

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 20, 2021 5:00 p.m.

Attendance: Brandie Doyle, Henry Fernandez, Anthony Gennaro, Ava Hart, Paige Petit, Debbie Ruimerman, Howard Thody, and Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

Excused Absence: Ed Ford

Absence:

QUORUM: Yes: X No:

Call to Order: Director Jackson called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. The commission welcomed new members, Anthony Gennaro and Paige Petit.

Public Session: Jay Tulin, Chairperson of the Human Relations Commission in Farmington, was present. He thanked the commission for having him again. He said that he wanted to provide an update to the statewide Human Relations Forum. There are now ten towns involved: Hamden, Guilford, West Hartford, Farmington, South Windsor, Windsor, Coventry, Glastonbury, Wethersfield, and Newington. Another development is that CHRO will have a role in participating, as well. Additionally, the Connecticut Human Rights Partnership is involved. He said that in response to Chairperson Doyle's request for more information, he asked Sean Cardwell of the Hamden Human Rights and Relations Commission to copy and include Director Jackson and Chairperson Doyle on all communications going forward. He said he'd love to have Middletown join them.

Director Jackson thanked Jay Tulin and said that she was looking for something a little more concrete. She said she wanted something in writing that she can then address to the mayor.

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Agenda: Chairperson Doyle reminded Director Jackson that the commission elected her as interim chair in November and that she could chair the meeting going forward. Director Jackson thanked her for the reminder and turned the meeting over the Chairperson Doyle. Chairperson Doyle asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Lawrence motioned to approve the January 20, 2021 agenda. Commissioner Hart seconded. Director Jackson called for a vote. The motion properly carried with two abstentions.

Approval of Minutes: Commissioner Thody motioned to approve the December 16, 2022 Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Hart seconded. Director Jackson called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Old Business:

Chairperson Doyle referenced an email that she sent earlier in the day. She brought the focus back to the NCCJ report. She shared her screen to show the executive summary and referenced the areas recommended for attention as a result of the extensive community input process. The areas are as follows: labor equity, criminal justice equity, information equity, housing equity, education equity, community building, and overall racial climate. She explained to the commission for those who were new to the group that so far, the commission has addressed the area of labor equity. She said that the commission made a written recommendation to the mayor to make the hiring process for the manager's union more open to those who are in other unions or those who don't already work for the City.

Chairperson Doyle said that her hope for tonight's meeting is that the commission can decide on another area that needs immediate action. She added that under the heading of overall racial climate is the point that the community is concerned that residents will not be open to the amount of work that must be done or the changes that must be made. She said that she has given some thought to areas with either low-hanging fruit or those that would make a big difference but may require more leg work. She said that the topic of housing equity has come up frequently, and she read one of the points outlines under housing equity: "allocate resources more equitably, such as prioritizing lower-income neighborhoods alongside wealthier neighborhoods when delivering City services such as street clean up, sanitation, lawn care, etc., which create a more attractive living space." She added that the City recently rolled out the SeeClickFix platform, which is intended to provide more accountability when a complaint is made to the City and whether action is taken on the complaint. One action the commission could take is to further promote the SeeClickFix to other neighborhoods where residents are feeling neglected. She said her second idea addresses the first bullet under housing equity, "end housing segregation in Middletown." Obviously, this is a much bigger objective. She said that she is a Planning and Zoning alternate in her hometown, and they had an opportunity to invite an organization called Desegregate CT. Desegregate CT introduced them to some recommended practices that their platform is recommending for 2021. She suggested that the commission invite Desegregate CT to a future meeting. A major recommendation she has seen on their website is mandatory training for anyone who is operating in a planning capacity. Her third idea is under the community building heading: "change the nature of youth City jobs to offer more substantive experience than just outdoor labor." She explained that this is a more mid-range goal. The commission operates in an advisory capacity and can make a recommendation on the type and level of work offered to youth City positions.

Having made those suggestions, Chairperson Doyle opened the discussion and asked the commissioners for input on any of her three suggestions or any of the bullets under the recommended areas. Commissioner Hart thanked Chairperson Doyle for having read the minutes from the last meeting, which she wasn't able to attend. Commissioner Hart said the group had a lengthy discussion on housing. She added that she liked the idea of bringing in Desegregate CT. Chairperson Doyle said that she would reach out to Desegregate CT and provide them with a list of the commission's upcoming meetings to see when they would be able to join them. She asked the commission if anyone else had any other suggestions or input. She reminded the commission that they should be accountable to the people who took time to bring forward these issues.

Commissioner Lawrence introduced herself to the new members and explained to the other members that she had been absent for a few meetings due to medical issues and a surgery. She added that one of the issues that resonates with her is getting the youth to do more meaningful employment. She said that during this time of COVID-19, she has found that the youth are more skilled with the technical issues she's been experiencing. She said it would be great if the youth could get more engaged with jobs in the City that provide technical support. Commissioner Hart asked for clarification on the administration of the youth programs. Chairperson Doyle said that there are two programs. One is administered through the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, and that's the program the library uses. The other is administered through the City. However, the programs are similar. She added that the City-administered program is the one the commission is more likely to impact through recommendation. Commissioner Hart said she didn't know much about the City program.

Director Jackson said she could comment on the City program. She said that it is run through the Youth Services Bureau, headed up by Justin Carbonella. She said that every year, the bureau reaches out to the departments asking if the directors are interested in hiring youth. For her office, she wrote a job description for the position and has had a number of summer interns over the years. The interns in her department have done actual administrative work. They fill in for the Administrative Secretary when she is out or at lunch. They update the City's organizational charts. They speak to people who are applying for the Jones Fund. They perform data entry for the intakes the department has had over the year but has not had the time to enter into the database. This year, due to COVID-19 guidelines, the department could not have an intern. The space where the intern would typically work is only big enough for one person, due to distancing guidelines, and that space is near the entrance of the department where people come into the office to drop off paperwork or speak to the office personnel. However, a department that hires a lot of summer interns is Public Works, and the bulk of their work is outside.

Chairperson Doyle said that an issue they have to deal with at the library is that they cannot have other workers doing the work of unionized employees. So, that might be an issue that other departments in the City face, as well. She then added that she'd be willing to reach out to Justin Carbonella to get more data on how many students participate in the program and where they are typically placed. Commissioner Hart said it sounded like the two programs are different and asked how the commission knows to which program residents were referring. She wouldn't want to problem solve something on the City side when people were referring to the chamber program. Chairperson Doyle answered that the two programs are similar, so they are likely conflated. However, reaching out to Justin Carbonella will provide more amplifying information. Commissioner Lawrence said she has a family member who went through the chamber program, and it places students in companies other than just the City.

Chairperson Doyle summarized that the commission has a couple action items for next steps. She said she would reach out to Desegregate CT to join them for possibly next month's meeting. Meanwhile, she highly recommends the commission checks out their website. Additionally, she will reach out to Justin Carbonella. However, she said as she recalls, the City's program has strict requirements to provide meaningful work. Therefore, it's possible that the residents are referring to the chamber program as far as the limitations of the work. If that's the case, the commission can make a recommendation to the chamber, but the chamber is not accountable to the commission. Commissioner Hart clarified that she was very interested in the data they gather from Justin Carbonella. The community may have a perception that most of the youth work is outside work. And, while that's a perception, it may not be the case. They should know if they're working on solving a problem that

doesn't need to be solved. However, they should be certain that students are given equal access to opportunities in the office and outside, or whatever they value. She added that they should also look at information on the chamber program. She asked Director Jackson the best way to get information about the youth intern program administered by Lorenzo Marshall. Director Jackson answered that they could send him a direct email explaining that the commission is working on a project and would like further data on the program, specifically what types of positions have been offered over the last few years. Commissioner Hart said she would reach out to Lorenzo Marshall at the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce and request this information. The commission thanked her for volunteering to do that.

Chairperson Doyle recommended that the commission bring additional ideas for action and next steps to the upcoming meetings because the commission wants to be a group that gets things done. Director Jackson suggested that the commission members re-visit the NCCJ report because that is the document from which they are working. Chairperson Doyle said that the report addressed issues in the school system, which is outside her wheelhouse. Therefore, if any other commissioner has more expertise that would be very beneficial.

Chairperson Doyle closed the discussion on next steps and moved the commission to the agenda item of the election of the chair and vice chair. Considering that the commission has two new members, she asked if the group was comfortable having this vote or wanted to wait another meeting or two. Director Jackson said that Chairperson Doyle had also expressed the importance of having the full commission present. The commissioners agreed. Chairperson Doyle said that her other reservation over conducting this business tonight is that no one seems to be very eager to take on either of these roles. She said that if she became chair, it would be reluctant, at best. She added that she would be particularly reluctant if she didn't have a vice chair. She added that she is technically a registered democrat, but leans more toward unaffiliated, so a party counterbalance in the leadership would be beneficial. Director Jackson added that diversity in the leadership would also be important. Chairperson Doyle added that she doesn't feel great being a white female at the helm of this commission. She is willing to do the work; however, she feels strongly that they need to make room in government leadership positions for people who don't look like her.

Commissioner Fernandez said he's been a commissioner for many years and appreciates how she has led the meetings since taking the helm. He added that he remembers when the commission struggled to even have a quorum. The state of this group is a vast improvement. Director Jackson agreed and said this commission is a great team. She is pleased to see that this group is action oriented and wants to work. She mentioned that Commissioner Hart may make a good vice chair. Commissioner Hart said her only concern would be time. She would want to make sure she had the time to dedicate to the work. Chairperson Doyle said she wouldn't ask much from her as a vice. Simply the way Commissioner Doyle keeps the discussion moving is valuable in a leader. Commissioner Thody asked if Commissioner Hart would consider chair. Commissioner Hart answered no. There was further discussion on either Commissioner Hart or Commissioner Lawrence taking the role of vice chair. Chairperson Doyle said that the commission members should give it some thought and feel free to discuss over email.

New Business:

Motion: Chairperson Doyle motioned to table the nomination and election of chair and vice chair until the February meeting. Commissioner Lawrence seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried.

Review: The commission reviewed the 2020 attendance.

Announcements The next meeting of the commission will be February 17, 2021.

Adjournment: Commissioner Fernandez motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Lawrence seconded. Director Jackson called for a vote. The meeting was adjourned at 5:49 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,



Kasey Maurice,
Administrative Sec. III