

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2020 5:00 p.m.

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

Excused Absence:

Absence: Sanji Lawrence and Howard Thody

QUORUM: *Yes:* X *No:*

Call to Order: Director Jackson called the meeting to order at 5:17 p.m.

Public Session: Jay Tulin, Chairperson of the Human Relations Commission in Farmington was present.

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Agenda: Commissioner Doyle motioned to approve the November 18, 2020 agenda. Commissioner Fernandez seconded. Director Jackson called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Approval of Minutes: Commissioner Doyle motioned to approve the September 16, 2020 Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Hart seconded. Director Jackson called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Review of Information Minutes: The commission reviewed the Informal Meeting Minutes of October 21, 2020, which did not require approval.

Nominate and Elect Chairperson and Vice Chairperson: Commissioner Doyle asked if members of the Common Council, who also serve as commissioners, can serve in a leadership role. Director Jackson said she didn't have a formal answer on that but typically they do not serve in that capacity. Director Jackson asked Commissioner Ford to further elaborate. Commissioner Ford said that unless the body is made up of only council members, generally council members do not serve in leadership roles on the committee or commission. Director Jackson added that there is nothing in the ordinance for the commission that indicates that a council member cannot serve in a leadership position. Commissioner Hart commented that when she was on the Board of Ed, she would have hated to have been asked to chair anything because she was already stretched too thin. She then asked if it was necessary to elect a chair and vice chair tonight because the commission has vacancies. Director Jackson said she would be surprised if a new person comes on board and is then willing to step to the plate and take on a leadership role. Commissioner Ford said to Commissioner Hart's point that the new members may not want to take on a leadership position but they may want to have a voice in selecting the people for those roles.

Director Jackson added that until the commission selects a chair, she is the person who has to run the meetings. She reminded them that she is a staff person and that's not her role. Commissioner Doyle said, as the last immediate vice chairperson, she would be willing to run the meetings until the commission is at full membership and elects a chair and vice chair.

Commissioner Hart nominated Commissioner Doyle as an interim chairperson. Commissioner Ford seconded. Director Jackson called for a vote. By unanimous vote, Commissioner Doyle was elected Chairperson for the interim.

Commissioner Hart motioned that the commission table the election of a vice chairperson until the commission is able to properly vote for a vice chair. Commissioner Ford seconded. Chairperson Doyle called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Old Business:

There was no discussion on the commission's next steps at this time.

New Business:

Chairperson Doyle moved the discussion to Middletown's Charter and the City's plan to revise it. She clarified that she doesn't have much background in this area. She asked Commissioner Ford to speak on this topic. Commissioner Ford said that this is his first experience in this task. He added that at 7:00 p.m. this evening, there is a public comment meeting regarding the charter revision. He said that if the commissioners had any questions they'd like him to bring to the meeting this evening, they can communicate that to him.

Director Jackson explained that Councilman Faulkner met with her. From that meeting, she gathered that this revision is coming about because the Board of Education wants to separate from the City. That's one of the driving components. At this time, the City hires the 466 and UPSEU employees who work at the Board of Ed. However, the Board of Ed would much prefer to hire its own staff. She continued by explaining that when there's an employee issue, it becomes problematic for the Board of Ed because the discipline would come from the City's Human Resources division or her own department would conduct an investigation and render a recommendation to the mayor for disciplinary action since the mayor is the hiring authority. However, discipline should really come from the Board of Ed because that's where the employee works. The City has a system of progressive discipline. However, the Board of Ed can get frustrated with that, especially if the employee is not disciplined but instead moved around within the Board of Ed and or different departments.

Chairperson Doyle said she would like to add to the discussion because she's heard two rationales regarding the charter revision, and the separation of the Board of Ed is the more recent of the two. She said that she heard one of the reasons to consider a revision is to implement a council-management form of government; whereas, the City currently functions under the mayor-council form. She added that her concern would be if the City moves toward a council-manager form, how would that affect equity, diversity, and inclusion? She wondered if there is data available to show which format is more beneficial for achieving better equity, diversity, and inclusion. She continued that she could see a benefit from either format and the best way to gauge success in this area would be to look at Cities that have moved toward council-manager and see if they have achieved greater results or the opposite.

Commissioner Fernandez said that he was hearing in the community that residents were upset that the City gives the Board of Ed money, which are their tax dollars, and then the City has no jurisdiction over how it is spent. Years ago, a great amount of money went missing and was unaccounted for, and residents were very upset. He explained that jurisdiction was the biggest issue to residents. It appeared as though the City presided over the Board of Ed but had no control or say. He said he understands there is new leadership at the Board of Ed, but residents are still very concerned about how that money was managed and how it's continuing to be managed.

Commissioner Hart said she had a point of clarification because she was on the Board of Ed at that time. She said that just like the politics that the nation has just experienced with regards to misinformation and confusion, when there are two different parties at odds, misinformation can occur. A million dollars did not go missing; however, residents believe that, and residents believe that because that is what has been presented to them. She added that whether it's true or not, it's public perception. To the public, it's reality. She continued by saying that what Commissioner Fernandez just highlighted is the divide between the City and the Board of Education. She said that Director Jackson mentioned the disciplining of the employees being a symptom of the problem. However, before the Board of Ed even gets to that point, the Board of Ed would like to actually be the entity that hires the employees. She said that interests are competing, and while everyone may get along today, when money is brought into the mix, people get upset and point fingers, which leads to confusion. She said that as a former member of the Board of Education, she would support a division. In the past, people were interviewed for certain positions, and they weren't ideal. However, the Board of Ed would be forced to hire the person because of union guidelines. The Board of Ed is in charge of making sure the students in the school system are getting the best possible education in the best possible environment; however, its hands would be tied as it deals with a person who is not appropriate for the position and isn't effective at doing the job. She added that as the City considers revising the charter, it should look at giving the Board of Ed members stipends because they work long hours for free.

Director Jackson added that another component of the revision to which Councilman Faulkner alluded is in regards to personnel. He communicated to her that some of the information in the Personnel Rules should be clarified in the charter. At this time, the Affirmative Action Monitoring Committee is looking at the charter revision, as well. The committee is specifically looking at the section of the charter that relates to the personnel and hiring. She further explained that the limitations of the UPSEU contract, which the commission addressed with its recommendation letter, lead to sometimes the only candidate in the applicant pool getting the job by default. This issue can snowball later if the employee is not a good fit and the Board of Ed isn't the entity to manage or discipline the employee. Unless contract language is changed, the City and/or the Board of Ed are going to be locked into scenarios where one candidate meets the minimum qualifications, and while not ideal or a good fit, the one person automatically gets the position.

Chairperson Doyle said she's always believed that the greatest equalizer is the distribution of power. Therefore, having multiple entities responsible for the hiring of employees would be beneficial to having one person be the only one who does all the hiring for the City and Board of Ed. Commissioner Ford clarified that the hiring practices and distribution of power is also exactly along the lines of a council-manager format. Chairperson Doyle agreed. Commissioner Fernandez said that when Hartford moved to a council-manager format, the system worked well and there was more diversity in the Fire Department and Police Department. A City Manager who came from outside the city of Hartford

actually brought the city together. Chairperson Doyle added that the argument she has heard in favor of the counsel-manager format is the City should be viewed as a business. The person in charge of the business should be skilled in organizational management, and that is not guaranteed in an elected official. Commissioner Fernandez agreed and said that politics can be largely about favors promised or owed, and that's not ideal for someone running the City.

Chairperson Doyle said that she noticed that she skipped over discussion of vacancies on the agenda and brought the discussion to that topic. Director Jackson said that she put together an announcement of the commission vacancy. Also, the office reached out to Councilman Gennaro, per Commissioner Fernandez's suggestion, with information on the commission's charge and its meeting schedule. He has not yet responded with his intent to serve on the commission. Therefore, she has put the announcement on hold because it says there are two vacancies. She asked if the commission wanted her to revise the announcement or put it on hold until hearing from Councilman Gennaro. Chairperson Doyle said she had another recommendation, so the announcement may not be necessary. She said that she reached out to Betsy Morgan, who declined, and Diana Martinez, who hasn't yet responded. However, she also reached out to Paige Petit, who works in the Middletown schools system. Paige Petit is very interested. They are registered as a Democrat but has historically been unaffiliated as is likely to change their party. Chairperson Doyle said that she has worked closely with Paige Petit for about two years and highly recommends them. She said she would get the office Paige Petit's contact information so information can be sent to them. So, the vacancies may be filled.

Approval of 2021 Meeting Schedule: Commissioner Hart motioned to approve the 2021 Meeting Schedule. Commissioner Fernandez seconded. Chairperson Doyle called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Review: The commission reviewed the 2020 attendance.

Announcements The next meeting of the commission will be December 16, 2020.

Adjournment: Commissioner Ford motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Fernandez seconded. Chairperson Doyle called for a vote. The meeting was adjourned at 5:53 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,



Kasey Maurice,
Administrative Sec. III