

Human Relations Commission

Meeting Minutes

August 21, 2019 5:00 p.m.

~ Corrected Minutes ~

Attendance: Justin Carbonella, Brandie Doyle, Ava Hart, Precious Price, Debbie Ruimerman, Howard Thody, and Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

Excused Absence: Ed Ford, Henry Fernandez, and Evan Davis, Youth in Government Representative

Absence: Jeanette Blackwell and Ani Zakarian, Youth in Government Representative

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

Call to Order: Chairperson Carbonella called the meeting to order at 5:16 p.m. Councilman Gene Nocera was present. Betsy Morgan and Beverly Lawrence of the Racial Justice Coalition were also present.

Public Session: None.

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Minutes: Chairperson Carbonella asked for a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of July 17, 2019. The commission noted for the record that Commissioner Hart was listed as in attendance and under excused absence. The minutes should be corrected to indicate that Commissioner Hart was in attendance. Commissioner Doyle motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes of July 17, 2019, with the noted correction and Commissioner Price seconded it. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried.

Old Business:

Chairperson Carbonella asked Director Jackson to address the second item on the agenda first, which was information only. Director Jackson advised that in the meeting package, there was a Preliminary Status Update Report, which was presented to the Common Council Questions to Directors session. She explained that Councilman Nocera called her and Randi Renee McCray to the microphone. He asked some questions, and then the rest of the council asked questions, as well. They provided an update pursuant to the resolution advising what has been done so far. They also included the evaluations from the April and June workshops. Councilman Nocera added that the presentation led to a very rich discussion. It also provided an opportunity to shed light on other programs, such as the sustainability work, which focuses on business and economic development. The commission's work is trying to change a culture, which requires consistent, continuous work. Additionally, the Board of Ed conducted a two-day anti-racism workshop.

Commissioner Doyle said that the Russell Library has contracted with NCCJ to conduct a half-day training. The library will be closed for a half a day to allow all staff members to attend the training. Commissioner Price said that the Racial Justice Coalition is working in partnership with the Russell

Library to host a series of workshops around race. They are pertaining to children, and some are for young children. This could possibly provide an opportunity for the commission members to talk to the parents and encourage them to come to a community discussion. Commissioner Doyle said she thought it was a great idea once they secure dates and times for the focus groups and the community conversations.

Councilman Nocera said the next biannual status report from the commission would be in January of 2019. **He said he'd like to see the entire commission present at the Common Council meeting on January 6th at 6:00 p.m. for the Questions to Directors.** Director Jackson added that by then, NCCJ should be able to provide information to structure the strategic plan.

Director Jackson said that the goal of the meeting tonight was to lock down a date for the focus group. She contacted Nyaunu Stevens, and the available dates are September 30th, October 1st, and October 4th. She indicated that NCCJ recommended doing only adult focus groups. Chairperson Carbonella agreed that the commission should move forward on this item on the agenda. Commissioner Price agreed that it was a small sample of people, and they will be basing the community conversations off this small sample. She added that this next phase of doing the focus groups has to be a lot more thoughtful and planned. Chairperson Doyle suggested that they consider trading off one of the community conversations for two additional focus groups, which would allow them to keep the youth session. However, they need to have a starting point, and time is of the essence. Director Jackson indicated that the office had contacted Russell Library and spoken to them about using one of their rooms. But, the commission needs to decide on a date and time.

Commissioner Doyle said that she'd like to consider amending the scope of work to trade one community conversation for two back-to-back focus groups. That way, the commission will have a total of four focus groups, meaning 40 people, ten of whom she hopes would be youth. She added that she'd advocate for asking the City for more funding to continue the work going forward. Director Jackson added that they also need to consider the cost of refreshments with the next budget process.

There was discussion of Commissioner Ruimerman's previous offer to provide food for one of the focus groups. Director Jackson said that the food would have to be prepared at a licensed facility approved and inspected by the Health Department. This is a City project, and there are protocols that need to be followed to avoid liabilities.

Director Jackson brought the discussion back to the current scope of work with NCCJ, which is two focus groups and three community discussions. There is a suggestion on the table to trade one of the community discussions to two focus groups back to back, for a total of four focus groups. She added that Commissioner Price and Evan Davis compiled a list of people the commission would like to invite to the first two focus groups. She said that Nyaunu Stevens indicated the importance of diversity within the focus groups of men and women, different economic backgrounds, and if possible African American and Latinx attendees. There was further discussion on the fact that increasing the number of focus groups means that one of them could be for the youth and possibly take place at the school.

Director Jackson said she spoke to Dr. Conner, and he said the best time for one to take place during the school day would be 3:00 p.m. Chairperson Carbonella clarified that there is typically an hour between school ending and sports practice beginning. The football team has a built-in study hall at the end of the day. Commissioner Price added that the Minority Student Coalition already meets at the

school. She was unsure of the specific day. There was further discussion on the timing for conducting the youth focus group. Director Jackson suggested that they return to the youth focus groups at a later time and instead schedule two adult ones back to back for October 1st. Director Jackson reminded the group that they would have to make a motion to change the scope of work.

Motion: Commissioner Doyle motioned to ask NCCJ to change the scope of work from two focus groups and three community discussions to four focus groups to take place in late September, early October and two community discussions to take place late October, early November. Additionally, one of the focus groups would be a youth focus group. Commissioner Price seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion carried unanimously.

Director Jackson brought the commission back to the earlier email that was sent out requesting input on three different questions:

1. List what they hope to get from the focus groups. Meaning what outcomes are they looking for,
2. Identify what groups and or recommend individuals to contact and invite to the focus groups. One will be dedicated to youth and the other adults of color, and
3. Provide a list of possible sites/locations for the focus groups

Director Jackson read some of the responses to question one:

- A better understanding of racial relationships and to get to know themselves in a completely different way.
- I hope the focus groups will provide strong statements about why Middletown has a long way to go to become equitable and inclusive. Many people in Middletown hold this view, but don't express it. The focus groups should be opportunities for open, honest, vigorous opinions. The goal is to wake the City up.
- I'd like to get a deeper understanding of the Middletown specific racialized experiences of the focus group attendees, I'd also like to hear their recommendations for how Middletown can become more inclusive of Black, Brown, & Indigenous People living here. I'd like to know from them their individual stories and feelings of Middletown as a whole.

Director Jackson said this input is the compass for the focus groups, and this information will also be used to frame the communications to the individuals. People are going to want to know why they are being invited to the focus groups. They need to explain the purpose and goal and say that their honest opinion will be greatly appreciated. The letter should draw the individual in and make him or her interested in participating.

Commissioner Doyle said for question one, what she is looking for from the focus groups is identification of the ways that inequity manifests itself in Middletown and what steps participants think Middletown decision makers need to take in order to achieve greater equity.

Councilman Nocera said that he hoped that when NCCJ reports its findings, it triangulates the data so it encompasses both the focus groups data and the surveys. Commissioner Doyle suggested that people be invited to comment further after the conclusion of the focus groups in case they feel they didn't

have an opportunity to get out their thoughts. She could then send out a very simple survey monkey to collect any additional thoughts people wanted to contribute.

Commissioner Price said that during the focus group, they should ask for the following input: opinions, lived experiences, specific stories, and other ways racism has manifested that the participant may or may not have experienced but was aware of or witnessed.

Commissioner Doyle broke it down into three elements:

- **How inequity manifests itself**
- **People's lived experiences**
- **What people think the next steps should be for the City's decision makers to work toward structural change and greater equity both as a community and a governing body**

Betsy Morgan said that the commission can pass these ideas along to NCCJ. However, focus groups are an art form with their own tested way. While they can make suggestions, she doesn't think they can design it. Councilman Nocera said he felt that an important piece of the focus groups is reflection but also looking forward. People can't stay in the past. Commissioner Price asked if there was going to be emotional support at the focus groups, which would be especially important at the youth one. Director Jackson reminded them that NCCJ guided the training in such a way that the journey continued to an emotional platform and then led it back.

There was also discussion of the fact that NCCJ advised them not to call them focus groups. The commission members discussed other terms. They reasserted that they did not want to use the term community conversations. They discussed other possibilities such as a talk sessions, group conversations, etc. Ultimately, they chose the title, **Truth Talk on Racial Equity**.

Director Jackson brought the discussion back to the second question posed to the commission, which was considering what groups and or individuals should attend. Randi Renee McCray had recommended approaching a church group. Commissioner Price and Evan Davis identified approximately 20 individuals, and invitations will go out to those already listed. She asked what other groups the commission would like to invite to the other sessions. Commissioner Doyle suggested inviting the people of color in the Police Department. Commissioner Price said that would eliminate the level of diversity necessary. There was also discussion on the importance of including marginalized voices.

The commission discussed how many identified people it should invite to ensure 30 or more in attendance. Director Jackson said they should invite at least 70 to 100 because not everyone will be able to attend. They will get better results if they approach minority groups that already exist for the remaining participants they invite. Commissioner Price suggested they approach the Racial Justice Coalition as a group. Director Jackson also suggested the Ministerial Alliance. The commission also discussed inviting those who attend the Indian temple in Middletown.

Commissioner Doyle asked how people will be invited. Director Jackson said the invites would be through regular mail.

Chairperson Carbonella suggested getting invitations out as soon as possible while they continue to gather names for the additional sessions. Commissioner Doyle suggested they start working on the language for the communication that would go out. Director Jackson said the communication will essentially say that the Human Relations Commission is looking for African Americans and Latinx to participate in a Truth Talk on Racial Equity. Commissioner Price asked if they could use the term, people of color because African American and Latinx is exclusionary. Director Jackson said clarity is important because while people may consider white a color, and she doesn't want to cause a conflict.

Director Jackson said time is of the essence. They have a list of people to start with, and they need to lock in a date so the office can get a location reserved. Once those things are done, they can send out the flier with all the pertinent information. The second session of back-to-back talks will be impacted by the youth, and they don't have that schedule yet. At this time, they can lock in the date for the first two back-to-back talks. The dates NCCJ provided were September 30th, October 1st, and October 4th. **The group agreed to have the first two back-to-back session entitled Truth Talk on Racial Equity take place on Tuesday, October 1st.** The office will draft letters to go out to the identified individuals. Then, an announcement will be sent out to the groups of minorities asking for people who may be interested. The commission discussed adding Professor Foster and Marilyn Rios to the list of identified participants.

Director Jackson said the Russell Library will likely be the location for the first two sessions. She asked the commission to suggest times. Commissioner Price suggested 5:45 p.m. and 6:45 p.m. There was a discussion on the potential need for childcare.

The commission discussed the second back-to-back sessions and agreed that it would likely take place at Middletown High School. Or, the first session would take place at the school, and the second would possibly take place at the Russell Library.

Chairperson Carbonella said that if they can get an electronic flier, he can get it to some of the people on that list through Facebook or email.

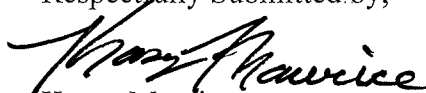
New Business:

Review: The commission reviewed the 2019 attendance.

Announcements The next meeting of the commission will be September 18, 2019 at City Hall, room 208.

Adjournment: Commissioner Doyle motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Ruimerman seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried. The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,


Kasey Maurice,
Administrative Sec. III