

Human Relations Commission
Informal Meeting Minutes
May 28, 2020 6:00 p.m.

Attendance: Ava Hart, Sanji Lawrence, Precious Price, Debbie Ruimerman, and Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

Excused Absence: Justin Carbonella, Brandie Doyle, Ed Ford, Brandie Doyle, and Howard Thody

Absence: Henry Fernandez

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

Call to Order: In the absence of the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, Director Jackson called the meeting to order to have an informal discussion about the NCCJ report and some of the core components of the strategic plan. She noted for the record that there was not a quorum. Others present were Beverly Lawrence and Betsy Morgan of the Racial Justice Coalition.

Public Session: None

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of April 15, 2020 could not be approved due to lack of quorum.

Old Business:

Director Jackson moved the discussion to the preliminary next steps in regards to the NCCJ report. Betsy Morgan clarified that they were still working with the first draft of the report. Director Jackson said that the final report wouldn't be ready until the June meeting. She was working with Nyaunu Stevens, who would be adding the history and data from the ALICE report and some of Izzi Greenberg's work. Commissioner Price asked where the report should go first, the Common Council or the community. Director Jackson answered that it goes before the Common Council first. Most likely, the council will ask that it made available to the public, at which point it will go up on the City's website. Then, it will be the commission's task to hold a community conversation after the Common Council has reviewed it. At this time, the commission needs to put together a strategic plan based on NCCJ's report. The commission needs to develop some next steps. Does the commission want to focus on more training or perhaps some more dialogue sessions? The commission should also come up with three phases of work and desired objectives for each phase.

Commissioner Ruimerman addressed the hiring component from the report. She asked if recruitment can be followed at every step. Director Jackson responded by explaining the recruitment process:

1. The department head issues an Employment Requisition, which first goes to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management.
2. Director Jackson fills out the hiring goals.

3. The requisition then goes back to the department head so he or she knows what the hiring goals are.
4. The department head then signs off on the requisition and sends it to Human Resources.
5. Human Resources then posts the job.
6. If the job is a 466 job or an UPSEU job, it gets posted internally first for a certain amount of time.
7. Human Resources will then screen the applications after the posting has closed.
8. A Recruitment Action Sheet is completed indicating the number of applicants. This sheet is sent to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management.
9. If there are no qualified applicants or no applicants, Human Resources will then post the position externally.
10. If there are qualified applicants in the pool, Human Resources will move the recruitment to the next stage.

The Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management monitors recruitment through four phases: after the posting has closed, after Human Resources has screened the applicants and indicated those who are qualified and those who are not, after testing to indicate those who passed and those who failed, and after the interview process. The department head then selects the candidate and sends that recommendation or sometimes the top three to the mayor. The mayor then appoints someone to the job. Commissioner Ruimerman said she was reading from NCCJ's report where it recommends that there be access to the recruitment process at every stage. Director Jackson said the word "access" needs to be clarified because there's confidentiality to consider.

Commissioner Hart said she was glad this recommendation was in the report because it came up consistently across the board. She has heard this issue also come up anecdotally within the community. She said that what Director Jackson described as the recruitment process was pretty standard. However, that is not what people in the community experience. Things go on behind the scene that change the criteria for positions and exclude people. Things are happening that people don't fully understand. Director Jackson said she didn't understand what Commissioner Hart meant by things happening behind the scenes. Commissioner Hart said that's the impression. People are told they qualify but then they are sent a letter saying they don't qualify, as if the criteria changed. Director Jackson asked if people are being sent a letter indicating they are qualified and then being sent a letter saying they are not qualified. Commissioner Hart answered yes. Commissioner Lawrence added that sometimes people are overqualified for jobs. She explained that this happened to her when she was looking for a job in another state. She has a Bachelor's degree, background, and experience, and she was applying for positions that were not what she wanted just to get a job, and she couldn't get a job in retail.

Director Jackson said she immediately started addressing this issue when she first started in her position at City Hall. People of color would tell her that they couldn't get hired at the City. Or, if they could get hired, they then couldn't get promoted. She further explained that promotions in City Hall are unusual. Promotions are not done on a merit basis. The only way for an employee to get promoted is for him or her to apply for a position when it is posted internally. Sixty to seventy percent of City positions are filled internally. Movement occurs internally, which is why it's imperative to get diversity in the door, at the entry level. Also, the City does not hire a lot of new employees a year.

Commissioner Price said that is intentional. She said that she has spoken to City directors who said that they have to post positions internally. If someone internally wants the job, he or she can easily move into it. If no one applies for it, then the director can post it outside. Director Jackson agreed. She said it's structured that way due to the union contracts and because there is no merit system at City Hall. The only way to get promoted is to apply for a job internally. The commissioners said that's terrible. Commissioner Price said that the system is broken. Director Jackson said that any workplace that has unions works in this way. Commissioner Price said that's intentional. That's an example of a low-hanging fruit. Jobs should not be posted internally first. Director Jackson said that process is contractual, and the City will not change that system because there is no other process for promotion.

Director Jackson said they need to list the topics on which they want to focus. After some discussion, the five topics were determined to be employment, education inequity, law enforcement, housing, and community building.

Commissioner Hart asked for more explanation on the unions. Director Jackson said that there are four unions within the City: Fire, Police, AFSCME (466), and UPSEU. Also, there is a teachers union, but that is not under the City. Commissioner Hart then said that in order to cause the changes that they would like to see, they would have to develop a relationship with each union and communicate with them. Director Jackson said that in order to approach the union, they need to have specific information and concrete data. She added that she identified the unions as a barrier when she first started at the City. One of the first things they worked on improving was getting more diversity in the applicant pool. Now, there's diversity in the pool, but she continues to watch to see if diversity is continuing through the recruitment process and to the interview. Are people of color passing the test? Are they being selected to interview? She explained that part of her job is to monitor this throughout the entire recruitment process and identify possible barriers or issues. Changing anything in government is a very slow process.

Commissioner Price said that COVID-19 is teaching them that change in government doesn't have to be slow. When they're in a crisis, which they need to acknowledge and act as though they are, change does not need to take as long as the City would like them to think it does. She added that when the commission presents this to the council, they need to convey that sense of urgency. The council will try to say that this is years' worth of work. Beverly Lawrence added that they will come up with excuses. Director Jackson said that this work does take years. This process was started in September of 2017. Commissioner Hart agreed that it is a lengthy process, but they have already started to make changes. Commissioner Price said the commission was given a resolution and told to start on this project; whereas, the commission will respond to the council with a detailed plan. She said it shouldn't take the same amount of time to act on a strategic plan. She said the council shouldn't take years if the commission gives it a ten-point plan to for example tear down unions and create a better process for hiring. If the strategic plan includes tangible actions, is well thought out, and data driven, the council should be able to act on it quickly.

Commissioner Ruimerman asked how the commission would address the unions, which are powerful. Director Jackson said they would have to do so by providing an organized, structured plan. The commission would have to show something that identifies barriers and provides recommendations for solutions. It needs to be a simple format that everyone can understand. If the recommendations are resisted or ignored, people will need to come together to enforce it.

Commissioner Hart said the unions would likely question how the commission knows that the practices of the union are the cause of the problems.

Commissioner Price said that this current report does not necessarily lead the commission to start looking at policies and existing practices. There are national organizations that do this work. She said there is an organization based in New York that does this work very well. She explained that she thinks phase two of this work is finding consultants or organizations that can dig deeper into the practices on the City level to further uncover why people of color are not getting hired for City jobs. This was a great starting point to talk about the culture. She added that before approaching the City departments or the police department, they have to know exactly what needs to be discussed and have to be aware of exactly what policies are detrimental. Beverly Lawrence said there also needs to be a revision of the City Charter. It's outdated and racist.

Commissioner Lawrence said more community conversations need to occur. She added that the previous community conversations had a lack of real community in them. They often speculated about the needs of the families that weren't at the table. They know that there are families struggling, but they're not at the table to communicate their needs. Commissioner Price said people aren't coming to the conversations because they don't feel valued. She gave an example of snow not being cleared effectively in areas where people of color live. When children have to walk in the street because snow was never cleared, it's no wonder families who live in that area don't feel valued. People get exhausted complaining and getting no results. They don't have the energy to go to a City meeting to share their concerns, especially if they don't feel like anyone is listening. She added that people of color are talking, but they're being silenced in ways that are strategic. She gave the example of the issue of Green Street and the soup kitchen. People were made to feel broken down in those communities. Commissioner Lawrence said that people are tired of surveys and meetings. She said that the commissioners should talk to people where they are. If people are in the grocery store and say something about their needs or how they're treated, the commissioners should be ready to talk to them right there.

Commissioner Price said that the plan is to present the NCCJ report to the Common Council. After the council has seen it, they will then organize further community conversations to present it to the community. She said next steps would come out of the community conversations. She said in order to present it to the community, they need to put together talking points from the report.

Commissioner Hart said they should use the community conversation model that has worked very well in the city. The community is familiar with that style, and it's been successful in the past. Also, it will give the commission an opportunity to get a list of questions so they can get some deliverables.

Commissioner Price asked how the commission will present the report to the council. Director Jackson answered that the presentation to the council will essentially be Nyaunu Stevens presenting the final report. Then, based on the report, the commission should have next steps outlined, which would be the intention to have a few more community conversations surrounding the five core issues. Commissioner Price asked if Nyaunu Stevens will be presenting the entire plan to the council, why would the commission focus only on five areas for the community? Director Jackson answered that the commission needs to have a focused structure, and it needs to be built on what has already been presented. Also, the whole report is going to be available to the public to read. The people of color in the community are going to want to know what the commission did with the information they gave

them in the focus groups and community conversations. People are going to want to know the strategic plan and what actions are going to be taken. Commissioner Hart said that most likely Nyaunu Stevens was going to present a summary of the report, which would not be too different from the presentation to the community. Commissioner Price clarified that her question was if the commission was presenting it the same way to the community as its being presented to the council?

Director Jackson said that the commission members are not experts in this arena. The plan would be to continue the partnership with NCCJ and Nyaunu Stevens. Nyaunu Stevens would be the one to bring this to the community. The commissioners aren't going to be conducting the conversations because they're not qualified to do so. She added that some of the commissioners can become passionate about these issues themselves and not be as skilled in controlling the conversation among a large group of people. Commissioner Price said that she has a Master's degree in Social Work. She added that Commissioner Hart is also qualified to do this type of work. Director Jackson explained that as the commission moves forward with this work, it needs to make sure to have experts and professionals on board.

Commissioner Price said she agreed but she didn't think NCCJ would be continuing to work with the commission because their contract is done. Commissioner Hart agreed and said that the community conversation model intends to use people from the community. Beverly Lawrence asked the commissioners if they felt they could continue this initiative and conduct the conversations themselves. Commissioner Price said she does this type of work all the time in her profession.

Director Jackson clarified that this is a City project. Commissioner Hart countered that it's a community project. Director Jackson said that if the commission wanted to move forward and facilitate the conversations, the members would have to be trained. However, she would be continuing to utilize NCCJ to conduct future training sessions. She explained that Councilman Nocera is adamant that training sessions continue for City employees. She added that she will have funding in her department budget to continue this work and she intends to contract with another partner to facilitate additional training sessions, and that partner could possibly be NCCJ. Commissioner Hart said that the commission was not here to do what Councilman Nocera thinks is appropriate. They're here to work together as a group.

Director Jackson explained that they were on record in the last meeting saying that they look forward to continuing to work with NCCJ. The capacity of that work has not been identified. Also, the commission doesn't know at the time what type of work the City may want to do with NCCJ on the City's behalf.

Commissioner Lawrence said her employer, FAVOR, Inc. may be able to support this work through funding. Director Jackson added that she envisioned more agencies coming on board with this work. The commission will not be doing this work in isolation. However, the commission needs a strategic plan and an outline of the steps and the agencies needed to get the work done.

Director Jackson asked the commission about its next steps for the next meeting in June. She asked if one of the commissioner's would be willing to put together an outline for next steps because the minutes are just going to capture the discussion. Commissioner Price said the minutes would be enough because the commission didn't come to any sort of conclusion because the meeting was an informal discussion. Commissioner Hart agreed that the minutes would be sufficient to illustrate next steps.

New Business:

Review: The commission reviewed the 2020 attendance.

Announcements The next meeting of the commission will be June 17, 2020. Director Jackson said Nyaunu Stevens would be participating in the June meeting and will have her final report. The commission said they would like to see the final report ahead of the June meeting. Director Jackson said she would ask if Nyaunu Stevens could have the report done before the June meeting for the commission to review.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Kasey Maurice

Kasey Maurice,
Administrative Sec. III