

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
April 17, 2019 5:00 p.m.

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

Excused Absence: Edward Ford

Absence: Henry Fernandez, Evan Davis, Youth in Government Representative, 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 Blanchard, Councilman Nocera and members of the Racial Justice Coalition, Beverly Lawrence and Betsy Morgan were present. Nyaunu Stevens and Randi Renee McCray of NCCJ were present, as well.

Public Session: None.

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Minutes: Chairperson Carbonella asked for a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of March 20, 2019. Commissioner Ruimerman motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes of March 20, 2019, and Commissioner Blackwell seconded it. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried.

Old Business:

Chairperson Carbonella asked Director Jackson to provide an update on the status as they wait for NCCJ to settle into the meeting. She advised the commission that Councilman Chisem met with Mayor Drew, who agreed to move forward with the workshop. His office provided her with two sets of back-to-back days that would work. She communicated the dates to the department heads and Common Council members. The feedback was mixed with some wanting evening times, some wanting dates that weren't back to back, and some wanting to attend only one of the two dates. Director Jackson communicated the concerns to Ms. Nyaunu Stevens, who said she understood the issues but this is how the training is structured. The workshop is designed to take people on a journey. If there is lapse of time between the dates, momentum is lost and it will take longer on the second day to get everyone back into the flow of the workshop. It is a commitment to attend this training. Director Jackson communicated the consultant's response to the mayor, and they decided to move forward with the dates that had the most positive response, which was April 29th and April 30th. At this time, there are approximately 35-40 who will attend. Because the Middlesex County Chamber has its monthly breakfast on that Monday, some won't be in the session until a little after 9:00 a.m.

Councilman Blanchard said that his issue, which is probably the issue with many of the Common Council members, is the fact that he has a day job. He said he would try to attend, but he may not be able to use vacation time due to his job having a six-month probation before the use of vacation. Director Jackson said that there will be a second two-day session. After that, they will move onto the focus groups.

Commissioner Price said that she remembered that Cynthia Martin said that they couldn't do the workshop with more than 25 people. Randi Renee McCray said that they've done a lot of these sessions in the past, and the maximum number of people was 30. A bigger group reduces the experience because they facilitate peer sharing and activities, and there is some moving around the room. That process can get difficult when the group is big. Typically they cap at 30 in order to maintain the integrity of the overall experience. However, they can make adjustments.

Commissioner Price asked if it was mandatory for the commission members to attend, as well. Director Jackson said that in the minutes the commission is excluded from the workshop. There was discussion on the email that the commission received regarding the workshop. Randi Renee McCray asked if any of the commission members were planning to attend. Chairperson Carbonella said he would be in attendance as a department head. Randi Renee McCray said that because they are pursuing this as a collective entity, there's something to be said for them all having the same experience. Not attending the workshop would exclude them from the totality of the culture they're trying to create. She added that while the April 29th and 30th workshop is full, the commission members should consider attending a second one at a later date.

Councilman Blanchard asked specifically who was mandated to attend this workshop. Director Jackson answered that those mandated are the mayor, Common Council members, department heads, and deputy directors. These employees and council members are the decision makers for the City of Middletown.

Chairperson Carbonella agreed that they should be working with a collective lens. If they are going to be working through these complex issues, they need to have a shared definition of racism, privilege, and bias and how it all works systemically. He asked how this group could be included with regards to the attendance cap. Director Jackson added that the commission discussed at the last meeting that there was a training planned for the next group down, such as the Board of Ed. Also, they need to stay within NCCJ's scope of work.

Randi Renee McCray said the commission needs to consider its role. If it is going to have more of an active role, there is a core knowledge that comes out of this two-day workshop. If the commission is going to engage in any of the after work, it needs the foundational learning. After these workshops, people may come to the commission to say they're struggling with something specific, and the commission needs the tools to address that. Because, the first workshop is already full, there's no other option than to have a second anti-racism workshop.

Commissioner Doyle asked if they should be working to schedule the second workshop. Randi Renee McCray said that she can't schedule it right now but that the commission could come up with some dates and contact her. Commissioner Doyle and Councilman Blanchard asked if it's possible to hold the next workshop at a time other than during work. Randi Renee McCray said that while she understood the conflict of work, the way the content is scaffolded over the two days is specific to this

structure. The things they leave the attendees with on day one are things that people need to process before day two. And, the two days have to be consecutive.

Director Jackson asked the commission to be mindful that her office is a two-person one, and this work backlogs the other work in the department.

Note: At this time, Councilman Blanchard and Councilman Nocera had to exit the meeting for another meeting.

Commissioner Doyle volunteered to create a Doodle Poll to go out to the commission, the Racial Justice Coalition, and the Common Council asking what dates, including weekend dates, in May and June people will be available. She will then send those dates to Director Jackson and she can cross reference with NCCJ.

Commissioner Price asked if she was expected to attend since she has already done so. Chairperson Carbonella said that he wouldn't expect her or Beverly Lawrence to attend because they have already taken it. Randi Renee McCray agreed that they don't have to all be together; the idea is that they all be using the same language and working from the same knowledge base.

The commission asked about NCCJ's training they are having on May 9th and 10th. Ms. Nyaunu Stevens replied that there is still room in that session, and people can sign up through the website. However, that is not explicitly covered under their contract, so those details will need to be worked out. Director Jackson clarified that the commission members who attend on the 9th and 10th would have to cover their own expense of attendance.

Chairperson Carbonella asked if everyone was of the understanding that the focus groups would not occur until after the second anti-racism workshop. The commission and NCCJ agreed. He further asked if the commission could hold off any external work until after July 1st. Does that affect the timeline or scope of work? He asked about holding larger town halls or focus groups in the month of July and August. Director Jackson reminded the commission that people take vacation during those weeks. Commissioner Doyle said the commission may have better opportunity to engage youth during those months, whereas they wouldn't be available during the school year. She added that the library has a summer program every Friday, and they would be an available audience for reaching youth.

Chairperson Carbonella asked if the commission should discuss focus groups now or at the next monthly meeting, which is May 15th. Randi Renee McCray responded that the commission first needs to decide what it wants to get out of the focus groups with regards to this work and then identify the audience members. Determining those first two factors will drive the structure of the focus group. Then, they can best decide the most appropriate time to have it. This conversation is a longer one because they need to set the framework. However, the commission first has to define what it wants from the groups. There was discussion of whether this could be a topic covered during the two-day workshop. Randi Renee McCray answered that there is a portion during the workshop where they do action planning, and this can be incorporated. To put this discussion in the upcoming training would be problematic because the commission needs to be present for the conversation. So, it may be better to have the conversation with just the commission so no part of it has to be rehashed. Commissioner Price said the conversation is imperative and should take place after the two-day training.

Chairperson Carbonella concluded that they should hold off on discussion of the structure of the focus groups until everyone has participated in the anti-racism workshop, which may mean that it's off the table for the May 15th meeting, as well. So, it may be best to have this discussion at either the June or July Human Relations Commission meeting. There was discussion on the roles of NCCJ and the commission during the focus groups. Randi Renee McCray said there is the expectation of the commission's presence at the groups. The commission members would not necessarily be leading the discussion, but they should be more than spectators. They should be actively engaged in the conversation, and NCCJ can map out how that would work. Ultimately, when NCCJ's scope of work is complete, they expect that the commission can continue this work on its own.

The situation that currently exists took years to create, and it will take years to undo. One focus group is not going to solve the entire problem. Therefore, the idea is that NCCJ is building an infrastructure to support the commission as it continues this work on its own. At some point, the commission will be driving this work.

Betsy Morgan said the upcoming workshop is really remarkable for Middletown, and she wanted to commend Director Jackson, the commission, and NCCJ for putting this together. She asked if they need to talk at all about racial justice trainings that have occurred in the past or provide any other background. Randi Renee McCray answered that Director Jackson has been in contact with Ms. Nyaunu Stevens, and if there's anything that the commission or Director Jackson thinks is relevant to the training or the group, she should communicate that to Ms. Nyaunu Stevens. Director Jackson said she's already shared some background of the audience that will be in attendance. While many of them have participated in diversity training, she doesn't think there's anything that could prepare them for this scope of work. This work will take them on a journey and an experience they've never had before. She feels this is necessary because much of what the employees have been to in the past has been in a lecture format. It will be an eye-opener for some.

Commissioner Price asked Randi Renee McCray to speak to her process of engaging people who may not want to actively participate. She responded that some people don't say anything. But them not saying anything doesn't mean that they're not receptive. This work is challenging. That's why this is a two-day experience because typically those who don't engage right away come back the next day with a new perspective. Some people do maintain resistance throughout. However, they can't un-hear the information. Even if they are challenged by it, they heard it, and it's going to sit with them. The process is that NCCJ creates a safe and open space but they also put set guidelines upfront about racism being structural and operating on multiple levels. They are upfront that while everyone has a perspective, that's not the singular truth. If people want a society free of racism, they have to talk about the truth of what exists. Ms. Nyaunu Stevens added that they operate from a standpoint of no shame and no blame. People can become defensive and feel they are being called out for something they didn't do. However, NCCJ comes from the standpoint of none of them created this situation. They were born into it. Some were born into a position of benefits and some of disadvantages. The systems in place are old. But, they're trying to dismantle them. People get uncomfortable, but the discomfort is where the growth happens. The discomfort is important.

Randi Renee McCray said that the workshop will help people understand that their lens is not the only correct one. There are other lenses. And, they take this understanding into the focus groups, which makes them more receptive to what the community tells them needs work. Out of this work should come some concrete asks, some concrete changes that those in power can drive for this community.

Once people know the history, they can change the course or direction for the future. Commissioner Doyle said the commission was most interested in the action plan from NCCJ. She said she didn't want too much time to lapse between the training and the production of that action plan. She added that the commission should be mindful that it may need to provide verbal and/or written updates to the Common Council throughout this process.

Note: At this time, Commissioner Doyle exited the meeting.

Chairperson Carbonella asked NCCJ how they would like the council chamber set up for the training. Randi Renee McCray answered that the number of chairs for the attendees including the two facilitators be arranged in a U shape and a head table. They will also need access to a projector and flip charts. There was further discussion on the set up, and Director Jackson said she would work with the Building Superintendent to arrange the room. She added that they will provide lunch on both days.

Chairperson Carbonella asked if there was any other discussion on the work. Director Jackson said that she'd like to provide the information on the ALICE report. She added that Commissioner Ford could not be present at tonight's meeting, but he spoke to Dr. Conner, who said he could get any information for the commission but would need more specific parameters for the data. Chairperson Carbonella said he was still working on the school-based arrest data. Commissioner Price provided the report from the Middletown Coalition for Children. There are three pending reports.

Randi Renee McCray thanked her and mentioned another report from The Urban League of Southern Connecticut and Quinnipiac called the State of Urban Connecticut, which addresses the crisis shortage of affordable housing and an increase in low-wage jobs. The report is available digitally on their website for \$9.99.

There was further discussion on the process for the purchase order and the invoicing for NCCJ's work, which Director Jackson said was already underway and should be in place before the training begins.

New Business:

Review: Chairperson Carbonella referenced the amended meeting schedule and noted that conference room 208 is not available for the additional meetings between the bi-monthly ones. He said that he spoke to Director Jackson's office and offered the conference room at his facility, which he said may be more conducive to the meetings. He added that the May meeting will be in 208, but the June meeting may potentially be off site.

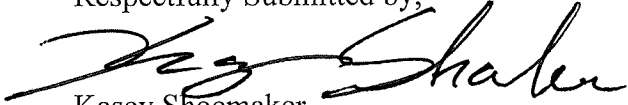
Review: The commission reviewed the 2019 attendance.

Announcements: The commission's next scheduled meeting will be May 15, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. in room 208.

The commission thanked NCCJ for being present at the meeting.

Adjournment: Commissioner Hart motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Thody seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion was properly carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:48 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kasey Shoemaker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "K".

Kasey Shoemaker,
Administrative Sec. III