

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 19, 2022 5:00 p.m.

Attendance: Tasha Edens, Henry Fernandez, Anthony Gennaro, Ava Hart, Sanji Lawrence, Debbie Ruimerman, Howard Thody, and Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

Excused Absence:

Absence: Brandie Doyle and Ed Ford

QUORUM: Yes: X No:

Call to Order: Chairperson Hart called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m. She noted for the record that there is a quorum. Commissioner Lawrence explained that she has had some issues in her personal life that have made it difficult for her to attend meetings. She apologized for her absences and said it was good to be back and to see everyone.

Public Session: None.

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Agenda: Chairperson Hart asked for a motion to approve the Revised January 19, 2022 Meeting Agenda. Commissioner Thody motioned to approve the Revised January 19, 2022 Meeting Agenda. Commissioner Gennaro seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chairperson Hart asked for a motion to approve the November 17, 2021 Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Thody motioned to approve the November 17, 2021 Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Edens seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried with two abstentions.

Old Business: Chairperson Hart moved the discussion to next steps. She said there was great discussion at the November meeting regarding next steps. She reminded the commission that she was not present at that meeting, so she wants to look to the other commissioners for input on the discussion of bringing back participants from the focus groups. She noted that there was also discussion on the meeting with the Director of Human Resources and sharing those minutes with the participants. Director Jackson explained that the discussion centered on bringing back the participants from the focus groups, by way of inviting them to a meeting, and advising them of what has been done since they provided the input to the report with the Human Relations Commission and the creation of the Anti-Racism Task Force. She clarified that in many cases, people participate in discussion groups and or focus groups and provide feedback but then never learn of what was done as a result of their input. Director Jackson further explained that the plan was that a letter would go out to the participants; however, Commissioner Doyle had volunteered to draft the letter but had not done so. Commissioner Doyle sent an email to the commissioners and apologized for neglecting to do it.

Chairperson Hart said that at this point, due to the rising number of COVID cases and the new variant, it would not be possible to have a large in-person meeting. Director Jackson agreed. She then asked the commissioners if they'd had a chance to review the diagram that the Anti-Racism Task Force put together. While the hard copy of the diagram is difficult to read, it does include the six categories that the NCCJ report addressed: criminal justice, labor, community building, housing, information, and education.

Chairperson Hart said that the commission should have a discussion with Anti-Racism Task Force Chair Sacha Armstrong-Crockett about collaborating with the Human Relations Commission. She said that she would be happy to be the person to have that discussion but that she would need a motion from the commission. Director Jackson added that the commission should have some bullet points to be prepared to speak to her about, as well. Commissioner Fernandez said the commission should reintroduce itself, learn what the task force is working on, and determine how best to help with that work. After that, the commission could better create some bullet points and suggestions, but at this time, both groups are working blind.

Motion: Commissioner Thody motioned that the commission invite the Chairperson of the Anti-Racism Task Force to the February Human Relations Commission meeting. He added that he'd like for them to give some type of report of the work they have done.

Commissioner Gennaro advised the commission that shortly after he was first elected to serve on the Common Council, the council voted to fund the task force from money from the Police Department. He explained that he voted in favor of that because the money was coming from funds allocated for events that were cancelled due to COVID. He said that the task force has quite a bit of money to accomplish work and that it is supposed to be giving reports to the Common Council. The task force did give a report to the council, and the work the task force is doing is still not clear. Going forward, as a council person, he wants to see the money being spent properly with concrete, achievable goals.

Director Jackson read from the Ordinance Regarding the Permanent Task Force on Anti-Racism: "The task force will coordinate with the Commission on Human Relations in order to effectuate the goal of fighting racism locally and beyond. While the focus of the commission is on fostering understanding of, and conversations on, racism, the focus of the task force is to take concrete steps to translate discussion into action." She added that the Human Relations Commission is advisory; whereas, the task force is action oriented.

Director Jackson then read their mission statement: "To propose policy recommendations and action items to the mayor that dismantle systemic and institutional racism, and eliminate white supremacy by centering the voices and experiences of BIPOC (Black, Brown, Indigenous, BIPOC community) residents in ways that support their full equal citizenship and ownership in Middletown." She said that the commission should ask for further explanation of the mission statement and the goals.

Commissioner Fernandez said he would like to address the term BIPOC. In his lifetime, he has been labeled multiple things from Black, African America, Negro, etc. Now, he is being called BIPOC. Director Jackson said the term was developed at a university. Commissioner Fernandez said he understood but that the commission doesn't have to use the term. He said he didn't appreciate being given another name and being told what he was. He doesn't need another label.

Amendment: Commissioner Thody said he would like to amend his motion to include an invitation to the Police Department to also attend the February meeting and provide a report.

Director Jackson said that the commission had not been discussing the Police Department and that there must be something misunderstood in the discussion. Commissioner Gennaro clarified that he understood that the task force wants to bring on a Civilian Review Board. He added that the Civilian Review Board should be a part of the report the task force provides. Director Jackson advised Commissioner Thody that his motion is still on the floor and has not been properly seconded.

Motion (repeated): Commissioner Thody motioned that the commission invite the chairperson of the Anti-Racism Task Force to the February Human Relations Commission meeting. He added that he'd like for them to give some type of report of the work they have done.

Director Jackson added that the report should be in a written format. Chairperson Gennaro agreed and said that when they presented to the Common Council, they did not provide a written report.

Called the Question: Commissioner Thody called the question. Director Jackson clarified that when the question has been called there is no further discussion until the motion is seconded.

Second: Commissioner Edens seconded the motion.

Discussion: Chairperson Hart said that she would have a conversation with the chairperson of the Anti-Racism Task Force. However, she would not necessarily want the commission to write a formal letter asking the task force to report to the commission.

Friendly Amendment: Commissioner Gennaro said he would like to add that when Chairperson Hart reaches out to Chairperson Sacha Armstrong-Crockett, they discuss the Human Relations Commission's concerns and then figure out when the chairperson would like to come to one of the commission's meetings. Then, Chairperson Hart can report back to the commission and report the outcome of that discussion. Commissioner Fernandez seconded the friendly amendment.

Director Jackson asked Commissioner Thody if he accepted the amendment to his motion. Commissioner Thody said he didn't understand why the commission seemed to be putting off the timing of the Anti-Racism Task Force coming to the Human Relations Commission meeting. He added that he wasn't seeking a formal document but rather wanted to know what the task force has been doing. There was further discussion regarding this, and Commissioner Gennaro clarified that that Chairperson Hart would start the conversation with Chairperson Sacha Armstrong-Crockett to invite her to an upcoming meeting, the sooner the better. Commissioner Thody said he agreed with the friendly amendment.

Commissioner Gennaro added that the task force plans to come to the Common Council in February with a number of resolutions. However, the Human Relations Commission has been left out of it, and the two groups are supposed to be working collaboratively. Chairperson Hart asked when the February Common Council meeting is scheduled. The Common Council meeting is February 7th. Chairperson Hart said she would get in touch with Chairperson Sacha Armstrong-Crockett as soon as possible.

Commissioner Gennaro added that when the council voted to allocate funding to the task force, they were a byproduct of the Human Relations Commission. Chairperson Hart said she was glad he said that. She said that when she communicates with them, she intends to ask the question of how they see themselves collaborating with the Human Relations Commission.

Vote: Chairperson Hart asked the commission to vote on the friendly amendment which was seconded by Commissioner Fernandez. The motion with the friendly amendment passed with a unanimous vote.

Chairperson Hart said she wanted to make sure that the previous discussion regarding the NCCJ participants stays on the commission's radar. She suggested the commission wait until Commissioner Doyle is in attendance since she initiated that idea. Director Jackson agreed that the commission should wait until Commissioner Doyle was available. Also, it would be beneficial for the commission to wait until the weather could permit them to have an outdoor gathering to mitigate risk. The commission agreed that it should hold off on planning the in-person meeting.

New Business: There was no new business.

Review: The commission reviewed the attendance.

Announcements:

The next meeting of the commission will be February 16, 2022.

Adjournment:

Chairperson Hart asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Gennaro motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Lawrence seconded. The meeting adjourned at 6:11 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,



Kasey Maurice,
Administrative Sec. III