval of the letter would come from Chairperson Carbonella, Commissioner Doyle, and Director Jackson. Commissioner Hart seconded the motion. Commissioner Doyle made a friendly amendment that the letter indicate the Human Relations Commission recognizes the census is critical to achieving racial equity in Middletown. There was no further discussion on the motion. The Chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried.

Chairperson Carbonella returned the discussion to the issue of canceling or rescheduling the February meeting. Commissioner Doyle motioned to cancel the February meeting. Commissioner Hart seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried. Chairperson Carbonella asked for a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of December 18, 2019. Commissioner Doyle motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes of December 18, 2019. Commissioner Hart seconded it. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried.

Old Business:

Chairperson Carbonella called Nyaunu Stevens and placed her on speaker. Nyaunu Stevens congratulated the commission on a successful presentation at the Common Council meeting. Chairperson Carbonella said that most of the commission members were at the council meeting; however, he sent the video to the group if anyone wanted to view it. He then asked Nyaunu Stevens how the commission could best be helpful in the preparation of the upcoming community conversations. Nyaunu Stevens answered that she's very excited to move the next step in this project. The most important thing for the commission to work on would be getting people in the room. Chairperson Carbonella asked about the process of recruiting participants. Nyaunu Stevens deferred the question to Director Jackson. Director Jackson answered that the first step is to develop the communication that will go out. She will also put together a flyer. The communication and flyer will be reviewed by the mayor. He will also sign it. The communication will be more powerful when it's signed by the mayor. Labels are already done. Some need to be updated. Also, she will be in touch with the principal of Middletown High School to disseminate the communication to the students who participated in the youth focus group. The Community Health Center will also work on promoting the

dialogue series in the North End. She advised the commission that she would also be in contact with the pastors in the community who have a significant number of affinity members in their congregations. As participants register, the office can keep the commission updated to let them know if the commission needs to assist in getting more people to register.

Commissioner Hart said she wanted to make a comment. The commission had been intentional in where the groups were hosted. After getting one suggestion, the location was changed, and she was surprised that the commission didn't talk more about it before switching the location. Beverly Lawrence agreed and said that there were people who live in the North End who attended the focus groups. Director Jackson said she didn't see a problem with the suggestion from the councilperson or the change in location. Beverly Lawrence said it should not have been determined by just one councilperson. Chairperson Carbonella said that while there is a large group of minorities in the North End coupled with a lack of resources, the commission shouldn't operate as if minorities don't live in other areas of Middletown. Director Jackson said people across many different areas of Middletown are being invited. Beverly Lawrence said some people have an issue with Community Health Center and don't feel that it's a welcoming building. Chairperson Carbonella said that there is a difference between institutional building and grass roots buildings.

Chairperson Carbonella clarified that the flyer ask people to select one of the dates. Also, if the Community Health Center is promoting the conversation, the Racial Justice Coalition should, as well. He asked if the commission wanted to partner with any other organization. Already, the commission is working with the Ministerial Alliance, the Racial Justice Coalition, and the Community Health Center. He also indicated that it has a natural partner with the NAACP, with Director Jackson as staff. Commissioner Doyle said that should be sufficient. There was further discussion about whether attendance should be capped. Nyaunu Stevens said they should absolutely cap at 30 people. They should not allow for over-registration with the assumption that some may not attend at the last minute. They could instead do a wait list. She repeated that she did not want to facilitate the dialogue with more than 30 people. To recap, Chairperson Carbonella said that Director Jackson would develop with communication and send it to the mayor's office. That communication will be mailed out to the people on the initial invite list. That communication will also be shared with the commission members electronically. The communication will be clear that people must RSVP with the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management.

Chairperson Carbonella asked Nyaunu Stevens about the structure of the dialogues. Nyaunu Stevens answered that the commission should be clear about what it wants to come out of the conversation. She said her understanding was that the commission was seeking recommendations about what the City could do to improve racial equity and equality. The commission members added that they were seeking confirmation of the information received during the focus groups. Commissioner Hart asked about the commission members attending the conversation as observers and not necessarily participants. Nyaunu Stevens answered that they can attend as observers but reminded the commission that the dialogue is for affinity groups only. However, she stressed that if commission members attend, they should be participants, and definitely not just observers, as that would be uncomfortable for them and the other participants.

Chairperson Carbonella said that the curriculum of the sessions should focus on not just long-term solutions, but short-term solutions, as well. Nyaunu Stevens agreed. Director Jackson said she wanted

the conversation to encourage any solution or idea, and that no idea is too outside the box or outlandish.

Director Jackson asked Nyaunu Stevens what type of supplies she would need available. Nyaunu Stevens said generally speaking she would need multiple flip charts and markers. However, she can get back to Director Jackson with a more definitive answer once she has written the curriculum.

Chairperson Carbonella asked if Nyaunu Stevens wanted to add anything. Nyaunu Stevens answered that she wanted to say that she was very appreciative of what the commission members said to the Common Council about the work that she has done. She is very pleased that the commission had such positive feedback.

The commission thanked Nyaunu Stevens for her time. The call concluded.

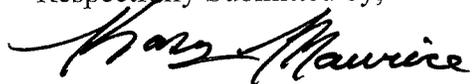
New Business:

Review: The commission reviewed the 2019 attendance.

Announcements The next meeting of the commission will be March 18, 2020 at City Hall.

Adjournment: Commissioner Doyle motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Ford seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:17 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,



Kasey Maurice,
Administrative Sec. III