

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 16, 2022 5:00 p.m.

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

Excused Absence:

Absence:

QUORUM: Yes: X No:

Call to Order: Chairperson Hart called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m. She noted for the record that there is a quorum.

Public Session: Jay Tulin was present from the public. He indicated that he was under the impression that he and Myra Clark-Siegel were expected to speak on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. He was able to call into the meeting using the information on the agenda. However, Myra Clark-Siegel could not get into the meeting. Chairperson Hart said that the commission was not expecting him to speak on any item on the agenda. However, if he wanted to give a presentation during the public session, the commission could allow him that time. Jay Tulin indicated that because Myra Clark-Siegel could not get into the meeting, he did not want to speak on the agenda item or hold up the commission's meeting. He then exited the meeting.

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Agenda: Chairperson Hart asked for a motion to approve the February 16, 2022 Meeting Agenda. Commissioner Gennaro motioned to approve the February 16, 2022 Meeting Agenda. Commissioner Edens seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chairperson Hart asked for a motion to approve the January 19, 2022 Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Gennaro motioned to approve the January 19, 2022 Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Edens seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried with one abstention.

Old Business: Chairperson Hart moved the discussion to an update on her discussion with Chairperson Armstrong-Crockett of the Permanent Task Force on Anti-Racism. She explained that she had sent an email with documents earlier that day to Director Jackson and asked her to share it with the commission. Director Jackson shared her screen with the commission, and Chairperson Hart explained that this was information from the Anti-Racism Task Force.

Commissioner Fernandez indicated that he has issue with the use of the term BIPOC. They have not approached community leaders about using this term. He asked what right they have to rename them. He added that the white community was not being renamed.

Director Jackson explained that she researched the term when the Anti-Racism Task Force started using it. The term originated from a college. Commissioner Fernandez said he understood that, but did the term come from an HBCU?

Chairperson Hart said she understood the commission had some thoughts about this term and that it is an important topic. However, due to the fact that the current agenda had a lot on it, the commission may want to put it on the agenda for the next meeting. She asked for a motion.

Motion: Commissioner Fernandez motioned to put discussion of the term/acronym BIPOC on the agenda for March's meeting. Commissioner Gennaro seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Chairperson Hart asked Director Jackson to leave up the documents on the screen for the commission to discuss. She said she had a couple observations. In addition to the themes identified in the NCCJ report, the task force has added three other themes: COVID 19, Healthcare Equity, and Environmental Racism. She then further referenced the document:

Little Victories

- *Human Resources Specialist with a focus on diversity and inclusion
- *created a mission statement and goals w/ glossary
- *attended a 2 day comprehensive anti-racism training
- *using trusted anti-racist stakeholders to partner in our data collection and strategic planning
- *working with MPS to increase BIPOC involvement in Agricultural Sciences (helping write a 2 year plan and goals)

We issued our 1st recommendation to the Mayor's office regarding the BOE investigation of the Central Office Administration.

Working with Policy Director of the Justice Collaborator @ Yale Law School to craft language for CRB and to explore other models of police accountability and transparency so we show community options

Chairperson Hart said she would like some clarification on the second to the last paragraph. She asked if anyone knew details of the recommendation to the Office of the Mayor. Director Jackson said this was the first she was hearing of this. Also, this investigation is a legal process. There are no outcomes as of yet, so how can the task force make a recommendation?

Commissioner Gennaro asked Commissioner Ford, who also serves on the Permanent Task Force on Anti Racism, to further explain the recommendation regarding the Board of Ed. Commissioner Ford said that Sasha Armstrong-Crockett came before the Common Council to deliver a report and in her address to the council, she mentioned the administration. He said that the task force wanted to ensure they conducted a completely fair investigation. He suggested that the commission get a copy of the statement from Sasha Crockett or from Linda Reed. Commissioner Gennaro said that there was no written report. Therefore, Linda Reed had to use only the recording from that night's meeting. At that

time, the situation was new, and the spoken address was emotionally charged. At the end of the day, the investigation will have to speak for itself.

Below is an excerpt from her spoken report the Common Council as it appeared in the Common Council minutes (bold face highlights the discussion on the BOE administration):

Task Force Chair Sasha Crockett says good evening, adding that she is just getting over a cold. Like other Anti-Racism task Forces that they researched, their Task Force had a head start in ways. They had data from community conversations and suggestions provided by the NCCJ Report that she assumes that they are all familiar with. It was a yearlong project to collect input specifically from residents of color on their experiences navigating racism in the City, They used that as their guide to create areas of focus or themes. That is what they are called in the NCCJ Report Those themes are: labor equity, criminal justice system equity, information equity, housing segregation, education equity, community building, and overall racial climate. Again, all of these themes were put together collectively from experiences of people of color in the community and all had a shared experience. These are things, the areas of focus for us. To adjust to the current community concerns, noting that the sessions were held prior to Covid, so they had to add extra themes. Those three include: Covid-19. Health care equity, and environmental racism. Over the past year of meeting, they have celebrated small victories. In labor equity, they advocated for a Human Resources Specialist with emphasis on inclusion, and, from what she understands, interviews were held last week. She believes that they selected the person. Another small victory is adopting their mission statement and goals. That was difficult. They started with good intentions, but no roadmap. Looking at other cities like Middletown, most are in the community conversations phase. There were no models for them so creating their mission statement and goals was a small victory, they attended a 2-day comprehensive racism training. They try to use anti-racist stakeholders to partner with in their data collection and strategic planning. They is important because they are working with Rev. Anderson, learning what she is doing with Covid 19 and health equity. This also brings the Task Force This brings the Task Force into her spaces like the Ministerial Alliance. **For education, she knows that the thought should be on the children and there is a lot going on with the administration. One of their first recommendations was there. Obviously, someone has been picked so it seems that their suggestion was just that. Race should be part of the conversation. It doesn't mean that the allegation aren't true, but that race is part of the conversation.** They gave a recommendation to the Mayor to be thoughtful, not for the Mayor to be thoughtful, but to make a recommendation to the Board of Education about that. Another reason

they did that was that there has been a lot of racialized events that have taken place recently, which is part of the things that they attack in the Task Force: women of color being called names at public meetings and in online spaces; a politically driven letter writing campaign that was mailed to the homes and employers of women of color with the intent of smearing and intimidation and in the hopes of them losing their jobs as well as their leadership roles in town. She can speak to that personally because it was her. Personal videos of black and brown underage children in crisis situations, being shared on social media, both public and private, on campaign pages of white BOE candidates without parental consent. She was with those parents. Her children's information was put up without her permission. When she provides her public information, she is providing it. It is very different where she would never enter willingly, or allow her children to enter willingly. These are things that are happening in the community. The great thing is that we have the Task Force to discuss this, even sitting in this meeting tonight, or listening to it. When the public spoke, you can hear people of color say that race is part of the conversation. We have teachers in Beman (Middle School), using the "N" work and being recorded by students in a lesson that is not part of the curriculum. That is a Beman teacher. That is racist. We have another investigation going on at the Board of Education with a high school teacher – a white man – who does stop and first lessons that are very anti-black and confuse children. White allies are left feeling very uncomfortable. That is racist. If we have these teachers involved somehow in these conversation about these allegations, Race is part of the conversation. It is really important to have a place like the Task Force to explore all of that. Our (inaudible) are crafting appropriate language for a Civilian Review Board, which falls under the criminal justice theme. For the Planning & Zoning Chair to explore Middletown zoning laws to ensure that they are all equitable. That would go in the housing segregation theme. We are also looking at doing asset mapping. Information equity is a theme and there is a real feeling of "I need help. Where do I go?" With race being part of the conversation, you can't, as a person of color in town, you are going to get received and feel more open to sharing if you feel represented. Doing asset mapping allows pole to understand that if something is working at school or at home or you go into the City and there is an issue or City Hall and there is an issue or whatever. . You live in Middletown and need help, we need to create asset mappings so it's easier for folks. Also creating a strategic two-year plan is where we are going. That would fall under overall racial climate. That is why she feels it is important to share all of these experiences that many people of color are having in Middletown. Racism has evolved. You cannot directly (inaudible) black person anymore. You have to sprinkle in some white people. She can speak from experience exactly what happened to her. She was the one, who got the letter at home. She was the one, who got the letter at her job. It was very different from the white pole involved in these letters. There is an overall racial climate in Middletown.

She knows what it is like because she was raised here. You can like a Black person and hate Black people because this is the experience that she has had. She would be welcomed into someone's house as a Black person, as Sasha, but could hear horrible, racist things said about people of color in the process. There is a culture there that we are trying to give space to having these conversations - yea - race is at play. We don't get to pretend it's not because it's comfortable. The Task Force is where we are unpacking that, unpacking that in a bipartisan way and diverse way: Black and white and Latinx. She hopes that more people start to come in and attend meeting, adding that they hope to meet in person eventually. Since they have not yet met in person, none of them since they had their first meeting during Covid. She feels really glad about what they are trying to create and what they have succeeded in so far. She quickly wants to read the mission and goals and that will be the end.

Commissioner Ford spoke on the addition of COVID 19, healthcare equity, and environmental racism. He said environment racism is something he specifically wanted added, and it relates to food insecurities and food deserts. They have been working with a group from Wesleyan. The goal is to eventually have a grocery store that is more affordable and accessible in neighborhoods that are predominantly lower income and or people of color. The issues of COVID 19 and healthcare inequity speak for themselves and have been key topics for two, going on three, years now. Director Jackson and Commissioner Ford said that Rev. Moses Harvill of Cross Street AME Zion Church in Middletown and Rev. Robyn Anderson of Blackwell AME Zion Church in Hartford along with the Community Health Center were impactful in making vaccines and booster shots accessible throughout the community and especially to people of color. Commissioner Ford praised the Ministerial Health Alliance for its great effort and success. Commissioner Ford added that he did not have any update at this time on the collaboration with Yale Law School in the effort to craft language for the CRB.

Chairperson Hart asked Commissioner Ford and Commissioner Gennaro to speak on the Resolution Item 13i Civilian Review Board. She asked when the work on this started. Commissioner Ford said that the task force had been talking about the CRB for some time, but nothing was concrete. He said in his opinion, they weren't at the stage to do a resolution, yet, especially because they hadn't yet named the groups that needed to be identified, like the Human Relations Commission. He indicated that he made that clear to the task force and abstained from voting for that reason. This work has been talked about, but he didn't think the task force was at a point where it was ready to pass a resolution.

Commissioner Gennaro agreed and said that he spoke to Commissioner Ford about it, as well. He had concerns about it being pushed forward. Personally, he feels there should be a distinction between issues that were campaigned on and activism and actually doing the work in governing. Also, he questioned the source of their data and why the group was using New Haven as an example. He explained that when they copy another town's model, they risk also copying the problems. Middletown is not New Haven, Hartford, or Bridgeport. He said he wants Middletown to be a leader in this and not follow anyone. He said he wants things to be done right so they are successful down the road. He added that he is all for holding the police accountable; however, it takes place from the top down and it has to happen internally. Also, those who want to hold police accountable have to do so without acting on their own biases. Middletown has always been just big enough and just small enough to have those problems. He said that he looks forward to having some open and honest conversations and having

everyone truly understand both sides. In the end, he hopes this initiative doesn't hurt this city. He hopes that it improves upon what is already positive in the city.

Chairperson Hart said she greatly appreciated Commissioner Gennaro's feedback. She said she thinks transparency is key in this situation. She added that there are members of the Common Council and a member of the Anti Racism Task Force on the commission, and there should be no reason why this information is new to the commission. The Human Relations Commission needs to be getting regular updates. She said there is no communication between the different entities, and to add to that issue, things are happening behind the scenes that are creating a mess. Rather than being reactive and having to clean up that mess, she'd prefer to be proactive. She asked if anyone else had any further comments to add to the discussion so far.

Director Jackson said that she was pleased to see that the Human Relations Commission was being included in this work. According to the ordinance, the commission and the task force is supposed to be working together. The commission's minutes are very detailed. They clearly show the commission's discussion, not just the motions. She said in regards to the Civilian Review Board, she doesn't like the term "civilian." She would prefer something that refers to the community. The police and the community need to work collaboratively.

Commissioner Gennaro said the addition of the Human Relations Commission to the language of this resolution was last minute. However, the task force and the commission were supposed to be working together from the beginning. Commissioner Ford said the inclusion of the commission appeared to be an afterthought. However, it was not afterthought on the part of the task force. It was an afterthought on the part of those who put the resolution on the agenda. However, he agrees that this work should have been more collaborative. While the CRB could be positive for the city, if the right stakeholders are not at the table, it's not going to be effective. He stressed that the actual members of the task force are very willing to work with the Human Relations Commission. Going forward there has to be more consistent communication.

Chairperson Hart said she was not present at February's Common Council meeting for the discussion of the ordinance. She asked Commissioner Gennaro and Ford to advise the commission of the expected process. Commissioner Gennaro said there is a lot of work that needs to be done, and there is a lot of data that needs to be gathered. This is not something that will be done quickly. If it's done right, it could take close to a year or more to put together. Director Jackson said it would be beneficial for all the players, the Human Relations Commission, the Anti-Racism Task Force, and the Public Safety Commission to have a joint session. Then, the groups can get on one page, decide what needs to be done, and then assign the work. Chairperson Hart agreed with that plan and asked historically speaking how large groups, groups made up of more than one board or commission, have come together. She said they all have their own leadership, so what is the mechanism for getting them to come together, and upon whom does that responsibility fall? Director Jackson reminded the commission that its project was significantly supported and directed by Councilman Nocera. The council should designate a starting point for this, as well.

Commissioner Gennaro said that the Common Council gave the Anti-Racism Task force over \$200,000. It needs to be doing some work with that funding. Chairperson Hart said that while she agreed with that, she was concerned about one group having the responsibility to take the lead because they'll all be in the same predicament as they are now with reading information after the fact.

Commissioner Gennaro said communication is key. He thinks the task force should be providing monthly updates to the commission and show forward progress. Additionally, he thinks that both groups should meeting together on a quarterly basis.

Chairperson Hart said this should be the last “update” the commission receives from them. If they were working collaboratively, they wouldn’t need an update. She wanted to clarify that her issue is not with the task force but with how the resolution was handled, especially such an important resolution. Director Jackson said the task force was created out of the NCCJ report without first establishing the guidelines or mission statement. Those were established after the creation of the task force, and that is problematic. Commissioner Gennaro said this was pushed forward because of politics, and that can cause serious issues. Commissioner Ford said one of the best ways to collaborate would be through the chairpersons of the Human Relations Commission, the Anti-Racism Task Force, and the Public Safety Commission. Chairperson Hart said that maybe it should not just be one person from the group, but a couple of people. She would like the commission to decide how it would want to proceed. However, she would want participation from the Human Relations Commission to be fluid, not the same people every time.

Motion: Commissioner Ford motioned that if and when a subcommittee is formed by the City to form and create a Civilian Review Board that two to three representatives from the Human Relations Commission attend each meeting. Commissioner Ruimerman seconded. Chairperson Hart called for a vote. The motion carried unanimously.

Chairperson Hart moved the discussion to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. She explained that she had a conversation with Commissioner Lawrence and asked her to provide the commission with an update. However, Commissioner Lawrence was not present at the meeting,

Note: For the record, Commissioner Lawrence was in attendance at the meeting. However, due to technological issues, she could not speak or otherwise participate.

Director Jackson explained that Mayor Florsheim has joined over 700 mayors who have signed a statement and joined the Mayors United Against Antisemitism. To further explain, the Mayors United Against Antisemitism states the following: “American Jewish Committee (AJC) and The U.S. Conference of Mayors call on mayors and municipal leaders in the United States and around the world—and all people of good faith—to join us in declaring unequivocally that antisemitism is incompatible with the democratic values that are at the very bedrock of our society.” Multiple other towns have initiated it as a resolution and endorsed it. They are asking that Mayor Florsheim do a resolution to endorse it and that the commission support that initiative.

Commissioner Ford asked for clarification if the resolution is just that the mayor sign it and join it or is it a statement from Middletown’s Common Council. Director Jackson said they should recognize that the mayor signed it along with the other 700 plus mayors. Commissioner Ford said the resolution should be modified to make it specific to Middletown. Director Jackson agreed and said the AJC will be making a presentation. She added that the NAACP signed something similar to this on the national level. However, she’d prefer the commission hear from Myra Clark-Siegel who is the Director of the AJC Westchester/Fairfield region. She had attempted to call into the public session but could not.

Motion: Commissioner Gennaro motioned to invited Jay Tulin and Myra Clark-Siegel to attend next month's Human Relations Commission meeting to provide a presentation regarding the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Commissioner Ford seconded. Chairperson Hart called for a vote. The motion carried unanimously.

New Business: Chairperson Hart advised the commissioner that Vice Chairperson Doyle submitted her resignation to the commission, and there is now a resulting vacancy. She said for the record Vice Chairperson Doyle was a great commissioner and vice chairperson. She was active, engaged, bright, and very helpful to her in her transition to chairperson. She was significant in moving things forward during the NCCJ project and getting a great deal accomplished. She'd like to thank her publicly for her commitment and service to the City of Middletown. Director Jackson agreed and said that Vice Chairperson Doyle was instrumental in driving the NCCJ project and in putting together the executive summaries and actively communicating with the commissioners. The commissioners echoed that they were grateful for her significant contribution.

Director Jackson explained that the charter revision passed, and a part of it was term limits for members of committees, commissions, and boards. She said that the mayor would be putting together something for the departments to send to committees and commissions explaining how the term limits would be applied going forward. When a member's term comes up for renewal, if the person has more than nine years of service, he or she will not be reappointed. However, if a person reaches term limits on one committee, he or she can join another committee. For example, a committee member's term on the Affirmative Action Monitoring Committee is due to expire in April, and the person has been actively serving on the committee for many years. The commission could consider inviting that person to join fill the vacancy on the Human Relations Commission. Also, the person on the Affirmative Action Monitoring Committee, whose term is about to expire, is the same party as Vice Chairperson Doyle. Commissioner Ford suggested another process, which is that the vacancy is communicated to the appropriate party chair, such as the chairperson of the Democratic Town Committee or the Republican Town Committee. Then, the chairperson of the party reaches out to the rest of the party membership seeking interest. Names of anyone interested can be submitted to the mayor for appointment. The most effective way to start this process would be to reach out to the Town Clerk. Director Jackson said she would send communication to Common Council Clerk, Linda Reed, and copy Linda DeSena of the mayor's office. Chairperson Hart asked if she could be copied on the communication, as well. Direction Jackson said she would do so.

Chairperson Hart said that Commissioner Lawrence expressed concern to her and asked a question. She wanted to know if the Human Relations Commission members could be issued City email accounts so commission emails wouldn't be coming to her personal email account. Commissioner Gennaro said that he has an email for Common Council, and it can become an issue to keep the passwords updated. He suggested that Commissioner Lawrence, or anyone who wants to do so, create a separate email account for the commission for herself. Chairperson Hart agreed. She said that if Commissioner Lawrence wants to revisit the discussion, she's welcome to do that; however, at this time, the commission has provided a good recommendation.

Review: The commission reviewed the attendance.

Announcements:

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

Adjournment:

Chairperson Hart asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Gennaro motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Fernandez seconded. The meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kasey Maurice". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kasey" and last name "Maurice" clearly distinguishable.

Kasey Maurice,
Administrative Sec. III