

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 20, 2019 5:00 p.m.

Attendance: Justin Carbonella, Henry Fernandez, Edward Ford, Ava Hart, Precious Price, Howard Thody, E'von Davis, Youth in Government Representative, Ani Zakarian, Youth in Government Representative, and Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

Excused Absence: Jeanette Blackwell, Brandie Doyle, and Debbie Ruimerman

Absence: None

QUORUM: Yes: X No:

Call to Order: Chairperson Carbonella called the meeting to order at 5:11 p.m. Chairperson Carbonella then asked for those present to say their names for the record. Director Jackson said Commissioner Blackwell, Doyle, and Ruimerman were excused. Councilman Nocera could not be present. Councilman Chisem and members of the Racial Justice Coalition, Beverly Lawrence and Betsy Morgan were present. Nyaunu Stevens, Cynthia Martin, and Randi Renee McCray of NCCJ were present, as well. Chairperson Carbonella welcomed new member, Precious Price and new Youth in Government Representatives E'von Davis and Ani Zakarian. Chairperson Carbonella said that having Commissioner Price on the commission deepens the connection between the Racial Justice Coalition and the Human Relations Commission.

Public Session: None.

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Minutes: Chairperson Carbonella asked for a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of January 16, 2019. Commissioner Ford motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes of January 16, 2019, and Commissioner Fernandez seconded it. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried.

Old Business:

Chairperson Carbonella welcomed Nyaunu Stevens, Cynthia Martin, and Randi Renee McCray of NCCJ to the meeting to discuss preliminary steps. Director Jackson distributed the scope of work for everyone to review. Cynthia Martin said that NCCJ is thrilled about this partnership. This work is a collaboration. NCCJ is happy to provide the content and do the work with the idea that the commission works to bring the stakeholders to the table. The starting point is meeting with the City and the stakeholders. The priority is to identify dates for these meetings.

Director Jackson said they should think about the stakeholders and make sure the group is diverse and represents all the different areas of the city. They should also bring corporations to the table because they may be able to fund other activities. Cynthia Martin added that they have a connection at Middlesex Hospital who expressed interest in the project.

Randi Renee McCray said that a good way to go about getting stakeholders is to think of the different touchpoints in the town where the individuals are already convening, such as youth groups, patient services, and church. Blind marketing doesn't really work. They need to reach out to groups of people who are already connected to the people they want to bring to the table. She continued that this could be done by just asking for a brief meeting with the person to introduce the work and invite them to come to the table.

Randi Renee McCray asked the commission what racial justice should look like at the end of this project with everything accomplished. She said that when they talk about this work in the community, people will want to know what work they're being asked to be involved in and the ultimate vision. If people are truly engaged around the true meaningful vision of racial justice, what would that look like or are you asking people to come together to form that vision? Commissioner Price answered that she expects that during the focus group discussions, there will be a number of recommendations from various people. Randi Renee McCray responded that the commission when approaching people should then communicate that it wants to co-create a vision for racial justice in Middletown and that it has partnered with NCCJ to do this work. With this approach, people take ownership because they're a part of the work and the vision.

Cynthia Martin said the initial meeting would be very large, and they could brainstorm these issues. At that point, the group can be divided into smaller groups to discuss the topics that came up. She suggested that the commission come up with a list of who it wants to target. Commissioner Ford and Commissioner Thody listed a number of religious institutions. The commission established the following list:

1. Religious Institutions:
 - a. The Ministerial Alliance
 - b. Shiloh Christian
 - c. Shiloh Baptist
 - d. South Church
 - e. New Jerusalem
 - f. Victory Christian Church
 - g. Cross Street AME Zion
 - h. St. Mary
 - i. St. John
 - j. St. Sebastian
 - k. The Temple
 - l. St. Francis
 - m. St. Pius
 - n. First Church
2. Business and entities on Main St.
3. Board of Education
4. Chamber of Commerce
5. Middlesex Bar Association
6. Neighborhoods
7. Community Centers
8. Libraries

9. PTO

10. Recreations and Community Services

Director Jackson reminded the commission that the initiative of this project started with a conversation after the incident in Charlottesville wherein people were asking is Middletown a friendly place, does Middletown embrace diversity, and does Middletown treat everyone the same? Councilman Nocera was surprised that Director Jackson answered no to those questions. If people were to ask the minorities who come to Middletown, they will answer immediately that Middletown is not a friendly town. Unless the people are connected to someone or known in the city, it takes a long time for Middletown to embrace any type of diversity. Commissioner Price said just by looking around, one could tell that Middletown is not inclusive.

Randy Renee McCray said they should approach groups of people who feel Middletown is not a welcoming town. Some cities have parent groups or community groups. They should also consider places where people go every day, such as the grocery store or the Community Health Center. Commissioner Fernandez said that the population of people who feel this way about Middletown are largely disorganized, which is why they should approach the churches.

Director Jackson said all the audiences need to be included. They need to find out why Middletown's not friendly and not inclusive. They need to hear from these isolated groups, and the stakeholders need to hear it, too. There are a lot of programs and community resources, but people of color are not taking advantage of them. They need to find out why minorities don't approach or take advantage of these resources. Commissioner Fernandez suggested approaching Recreation and Community Services because almost every family in Middletown participates in some activity associated with Recreation. Director Jackson agreed that would be one of the few areas that includes people from all over Middletown.

Director Jackson said the commission should have a vision. This vision could be changed as it gets input from other people in the community, but to start this work, it should have a vision statement.

Commissioner Ford suggested a Town Hall meeting to discuss issues surrounding race. Cynthia Martin reminded the commission that it would be responsible for bringing the stakeholders to the table. NCCJ will put together flyers and letters, but the commission needs to get the people to the table. Randi Renee McCray said the commission should start within its own networks. The personal phone call or direct relationship would be more effective, especially if people are already not having a good experience and feel reluctant to attend something like this.

Commissioner Hart said that she and others in the room have been through workshops like this before, and people have walked away with a feeling of "what next?" There are times when those trainings or workshops have fallen short. She said she's protective of her community and wants to be sure that they don't pull people in and do the same thing over again. There is a great deal of data and information on this. The onus is on the commission to figure out why the people aren't being supported.

Cynthia Martin responded to Commissioner Hart's comment about the data and said that they would need access to that. She said that if the commission doesn't feel that the four meetings are important and that other work should be done instead, NCCJ can work in other ways. NCCJ can offer anti-racism workshops or other tools.

Director Jackson said that they should work together as a team to review the data. She asked where the data is housed. Commissioner Hart responded that the Connecticut Voices for Children collected a great amount of data. It doesn't have data on people's direct experiences, but it gives an idea of how people are experiencing systems in their town. She also mentioned reports generated by DCF, Middlesex Hospital, and the Board of Ed. Cynthia Martin said the commission members should look for the data from various entities and forward the information to NCCJ. The following data sources, along with the commissioner who volunteered to seek the data, were discussed:

1. The United Way ALICE Report
2. Juvenile Court school-based arrest data – Chairperson Carbonella
3. Work and Cities Challenge – Commissioner Price
4. Board of Education – Commissioner Ford
5. 2016 Middlesex Coalition for Children to also possibly include Connecticut Voices for Children and the ALICE report – Commissioner Hart

Commissioner Fernandez said that if they go by data from the Board of Education, they're excluding three schools, Mercy High School, Xavier High School, and Vinal Technical High School. All of these individuals are in this community, also. How does the commission get that information? It was suggested that they include the administration in those schools, as well.

Betsy Morgan said she understood the initiative as one put forth and funded by the City to investigate how the town can move forward to be a more inclusive, equitable community and provide for some long-term action.

Commissioner Fernandez said he was concerned about how to include or not students who go to Middletown High School but are not from Middletown. Chairperson Carbonella said this is an issue of scope. He said there needs to be clarity on whether the focus is the City of Middletown or the community of Middletown. Is this a reform effort for the municipality of Middletown or the community of Middletown? While they are not mutually exclusive, they are two different projects.

Randi Renee McCray said that it's both. The people who operate the municipality construct the experience for the people who come to Middletown. A person of color who is not from Middletown but visits the city will have an experience in Middletown based on the identity he or she holds, which means how people see him or her is going to affect how they treat him or her. Eventually, it's both, but as they discuss scope, the question is where they want to start. Is it with the individuals who create the experience in the city? Do they start there in educating them and building awareness around issues that create a racial in-just community? Is that the starting place? From there, the next step, as a means of liberation for the broader community and people who are really impacted, they could reach out to them with the notion that they don't have the right to construct their reality without their voice. So, the questions is how do they reach out to those voices in the community. Part of this is self-awareness and self-education. Then, they bring in the community members who are experiencing these disparities and ask them how they can create a different experience for them. And, they should be a part of that. Then, there is another part of this process that deals with solutions.

Chairperson Carbonella clarified that they were looking at the structural and functional leaders of the community. However, if they just convene them, they run the risk of having a conversation about

Middletown being wonderful and diverse. Commissioner Fernandez said that everyone's impacted. He said they should bring in all sides. Youth Representative E'von Davis compared it to triaging patients. He said they should address those who need the urgent care, the urgent love. Cynthia Martin said, as a white person, she can say with certainty that white people don't see racism. They don't see inclusion unless they've done racism work. Randi Renee McCray said she suggested people in positions of power. They can't participate in a solution-based conversation, if they don't understand the problem. She said that in doing this work, they have to honor that people have different constructed realities around this issue. People are in different places. Commissioner Price added that when white people hear about racism, they need time to process, and people of color have often been through these workshops and watched how the white people process the information and the reality. And, it's a challenge for a person of color to sell a white person on what's happening to him or her.

Cynthia Martin suggested they start with an anti-racism workshop. The commission was enthusiastic about that idea. She further explained that the workshop shouldn't be all white people. She added that they facilitate the workshop with a white person and a person of color. Perhaps they can get the stakeholders to the table, such as the school superintendent, the principals, the store owners, etc. Chairperson Carbonella asked if this group, meaning the commission members, the Racial Justice Coalition members, and the three members of the Common Council, would attend the workshop. He asked how this group would intersect with that workshop. Cynthia Martin answered that this group could come, but it's not the target. She explained that the commission members were doing this work because the members already care and already see the reality. This workshop is for the stakeholders who haven't had this conversation at all.

Director Jackson reminded the commission of the Healing Racism Institute that put out a series of workshops for several years. They talked about changing lenses and looking at people from a different perspective. However, the people who were at these sessions weren't stakeholders. They were people who were interested and wanted to sign up or were signed up by their employers.

Randi Renee McCray said that because the City mandated this work, there was an expectation that City officials would be engaged in it. She asked who is championing that message. Councilman Chisem agreed that it was a charge from the Common Council. They wanted to make the community feel that they were trying to get ahead of the problem of racism so what happened in Charlottesville doesn't happen here. Cynthia Martin asked if Councilman Chisem could get his colleagues to the table for the anti-racism workshop, and he said he could do that.

There was general discussion of what days would work for scheduling the workshop, weekdays or weekends. Cynthia Martin said the workshop is two full days, back to back. The commission agreed the first to attend the sessions should be department heads and members of the Common Council. Councilman Chisem said he had a meeting scheduled with Mayor Dan Drew the next day and would discuss having him support a two-day session for department heads and Common Council members.

Commissioner Price asked if the commission should put together a letter to the mayor asking him to support a workshop for the department heads. Councilman Chisem said that he wanted to talk to the mayor first before a letter is drafted.

Commissioner Thody said he would very much like to see the elected officials attend this workshop. They represent Middletown, and if there are problems in Middletown they should be listening. Randi

Renee McCray said this worked very well in Bloomfield, and the residents could see that the mayor and the other elected officials were invested in this work. Chairperson Carbonella asked if other elected officials should be included, such as the Board of Ed and Planning and Zoning. Councilman Chisem said he was confident he could get the Common Council to go, but it would be more complicated to get the other elected board members to attend two days because they may not be able to get off from work. Randi Renee McCray suggested that they offer it to the other elected officials and see the level of interest. She added that there are multiple ways to engage people as this work is started. If certain people don't get to this workshop, they can offer another one or a different type of session. Commissioner Ford said he's certain that some of his colleagues on the Board of Ed would be invested in this, as well. Director Jackson said that the mayor can make attendance mandatory. Cynthia Martin added that they have one scheduled already at the office of NCCJ on May 9th and 10th, and that session is open to the public.

Randi Renee McCray said she wanted to recap for clarity. They still want to get the aforementioned data. However, before they get to the initial community meeting, they want to take a step back and conduct a two-day anti-racism workshop with people who are in leadership roles so when they get to the broader dialogue they have a shared understanding of the issues. NCCJ can incorporate the data into the anti-racism workshop. After Councilman Chisem meets with the mayor, they will work out a date.

Commissioner Price said she would draft a letter from the commission to the mayor. Commissioner Hart said she would help her with that task. Randi Renee McCray reminded the commission that they were assigned to collect data from certain entities. The information could be forwarded to Nyaunu Stevens.

Chairperson Carbonella said that historically the commission has met on a bi-monthly basis. However, to do this work effectively and keep momentum, it should increase the frequency of its meetings to monthly. Director Jackson said the office would modify the meeting schedule and book every third Wednesday until the end of the year.

New Business:

Review: The commission reviewed the 2019 attendance.

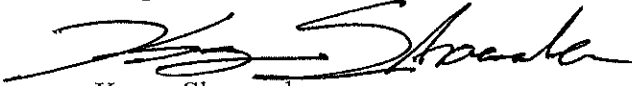
Announcements: The commission's next scheduled meeting will be **April 17, 2019 at 5:00 p.m., location to be determined.** Cynthia Martin said she could not attend on that day. Randi Renee McCray said she could be in attendance.

Chairperson Carbonella said that shortly after the resolution passed giving the commission this charge, there was a gathering on the south green. At that community gathering, both now-appointed Youth in Government Representatives, E'von Davis and Ani Zakarian spoke. Also, E'von Davis and another student spoke at the State Capital about a bill being introduced that would mandate African American studies and Latinx studies being taught in school.

The commission thanked NCCJ for being present at the meeting.

Adjournment: Commissioner Ford motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Fernandez seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kasey Shoemaker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "S".

Kasey Shoemaker,
Administrative Sec. III