

Human Relations Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
June 17, 2020 5:00 p.m.

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

**Excused Absence:** Justin Carbonella

**Absence:** Henry Fernandez

**QUORUM:**            *Yes:*   X          *No:*           

**Call to Order:** Director Jackson noted for the record that Chairperson Carbonella is currently on Family Medical Leave, with the new addition to his family, until mid-July. In the absence of the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson Doyle called the meeting to order at 5:16 p.m. Councilman Nocera was in attendance. Nyaunu Stevens of NCCJ was present along with Beverly Lawrence and Betsy Morgan of the Middletown Racial Justice Coalition.

**Public Session:** None

**Regular Meeting:**

**Approval of Minutes:** Vice Chairperson Doyle asked for a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes for April 15, 2020. Commissioner Ford motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Hart seconded. The Vice Chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried. The commission reviewed the Informal Meeting Minutes of May 28, 2020.

**Old Business:**

Vice Chairperson Doyle moved the discussion to the review of the final report. She asked Nyaunu Stevens to speak on the final report and walk them through any key points. Nyaunu Stevens started by saying that she gave the commission a thorough walk-through of the report at the April meeting. At this time, she'd like to call attention to the changes that she made. The first revision she made was to add the history of the project. This section explains why the project was started and who the key players were at the onset. This section explains that it is a City-funded project and that the commission was given a charge by the Common Council. Also, it goes on to say that the Middletown Racial Justice Coalition was invited to come on board with the Human Relations Commission. She then asked if there were any questions about the history section.

With no questions about the section, Nyaunu Stevens moved on to the next addition, which was the racial demographics the commission requested. She explained that the racial demographics were from the Middlesex Children's Project and the ALICE Report. These reports are also referenced at the end so people know how to access them. She said that this section gives a great overview of the racial makeup of the city and provides a context of disparity. It also addresses segregation in housing and the

resulting uneven distribution of resources. She went on to further explain what ALICE was and added that not surprisingly, most ALICE families were families of color.

Commissioner Price asked that the name of the Racial Justice Coalition be corrected to the Middletown Racial Justice Coalition. Nyaunu Stevens apologized and said she would make that change.

Nyaunu Stevens asked the commission if there were any other questions regarding the racial demographics section. The commission had none, so she moved forward and said that no other changes were made to the content of the report. The other changes were formatting and spelling revisions. Also, she included the output from the community conversations as an appendix instead of in the body of the report.

Director Jackson said that they need to include a list of project participants: the members of the Human Relations Commission, those who participated from the Middletown Racial Justice Coalition, and the Common Council members. That list can be at the end after the references. Nyaunu Stevens asked Director Jackson to send her the list so she can incorporate it into the report.

Vice Chairperson Doyle asked if the commission had any other comments or questions about this final draft of the report. Councilman Nocera said that he wanted to thank Nyaunu Stevens and her staff for the incredibly thorough job they did in following through and getting the best results for this report. Now, they enter phase three. Phase one was getting the funding. Phase two was working on the project. As they pass the torch to the Anti-Racism Task Force, they will be able to give the task force reliable, consistent data. This work is really a plus for the community. He added that the commission could have the discussion tonight on how to connect the commission and the task force.

Director Jackson said to Nyaunu Stevens that it's been a wonderful and enlightening journey. When the Common Council gave this charge to the commission, no one had any idea that this would put the City in such a good position for this difficult time. They have a big job ahead of them. But, this is important, ongoing work. It requires undivided attention and has to be managed on a regular basis. She said she is glad that a task force is being established and that there will be a person in the Office of the Mayor who will staff it. She is happy that this work will progress on a daily basis, not weekly, not monthly. She added that the next level for this work is far beyond the capacity of her office.

Vice Chairperson Doyle added that she agreed with Councilman Nocera that this report is fabulous and is exactly what was needed to move to the next step. She said that in order to frame the conversation going forward, she wanted to ask Nyaunu Stevens two questions:

1. What are some of the pain points that came up with the greatest frequency?
2. What are some of the low-hanging fruit? What can be accomplished quickly while work is still being done on the larger issues?

Nyaunu Stevens said that one of the things that she heard repeatedly was the lack of representation at City Hall. Everyone consistently remarked that it was problematic. She said that the City made great strides in getting more diversity into the Common Council, but the next thing to address would be hiring practices. Another issue that came up frequently was the way that young people are being treated in the schools. Also, the lack of representation in the schools came up, as well. She added that something the commission can do to demonstrate a good-faith effort is to have a conversation with

Middletown residents and communicate to them that work is being done and that they are eager to make change. However, they should communicate that they are eager to make the right changes and want to take their time to think this through. It's not a matter of trying to do something quickly. It's a matter of trying to make lasting change. She added that she is pleased that this project is going to receive more funding from the City. Another issue they can focus on in the immediate future is looking at how they can do community building, particularly in the black community. They could look into engaging some racial healing groups that can help the black people in Middletown deal with some of the trauma they're experiencing.

Vice Chairperson Doyle asked if she could reference any specific organizations that work on racial healing. Nyaunu Stevens answered that she personally didn't know of any organizations. However, Randi Renee McCray is credentialed in this area. She would be a good person to contact about this, and she has done a lot of this work with her in the community conversations.

Commissioner Price said that the Middletown Racial Justice Coalition is already working with a group that does this work. For years, they have been working with the Pacific Educational Group, and starting in August, they will have a monthly racial healing event. The events are planned to go until December depending on the outcome of the election. Councilman Nocera mentioned the Klingberg Family Centers as a local resource.

Vice Chairperson Doyle asked if the commission had any further questions for Nyaunu Stevens about the report. Commissioner Ford said he thought the report was a great foundation for where to go and now was the time to act on it. He thanked Nyaunu Stevens for her work in conducting the training and the community conversations. He said that she dug into some tough conversations and brought to light a lot of concerns people have. Now, this document is permanent, and people cannot contradict these concerns. These are the lived experiences of people of color. He appreciates this work and this report. Commissioner Lawrence said as she's worked with other communities, she wishes they would do this type of work. She feels Middletown is really ahead of other communities on this. Nyaunu Stevens said it was her pleasure to do this project and that she is so happy for Middletown that this work is taking place.

Vice Chairperson Doyle said she had a few minor formatting suggestions for the report and would like to send those via email. Nyaunu Stevens said that would be fine.

Councilman Nocera said that the Common Council would like Nyaunu Stevens to be available to present to them on Monday, July 6<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. Nyaunu Stevens said Director Jackson already told her about the upcoming council meeting, and she is available to present on that day. She added that all of these final changes to the report will be done in advance of the meeting. Director Jackson said she would get the final copy to Council Clerk Linda Reed for the agenda.

Nyaunu Stevens wished the commission a great rest of the evening and left the call.

Vice Chairperson Doyle opened up discussion on next steps. She reiterated the pain points that Nyaunu Stevens addressed: the lack of representation at City Hall (beyond the Common Council) and the treatment of young people in the school as well as a lack of representation in the schools. She also said, per Nyaunu Stevens's recommendations, they need to communicate with those who participated in the focus groups and community conversations that they were continuing this work and taking it seriously.

She also said it sounds like the Middletown Racial Justice Coalition is already ahead of this work in scheduling the racial healing events starting in August.

Commissioner Price said she would like to see a thank-you note go out to the participants. She and Vice Chairperson Doyle discussed potential ways to get the information in the report to the participants.

Commissioner Thody said he had to leave the meeting. However, he wanted to say that he is proud to live in Middletown. They have identified the problems and are working to solve them. And, he is so proud. Vice Chairperson Doyle agreed with Commissioner Thody's sentiment and said she was pleased that Middletown was a little ahead of the curve. She then said she would volunteer to write an executive summary of the report. Once completed, she will send it to the commissioners by email for feedback. Commissioner Price offered to help her with the executive summary. Director Jackson thanked both of them for volunteering to get work done.

Commissioner Lawrence asked the members of the Middletown Racial Justice Coalition if the racial healing events were going to be done virtually. Commissioner Price said initially, they were supposed to be conducted in person, but now they have to be done virtually because of the number of people they are expecting to attend. It's a drawback, and it's one they weren't prepared for, but they're working through it like everyone else. Vice Chairperson Doyle said that one thing she's noticed from this experience with COVID-19 is that some people who may not have been able to meet otherwise due to transportation issues or child care challenges are able to tune in from home, allowing more people to attend virtually and more voices to be heard.

Vice Chairperson Doyle that a low-hanging fruit she would like to add to their list to address was that in the report she noticed several people saying that certain parts of town don't receive equitable public services. Examples given were snow removal and trash removal. She said if they can find out more about the areas, they could work to remedy that. She suggested that people could complain to Director Jackson's department if they feel they are not receiving equitable services. Director Jackson said that complaints would actually go to the Public Works Department because they are in charge of those public services. Vice Chairperson Doyle asked Director Jackson what people should do if Public Works is not responding equitably. Director Jackson said that if people have complained to Public Works but have not received an appropriate and timely response, they can come to her department. However, Public Works has to keep a log of complaints, and they would need to see if the complaint went to them first. Commissioner Price said they could tap into the North End Action Team because they were keeping a running list of these types of complaints, and this has been an issue for over ten years. She added that she has seen it on Green Street where kids were walking in the street. She said she wasn't sure people were complaining anymore because they've been complaining for such a long time. Director Jackson said she agreed that it was something they need to look into. She asked the commission if this was a good list to start off with or if they wanted to add anything else.

Director Jackson said this was a good starting point to have these bullets. The commission could then pass this list off to the task force because the funding was assigned to the task force to get things accomplished. As an advisory group, the commission could put something in writing to the task force indicating the areas in which they should begin. Vice Chairperson Doyle agreed that theses would be suggested first steps to recommend to the task force. It would be great to set the task force up for success so it can hit the ground running.

Commissioner Hart said she has some angst surrounding this task force. She has concerns about letting go of this work. She doesn't know who will be appointed to the task force or their intentions. She added that she felt uncomfortable giving up their data to the task force. The community has put a lot of effort into this work. Director Jackson said members have not been appointed to the task force yet. She encouraged members of the commission to put forward their names to be considered to sit on it. Commissioner Hart reiterated her concerns about who was appointing the members and the criteria. She said she wanted whoever is putting the task force together to know that the commission has concerns.

Vice Chairperson Doyle said they should invite Mayor Florsheim to one of their upcoming meetings because he is the person who is appointing people to the task force. After the report goes before the Common Council in July, the commission could invite him to a meeting where they discuss the process of appointing people to the task force. Additionally, she said they should recommend a period of close collaboration between the commission and the task force. Hopefully, there will be a good amount of overlap in membership between the two bodies. Since it is clearly an outgrowth of the commission, they are well within their rights to have a voice in the development of it.

Commissioner Ford said he agreed with Vice Chairperson Doyle. This commission should not be left out of the development of the task force or its beginning stages of the work. If the task force is comprised of a whole new group of people and the commission just hands them this report, they might not know where to begin. He added that he expressed this to the mayor, and he strongly recommended that two or more Human Relations Commission members be appointed to the task force. Director Jackson agreed with that.

Vice Chairperson Doyle added that she believed one of the positive aspects of having a task force was that people who work at City Hall could be appointed. She said that because employment is a significant pain point, someone from Human Resources should be appointed, as well as someone from General Counsel. She added that when she read the informal minutes from May's meeting, she noticed that there was a great deal of discussion on the hiring practices at City Hall and the fact that union contracts require that jobs be posted internally first, which perpetuates the lack of diversity. She noted that the commission members said they wanted to get copies of the union contracts. She referenced an email that she sent out to the commission indicating that all the contracts are available on the City's website for review. Most of the contracts are due to expire in 2022, and that's typically when negotiations would happen. Generally, there can be no changes to a contract while it's still in effect. However, the UPSEU contract, which is the manager's union, is due to expire June 30<sup>th</sup> of this year. There is a clause in the contract that dictates posting positions internally first. She said that she reached out to General Counsel to see where the City is at in terms of negotiations and the renewal of this contract. She was told that they are in the early stages of the process. Therefore, there is an opportunity to have the clause either removed or amended. She said a potential recommendation that may work for union officers would be to say that all positions are posted publically but union members are guaranteed an interview if they qualify, or something along those lines. This is an opportunity for the commission to achieve a major change on one of the important pain points.

Director Jackson explained that the contracts are written in this way because the only way an employee can get promoted is to apply for a position when it is posted internally. If a 466 position is posted internally, only 466 members can apply. The same is true with UPSEU. There is no crossover from

466 to UPSEU, except when the position is posted publicly. She then explained the recruitment process. She said that her department monitors the different stages and pays close attention to whether there is diversity in the pool and what happens to those diverse candidates throughout the process. She monitors to see if they are passing the test and if they are sent to be interviewed.

Councilman Nocera indicated that he had to leave the meeting. However, he wanted to say to everyone before he left that on June 18<sup>th</sup>, the General Counsel Commission will be meeting, and the ordinance for the anti-racism task force is on the agenda. The discussion will be about the task force's goals, structure, and makeup. He will also bring up the concerns of this commission. He said that the commission can't pass on this work without careful coordination.

Councilman Nocera thanked the commission for its work and left the call.

Vice Chairperson Doyle asked the commission if it would like to make a recommendation to General Counsel to revise the wording of the article in the contract that requires UPSEU positions to be posted internally first. Commissioner Hart asked Vice Chairperson Doyle to put her recommendation into a motion so she could better understand it.

Vice Chairperson Doyle said that if she were to make a motion it would be that the Human Relations Commission make a recommendation to the City General Counsel to amend said provision of the UPSEU contract so that all positions are posted publically and not restricted to internal applicants.

Commissioner Hart said that would be a brave recommendation and that she agreed with it. Commissioner Price said she was reluctant to move forward in this way because this is not her expertise. It's possible that a number of policies would have to change at the same time for this to effect change. The task force may do research and find that there would have been a better approach to solving the issue, and she would hate to have the commission already make that recommendation without the proper understanding.

Director Jackson said the ultimate hiring authority is the mayor. A department head could send a list of the top three people he or she wants to hire, and the mayor could say he wants to hire number five. The mayor has final authority in every appointment to every position.

Vice Chairperson Doyle said she understood, but if the position is only posted internally, then the candidate the mayor has to select from would only be internal. She said the report identified the hiring practice as a major pain point. Discussion in May indicated that hiring practices are dictated by the union contracts. People of culture are having a difficult time moving up in the City because of the union contracts, and this is the same for people trying to get into City employment. She said that the UPSEU contract gives preference to people within that union by restricting applicants to just UPSEU, which excludes not only outside candidates, but also internal candidates in different unions. She said she felt it's important to move on this now. She explained that this contract is going to wrap up in the next month or two, and then it will probably be in place for five years. This not only allows external candidates an opportunity to apply but also those who already work for the City but are in lower level positions and therefore in different unions. It would open up decision making positions to people who aren't already in those positions.

Commissioner Hart asked Betsy Morgan to speak on this issue. Betsy Morgan said she feels she doesn't have all the information about this issue. Like Commissioner Price, she's not an expert in this area. She'd like to hear from someone who works for the City on whether this is a good course to pursue.

Director Jackson said that if down the road, the Human Relations Commission or the task force determines that the union contracts are a barrier, a Memorandum of Understanding can be put in place, which revises or amends a section of the contract. Vice Chairperson Doyle asked how many Memorandum of Understands have passed. Director Jackson said there haven't been many for UPSEU, but there have been many MOUs for 466. They are common. She added that the biggest group of employees is in 466, and there are managers in 466, as well. Vice Chairperson Doyle asked if it would be better to wait two years and make this type of recommendation for the 466 contract. Director Jackson said that it might be better for them to do that because they'll have more research to support them. Also, there's a lot more upward mobility in 466. There is a minority who started as a cafeteria worker and worked her way up to Payroll Supervisor.

Vice Chairperson Doyle said that she wanted to do this now because it would be good to strike while the iron is hot. The current climate may cause people to be more receptive to change. Also, if they can make this change in one union contract, the others will follow. Commissioner Hart said making the recommendation couldn't have a negative impact. Director Jackson said it won't have a negative impact, but there's a lot that goes into a union negotiation. Vice Chairperson Doyle said she is familiar with union negotiations and understands they have a few months to work this out. She said she's not prepared to make a motion. She will craft a motion to present at the commission's next meeting, the timing of which will work out better because NCCJ will have presented to the Common Council. She added that the commission members will have time between now and the July meeting to review the union contracts and identify any other clauses that relate to hiring practices that may need a recommended change. Director Jackson said she personally thinks it's a good recommendation because it will expand the applicant pool. Commissioner Hart thanked Vice Chairperson Doyle for reading the informal minutes and for doing this legwork. Vice Chairperson Doyle said they make a great team, and it took all of them to arrive at this point.

Director Jackson advised the commission that after the report is presented to the council, it will be made available to the public in various formats on the City's website. Vice Chairperson Doyle said that she will use the library to amplify the availability of the report, as well.

### **New Business:**

**Review:** The commission reviewed the 2020 attendance. Commissioner Hart asked about Commissioner Fernandez and pointed out his attendance record. They discussed the process for having him removed from the commission. Director Jackson explained that the standard process they follow is to send the person a letter indicating that the commission wished the commissioner be removed due to lack of attendance. A specific date is given in the letter for the commissioner to get back to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management with a response or a letter of resignation and or intent to continue. If nothing is received, it is understood that the commissioner no longer wants to serve on the commission. The commission then asked Director Jackson to send a letter to Commissioner

Fernandez. Director Jackson said she would do so. The commission members discussed the possibility of commissioners being automatically removed after a certain amount of missed meetings. Director Jackson said the department can send a letter automatically after a specific amount of meetings are missed, but a letter still has to be sent.

**Announcements** The next meeting of the commission will be July 15, 2020. Vice Chairperson Doyle reminded the commission that the presentation will go before the council on July 6<sup>th</sup>, and they were encouraged to attend via Webex.

**Adjournment:** Commissioner Lawrence motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Ford seconded. The Vice Chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:48 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kasey Maurice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kasey Maurice,  
Administrative Sec. III