

Human Relations Commission
Informal Meeting Minutes
October 21, 2020 5:00 p.m.

Attendance: Brandie Doyle, Henry Fernandez, Debbie Ruimerman, and Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

Excused Absence: Ava Hart and Howard Thody – due to a technical issue with WebEx

Absence: Ed Ford and Sanji Lawrence

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

Call to Order: Director Jackson called the meeting to order at 5:19 p.m. For the record, she noted that due to a technical error with the WebEx link, many commissioners were having difficulty attending the meeting.

Public Session: None

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Agenda: Due to lack of quorum, the Meeting Agenda for October 21, 2020 could not be approved.

Approval of Minutes: Due to lack of quorum, the Meeting Minutes of September 16, 2020 could not be approved.

Nominate and Elect Chairperson and Vice Chairperson: Due to a lack of quorum this business could not be conducted.

Old Business:

Director Jackson moved the discussion to next steps for the Human Relations Commission. She added that the members were emailed a copy of the Middletown Ordinance that concerns the Permanent Task Force on Anti-Racism. She read § 14-64 **Coordination with Commission on Human Relations:** “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.”

Director Jackson said that the City Charter was also sent to the commission because Councilman Faulkner brought it to her attention that the City would be revising the charter. She explained to him that the Human Relations Commission and the Affirmative Action Monitoring Committee need to review the charter and provide feedback on the revisions.

Director Jackson asked the commission members about next steps. Commissioner Doyle said the first thing the commission needs to focus on is filling the two vacancies. The members who vacated consisted of one democrat and one unaffiliated. Secondly, she said that the commission needs to establish its leadership. The third thing would be to arrange for the commission to meet with the Anti-Racism Task Force. Also, the fourth thing the commission needs to do is to revisit the report produced by NCCJ to assess which direction the commission wants to go in for its next recommendation.

Commissioner Fernandez asked if the commission would be using the same numbers the report used. He said the numbers NCCJ used had to be from an older census. He said simply walking through the hallway at Middletown High School, one could see the numbers aren't accurate. He has difficulty giving credence to a report that uses numbers such as 9.8% for the makeup of people of color in the city or 7.2 % for interracial couples.

Director Jackson said that she does the Affirmative Action Plan for the City of Middletown. She said the Latinx numbers have gone up. However, the African American numbers have gone down, which has to do with some of the larger families moving south.

Commissioner Fernandez also brought up the fact that there are two police officers stationed at Middletown High School, and that is likely because of a larger population of students of color. He added that he did research and found numbers on a website but questions if the numbers are factual. He added that in his community there are 28 homes, and out of that nine homes are owned by people of color.

Commissioner Doyle said that those numbers are from the 2010 census, which is now ten years. She added that historically the census has undercounted marginalized groups. She said that she agreed with him about the numbers. Also, she said his point about the public schools also resonates with her. One of the components of the NCCJ report was punishment in the school system. Perhaps that's something they can turn their attention to in one of their next steps. She agrees that it seems odd to have police in the school and that if there were police at her school when she was a student she wouldn't be comfortable with it.

Director Jackson clarified that they are School Resource Officers. Commissioner Doyle asked if they are in uniform. Commissioner Fernandez said that they are in uniform and mentioned that he knows some of them personally. He spoke on the numbers in the report and said that he did not think 72% of the population is white. He thinks it's more of a 60-40 split. He spoke on the fact that the police department was working to hire more people of color, which is a great reflection of Middletown. He said when he was hired as a police officer, the City Manager said that the police department would be a reflection of the City. He's seeing more and more of that in Middletown. However, there's something that the commissioners aren't getting at, something that is allowing a group of individuals believe it has the power to do what it wants to do. He continued by addressing the hiring practices within the City and how inaccurate numbers may mean hiring practices continue to be uneven. Qualified people who apply for a job should at least get an interview. He said it seems like family members are getting other family members jobs in the City. He said he looks at the numbers and they puzzle him. He's concerned. He said he wants to get the accurate numbers so they can attack the principles they want to attack.

Commissioner Ruimerman asked if the School Resource Officers has been increased because of increased danger in the schools. She added that she watches videos of activities from Middletown High School, and she doesn't see a large number of students of color.

Commissioner Doyle said that she understands Commissioner Fernandez's point about the numbers not quite matching what he visually sees throughout Middletown. However, she does not foresee the commission being able to influence that in any way in its capacity as an advisory commission. The issue is that NCCJ used the most reliable numbers that exist, which is the census numbers. There will be a census update because the census ran this year. However, she doesn't have any confidence that it will be more reliable and accurate than it was in 2010. It may even be less reliable because due to COVID-19, people could not mobilize and go door to door. Instead the census relied on people self-reporting online. She continued by saying that while that component of the report may leave something to be desired, that doesn't detract from the points they made based on the accounts they heard. So, the meat of the report isn't the numbers, which they got from elsewhere. It's the accounts they collected from the residents. She also said that in previous meetings, it was mentioned that the commission go back to the community upon the completion of the report. She said she's not sure how that would look without NCCJ to facilitate it, but it's important to keep the connection to the community that provided the information for the report. Perhaps that could be another action item and something the commission tackles with the Anti-Racism Task Force.

Commissioner Fernandez said he spoke to Commissioner Thody. Commissioner Thody told him about a church that put together an anti-racism panel. However, there are no people of color on the panel. He then suggested that the commission approach some of the larger churches in Middletown which have large numbers of people of color in their congregations to have a conversation with the leaders. Maybe the commission can hear from them. They might have great insight into who is coming and going, while the census isn't reflecting that.

Commissioner Doyle said she agreed that the churches were a good way to reach communities of color. However, she reminded him that former Commissioner Price mentioned in several meetings that the churches are good for reaching people of color, but she cautioned against only reaching out to churches because there are many people of color who are secular. Therefore, outreach efforts shouldn't be exclusively to faith-based groups.

New Business:

The commission began discussion of the commission vacancies created by the resignation of Chairperson Carbonella and Commissioner Price. Commissioner Doyle recommended reaching out to the School Resource Officers as potential candidates for filling the vacancies on the commission. It would allow for a different perspective. She also said that they should extend an invitation to Beverly Lawrence who attended many of the commission's meetings. She was a dedicated attendee and always provided valuable input. They could also consider inviting some faith leaders, as well. Director Jackson mentioned reaching out to Debra Hopkins who is the administrator for the Ministerial Alliance. Commissioner Doyle said she has a few ideas of people from the library, but she didn't want to necessarily stack the commission with Russell Library people. She also recommended Betsy Morgan, who attended a number of meetings. Director Jackson advised Commissioner Doyle that Betsy Morgan resigned from the Racial Justice Coalition and indicated that she also would not be

attending any more Human Relations Commission meetings. She added that another idea would be someone from the Anti-Racism Task Force. Since the two groups would be working closely, it may be beneficial to share a member.

Commissioner Ruimerman said she thought reaching out to either Beverly Lawrence or Betsy Morgan were good ideas. Also, she wondered if the schools would have demographic information on their students. Commissioner Doyle said she believed that is public information. They just need to dig it up. Director Jackson recommended that someone reach out to Central Office at the Board of Ed for the data. Commissioner Ruimerman said she would do that.

Commissioner Doyle asked about the process for inviting people to become commissioners. Director Jackson said that the commissioners should seek out people they know who may be interested. Then, they can submit a recommendation to the office. The office will then mail the person general information on the commission to see if he or she is interested in serving. If the person is interested, the office then sends the name to the Office of the Mayor for appointment. Commissioner Doyle then asked Commissioner Fernandez if he could reach out to the School Resource Officer he spoke of earlier. He said he would do so. Commissioner Doyle said she would reach out to Betsy Morgan. She asked if anyone had a closer relationship to Beverly Lawrence. Director Jackson said that she and Beverly Lawrence sit on another committee together. She said she would reach out to her. Commissioner Fernandez said he would reach out to Councilman Gennaro, who is a Republican. There was general discussion of whether members of the Common Council can be commissioners. Commissioner Fernandez mentioned that Commission Ford is a councilman. Director Jackson said that members of the council are actually assigned to sit on certain committees and commissions, anyway. This just happens to be the first time that commissioners have also been members of the council. Also, in the case of this project, it was Councilman Nocera, along with Councilman Chisem and Councilman Blanchard, who brought the commission the work.

Commissioner Doyle summarized who was going to reach out to whom and added that she would also reach out to Diana Martinez. Director Jackson said the commissioners could reach out to people in the community, as well. Sometimes asking a person who is on another committee or commission means they are reaching out to someone who may already be overextended. People who are overextended may not be as functional as commission members. Director Jackson said the office can send a letter to the local churches indicating that the commission has two vacancies and asking if anyone in their congregations may be interested. Commissioner Doyle said in an effort to reach out to the community, perhaps the City could post on the website about the vacancies and solicit interest that way. She asked about putting something in the Middletown Press and the Middletown Eye. Director Jackson said that she would send a letter to the churches and put something on the website. However, departments don't typically announce vacancies on their commissions or committees though the Middletown Press or the Middletown Eye.

Commissioner Doyle recommended that everyone reach out to their contacts right away so they can get responses by the next meeting.

Due to lack of time, the commission could not discuss the Middletown Charter and the City's plan to revise it.

Approval of 2021 Meeting Schedule: Due to lack of quorum, the 2021 Meeting Schedule could not be approved.

Review: The commission reviewed the 2020 attendance.

Announcements The next meeting of the commission will be November 18, 2020.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 6:02 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,



Kasey Maurice,
Administrative Sec. III