



City of Greensboro

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

MINUTES

October 2, 2014

The Human Relations Commission (HRC) convened for its regular monthly meeting at 6:07 p.m. on the above date in the Board Room at the Greensboro Cultural Center, with Chair Kevin Williams presiding.

PRESENT: Chair Kevin Williams, Vice-Chair Michael Picarelli, Commissioners Zac Engle, Gary Grandon, Tonya Doane and Jacqueline King and Chantale Wesley-Lamin

HUMAN RELATIONS DEPARTMENT STAFF: Donna Gray, HRD Senior Manager; Allen Hunt, Supervisor and Isabel Gil, Administrative Assistant.

EXCUSED ABSENCES: Commissioners Jean Brown, Margaret Arbuckle, Chantale Wesley-Lamin and Kurt Collins

VISITORS: Councilmember Marikay Abuzuaiter, Councilmember Sharon Hightower,

CALL TO ORDER

Kevin Williams called the meeting to order at 11:58 a.m. and a moment of silence was observed.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS

Chair Williams thanked visitors from the community for being present and invited them to introduce themselves to the Commission.

OPENING REMARKS

Chair Williams stated that the meeting is going to be a fact finding mission to get feedback from the community therefore there are no decisions to be made. He understands everyone is passionate about a particular issue however it takes time to make a comprehensive solution.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR – COMMISSIONER KEVIN WILLIAMS

See report attached

COMMITTEE REPORTS

CRC- Allen Hunt on behalf of Commissioner Wesley-Lamin

At the meeting last month three cases were closed, two of those were in agreement with the GPD of how they performed the investigations and with the conclusions they came up with and the third case the CRC agreed with the investigation but will provide recommendations. The committee will have the



opportunity to have a dialogue with interim chief of police, Anita Holder and discuss about body cameras and how it has helped them understand the nature of policing and the perspective of concerned citizens which is critical because you can put a face to the name and see the human side of the equation to make decisions. The committee is looking forward to have the participation of Jacqueline King and Tony Casas.

Education – Vice Chair Picarelli

The kick off meeting will be on October 27 at 8:00 am, HRD staff will find a place at the MMOB; e-mails are going to be sent to the listserv including Guilford Education Alliance and Guilford Parent Academy and other local groups here.

Employment – Commissioner Zac Engle

He is continuing to work in the entrepreneurship program for the youth next summer. The idea will be to put an entrepreneurship seminar for students partnering with the Nussbaum Center and also joining the committee is Dr. Archibong from NC A&T State University. He is looking forward to do this in next couple of months.

Councilmember Hightower asked Commissioner Engle if he was aware about the Teen Summit back in May because there were twenty five organizations partnering at the table and suggested to work with them to recruit youth. Commissioner Engle said that would be very helpful to give the information out to attract group. He also thinks that beside the seminar there should be something structure to provide mentoring and will give them the ability to go back at Sam Funchess at the Nussbaum Center because there is a lot of assistance from them.

Councilmember Hightower said that group is doing that work that is the reason why they came to the table so that it would be not just a onetime conversation. She finds interesting that there is a disconnection because Dr. Love Crossling is helping her chair the initiative and she thinks there is no need to reinvent the wheel they just have to collaborate; communications seems to be a big problem and she would like to discuss that further with him. Commissioner Engle agreed to have a conversation.

Commissioner Williams wanted to add that Commissioner Engle was appointed to this position within the last thirty days so he would like to give the chairman time to set his agenda, Commissioner Engle has willing partners and resources and believes he would do a fantastic job as he moves forward.

HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE – Chair Williams

The committee is responsible for the MLK Breakfast. There is not a report for September but he will provide more comprehensive update in November to show the program timeline.

Allen Hunt added that Carroll Rogoff Hallstrom has been confirmed as the keynote speaker for this event. She was a 1960's activist and a member of SNCC. She is a dynamic speaker and she worked under the current administration of Janet Reno and it is very fortunate to have her for this event.



Commissioner Picarelli asked if the HRC is set for the speaker and no longer pursuing other speakers. Allen Hunt said there may be other speakers but the keynote speaker is set. Commissioner Picarelli added that there is very small room to have more speakers to the event.

Chair Williams stated the committee is still in the planning stages, the keynote speaker was identified but another option would be to have a panel with two to three speakers to speak around three to five minutes each. He will provide more information in the November meeting.

Commissioner Picarelli stated he is excited to hear about this proposal and is looking forward to hear more details for the event.

Councilmember Hightower asked what the purpose is for the breakfast. Chair Williams answered that the mission or theme statement hasn't been developed yet. Councilmember Hightower commented that having that would help the speaker to be aligned to target purpose; she added that the speaker at the last breakfast she attended was boring, got off the mark, and lost a lot of people.

MONTGOMERY WELLS/HOUSING COMMITTEE

In preparation of establishing more members and increased partnerships for the committee Commissioner Doane met with Allen Hunt on September 18th to discuss ideas for the structure and development. Additionally, an email was sent to former Chair of the committee, Commissioner Ksieniewicz, in order to get an insight on what was achieved on his tenure years as a chair and she plans to reach out to Lee Staton, COG Fair Housing Investigator and Beth McGee Huger, Executive Director of Greensboro Housing Coalition to discuss issues within the City. Her goal is to add members to start a meeting on November 2014.

PROGRAM AND PLANNING AD HOC – Commissioner Grandon

The committee will meet Thursday October 9th in Orientation Room of the Greensboro Cultural Center downtown to plan a public forum on topics surrounding recent City wide discussion of police review, police body camera use, and surveillance cameras on the streets.

The committee is looking at formats, panelists, location, and appropriate advertising. Advertising is of particular concern. The committee is open to sharing the spotlight on this event with community partners as he hope will be suggested. Commissioner Grandon added he would like to find out who in the City Council he could talk to have their support. He would like to have a board range of ideas from a board range of people at these events and he is welcoming everyone to attend the planning committee.

STAFF REPORT



Allen Hunt provided information about the Envisioning Retreat for the HRC and CSW is going to be held on October 10 from 12-5 pm and Saturday October 11 from 9-12pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- September 3, 2014 Meeting Minutes
On motion made by Commissioner Picarelli and seconded by Commissioner Picarelli the minutes were approved as corrected.

OTHER BUSINESS – IAC Committee Discussion

Chair Williams made a motion to amend the Agenda to extend the meeting to additional thirty minutes. The motion was moved by Commissioner Engle and seconded by Commissioner Picarelli.

Chair Williams stated again that this is a fact finding session for the Commission to develop a comprehensive plan for future years. He asked for volunteers to speak and announce themselves.

Mr. Adamou Mohammed stated he is a community advocate and leader of the Niger Community. He is also a current student of the City Academy. He stated that five months ago he was very excited and hopeful, like many other leaders in this community who call Greensboro home, to hear that the IAC was launched on May 2 with the purpose of analyzing the challenges that refugees and immigrants face and to find ways to implement policies and changes. A few weeks ago he found out that was not the case because he is disappointed and concerned about the process that led the nomination of the IAC leadership team. He attended the first IAC meeting but he was out of the country when the second took place and was not able to attend the third one but he was in touch with member of Welcoming Greensboro Initiative (WGI) and others that attended so he is fully aware of most of the discussions of the meeting. He quoted COG website where states the IAC structure as follows: “The committee is comprised of individuals whose national origin is outside the US and who represent Greensboro's diverse international community” and unfortunately for him that was not the case when he learned that the leadership team has been nominated and are people who were born in the US, at least three quarters of those people are American. As an immigrant himself, he has had the privilege to work with motivated and competent immigrant leaders during the Welcoming Greensboro Project. This project led to the passing of the Resolution by the City Council. Those leaders had the opportunity to discuss with many immigrants of different backgrounds who saw in them people who share their realities and have trust to be their voice as they talked to policy makers and city officials. In Greensboro, refugee and immigrants have few opportunities to speak directly to city government therefore it is important for them to lead the IAC and advice the City Council about the true problems they face as newcomers. His question is how come it can be claimed to be an inclusive and welcoming city if the IAC leadership doesn't even reflect the diversity of the community. He also believes that service providers like resettlement and advocacy agencies have an important role to play but the IAC should be led by immigrants so he defers the urge to



the COG and HRC to see that newcomers are represented on the IAC. He thanked the commission and waits for a positive response.

Ms. Kathy Hinshaw stated that she is a former Human Relations Commissioner and also was part of the initiation of IAC under councilmember Johnson's suggestion in 2008 where the City Council established the following structure: "The committee is comprised of individuals whose national origin is outside the US and who represent Greensboro's diverse international community". She added that the new leadership appointed is clearly not abiding with the HRD and to that the IAC committee will do; there was an unfortunate misstep by the COG by appointing a leadership team that is 75% US born so it's not in compliance in the structure established. They believe that this sends a wrong message to immigrants and non immigrants in the city and they are present in the meeting to make COG aware that this is happening and the international community once again is feeling very disappointed and betrayed. The trust relationship has been damaged by this. They are urging the HRC and COG to see refugees and immigrants as leaders because they are capable, many of them have been living in Greensboro for a long time and are very aware of how the government procedures are and are capable of serving in boards and lead in committees that have to do with their own issues. Ms. Hinshaw is sharing this concern with hopes that every party can work together.

Mrs. Esther Idassi wanted to add that immigrants and refugees are capable of leading. She wants to put herself as an example but she is not the only one that has had that training. An example is Eli Empowerment Services which is an organization that she started in 2010. Her training is City Academy, Impact Greensboro, Education Alliance Leadership, Women in Office Workshop and Women in Office Program which is part of the Institute of Political Leadership. Immigrants are able to lead and they have built up the WGI which is a group of community members who have come together and reach cross-cultures to find what it needs to be done. When they went to the City Council they said they were going to work through IAC to be able to implement changes. Kathy Hinshaw wanted to clarify that what Mrs. Idassi was referring to the Welcoming Initiative Report is a fifty page report that was presented to City Council which has input of international community members with specific suggestions of what the City needs to be done to become a welcoming city. Mr. Mohammed stated that this report is a result of sixteen different community discussions and there was trust build with these communities so this is like a slap in the face when all this work has been done and then these committees are not represented in the IAC and so he asks what the purpose of the IAC is. Mrs. Idassi said they all are expecting for the IAC mission and structure to be followed.

Mr. Yacine Kout stated that he feels that his voice has been silenced in this process and in life in general. He has children that are US Citizens but he can't vote whether it is for the highest office in the country or for the mayoral service of the town he lives in. When it comes to the school board where decisions are made that will impact his children he cannot run either. The IAC is the only opportunity for him to lead and have an impact on his family and that's why it is important to share this message so he is asking the HRC to respect and abide by the structure and purpose because it is an issue of opportunity. The IAC would be the place to allow him to speak.

Mr. Million Mekonnen stated that he has been working with refugees and immigrants for several years. There are about seven hundred refugees coming to the area, including High Point. When he heard about



the WGI he thought this would be a great opportunity for the City to engage with the community so that the IAC would be more functional to hear these voices. When he learned that the IAC is not aligning with what is posted in the website and made him upset and thinks the purpose has to be respected.

Mrs. Lori Khamala with the American Friends Service Committee stated she has attended some of the IAC meetings and she is one of the individuals who were appointed to the leadership team of the IAC, which she found surprising. She wanted to applaud the HRC for addressing the issue around the leadership of the IAC and also wanted to make clear that the problem that she and many others have regarding this process are unrelated to the individuals appointed. David Fraccaro, Maha Elobeid, Sarah Ivory and herself are very knowledgeable and competent who have all contributed greatly to the immigrant and refugees integration in the city so it's not about personalities or individuals; however, appointing three non immigrants of four IAC positions sends a wrong message which is that the COG does not believe that there are immigrants and refugees capable to serve in leadership roles. She thinks she has been working over fifteen years with immigrants in NC who are very talented and brilliant. She would like to see more refugees and immigrants serving leadership positions and on many committees and commissions not only the IAC including the City Council itself. It is essential that immigrants have the opportunity to express their own concerns and find their own priorities. Just because there are non immigrants that care about these issues doesn't mean they can speak on behalf of immigrants because that is untrue, immigrants can speak on their own voice. Prioritizing immigrant leadership is not only smart and forward thinking but it's also laid out in the IAC mission statement on the website. She clarified that she thinks non immigrants should have a place on the table because they can offer a lot the cause of immigrant integration but there is no reason why immigrant themselves should not be in those leadership positions. The COG should have a more transparent and democratic process for the leadership positions to be voted on. She is looking forward to work on an immigrant led IAC in order to be an inclusive city.

Commissioner Piccarelli asked staff for a brief version, and if the IAC is not an arm of the HRC. Allen Hunt stated the IAC it is a standing committee of the HRC and added that what occurred is that there was a request to revive the IAC from City Council to create a forum for those voices to be heard. So at that request, the HRD approached former Chair Wendell Phillips for the appointment of the person to chair the committee. Mr. Umar Awan who is a graduate from City Academy was appointed and was very competent leader but had to resign to the chair role because of a new job he accepted. Before that, he suggested a list of individuals for the leadership structure that would help in the transition to a newcomer led entity. Commissioner Picarelli clarified that the authority to appoint the IAC chair came from the HRC.

Mrs. Addy Jeffrey stated that she is not an immigrant, she was born in New York but her parents are immigrants from Cuba. She attended two meetings of the IAC and wanted to applaud Dr. Crossling and the Human Relations Staff who work very hard to reengage the International Community and their allies. She stated that her comments are not meant to disrespect the City staff or the people who were identified as leaders of the IAC because she considers all of them leaders in the community who she admires and are her friends, but she wants to voice her thoughts. She referred to the statement on the City's website that says that the IAC is comprised of individuals whose national origin is outside the U.S. and added this is not vague but very simple. She thinks that the leadership of the international community should be respected as exemplified by the leaders that have spoken before. She added this is not complicated and since there is HRC quorum she asked Chair Williams to not to drag it any longer



and avoid to take weeks to figure it out because it is very simple and asks to do the right thing. Mrs. Jeffrey thinks that whatever misstep was unintentional but whatever decision that is made as of now it is intentional. It is very clear on the website and on the public documents that have been requested.

Mr. Mohammed wanted to add that there was no transparency in the appointments of the leadership. He was not at the last IAC leadership but a member of the Togolese Community was there who thought that the process adopted in nominating those people was not the correct way proceed, everybody needs to get together to see who can represent the international community. Mr. Mohammed added that when Allen Hunt went to visit the AFSC to seek the third person to be on the leadership team that is when they learned that there was already a group put in place so he asks where the transparency in that process is.

Ms. Lori Khamala commented that she doesn't have an issue to have a team but with the makeup of the selection of the team so there is no reason why the HRC within their authority could appoint a new team or identify a new process.

Commissioner Gary Grandon commented that the Welcoming Initiative Report is fabulous and asked if there are other groups similar to them to be represented on the leadership team and asked if there are other groups that speak for immigrants. Addy Jeffrey answered that there are many other groups. Mr. Mohammed added that they were not there as the Welcoming Greensboro Initiative Group because there are many other in the group representing different communities that there are not present. It is a group of individuals it is not and incorporated organization. Commissioner Grandon added that he is glad to meet them and to know that they are in the same business as the HRC is very good but not knowing that they existed is really bad on the HRC because not many of the members of the Commission knew about this Initiative and he wonders if they are going to find other groups later that they don't know about.

Ms. Hinshaw wanted to clarify that the Welcoming Greensboro Initiative and report is a result of different community meetings in the Greater Greensboro Area and is the input of different international groups and countries represented. The Resolution was passed by City Council on April 15 saying that COG receives the Welcoming Greensboro Initiative. They all were in the hope to have the implementations of those recommendations through the IAC so the COG could become a Welcoming City.

Mrs. Lori Khamala wanted to acknowledge that an organization not represented in this meeting is Faith Action International who is not part of the WGI but they are going to hear from that group as well.

Mrs. Maha Elobeid wanted take them back stating that at some point there was a network called RING which is stands for Refugee and Immigrant Network but it was agency driven who were service providers but not community driven and naturally it failed at the end. The meeting times were nine to five where community could not attend. WGI is community based and it is the reason why she supports it.

Chair Williams asked council member Hightower if she had any comments. She stated that in the understanding of the structure of the IAC it is very important for the mission that they are trying to do and if the COG is ought to be a diverse city it has to be open and welcoming to those who are different and certainly have ideas that are most conducive to the best utilization of our community. She had talked to the WGI group a few months ago and she told them the IAC was going to get started so the COG should



not miss out this opportunity to engage them and make them feel they are leaders and also it must be community driven in their efforts. Too many times the structure is set up and dictated to people and they are not asked about it and she doesn't like that. It is one of various reasons she wants to be in the position of helping engage the community. She supports the requests of this group to make corrections and changes.

Councilmember Marikay Abuzuaiter stated that she was hoping that there was a major misunderstanding in this process, the reason she said this is because she was also unaware that there were some issues and concerns going. She provided a brief synopsis of the IAC in its beginning: In 2008, Mayor Johnson had promised in her campaign to establish an IAC. At first, it was going to be a commission and then it turned into a council and then it turn into a committee under the hospices under the HRC. They reached out to many service providers trying to identify immigrants and she watched the growth of many of the leaders present in the meeting. What happened in 2008 is that she, who is not a foreign born person, was appointed by Mayor Johnson to chair the IAC. The reason was not to believe that no one in the refugee and immigrant community were able to lead but it was to navigate the COG's procedures and protocols to give the IAC the power it needed to happen. When she was chair, they went in without a vision of what the immigrant and refugee community wanted and what they needed. At the first meeting she realized that was not the way it should be but should be the community telling the COG what they needed in order to navigate. She wanted to give up the chair role and it was not because there were no leaders in the room but most of the people were working and were very involved in their own communities and the meetings were once a month. Evelyn Rodriguez was the co chair and councilmember Abuzuaiter was hoping for her to take over the IAC but her health did not permit that at that time. When Mayor pro term Johnson and herself heard that Chair Awan was recently appointed she was thrilled to hear about it because they knew there were leaders in the community so this is not the issue. They see the leaders; she knows what many of them are doing to make a difference. What she believes is that there was good intention with the appointments of IAC executive leadership because basically the vice chair was going to take the chair place, which is not uncommon when a group is transformed. She stated that it is a model, a model to have service providers start it over and then turn it over to the community. Again, she stated she believes there was good intention and she believes things can be restructured; however it will take City Council ordinance and council resolution. In the original resolution that council passed, it did not say the leadership team had to be foreign born. She is not saying that the statement referred should be changed now but she also wanted to comment on something that it is coming from her heart and it is that she is very upset to see the vitriolic hatred that has been put out in emails and blogs; everyone needs to be working together and she was very hurt because the IAC is something good for the City and if that is going to be the case she would not want the IAC. She stated again that she doesn't believe there was a hidden agenda on the way it transpired.

Mrs. Khamala commented that even if it was not intentional the changes could start right away. Council member Abuzuaiter said she understands that and but the executive leadership have not even had their first meeting and invites everyone to participate on that meeting.

Mrs. Addy Jeffrey wanted to clarify that they were there voicing concerns in a very constructive way.



On another note, council member Abuzuaiter thanked Chair Williams to bring the concerns about ISIS because people are becoming “islamaphobic” and it needs to be addressed by the HRC and added they are all in this together respectfully. She appreciates everyone being present at the meeting and believes everyone has been dignified and able to make their points very clear.

Council member Hightower wanted ask for clarification to the visitors if they are trying to put a WGI group in the leadership but that is not the case so they just to have immigrants so if the actual leadership structure is four if it could it be added to six or more.

Chair Williams answered that he has been in the HRC since December 2008 and with the committees under the HRC umbrella there is no documentation on the explanation of transparency of the selections of leaders and also how to vet members, it is a piece that is missing. With all the varied opinions expressed earlier he is hoping that the members of the community could give the HRC a chance to work amongst Commissioners and with the City Council because the HRC is an extension and advisory group to the City Council. The HRC can put forth recommendations but it is up to the City Council who approves and authorizes. He understands everyone’s passions but encourages everyone to give the commissioners a chance because he knows that the city is a resettlement city so if COG is going to be recognized as that, there is an opportunity and obligation for leadership from people who are not born here in the United States and he wanted to thank everyone for being there.

Mrs. Khamala asked the estimated time to hear back about this. Chair Williams stated that the commissioners have to get together first and then based on advisory from City staff it can be put on the agenda if needed. It is not an overnight process and he is hoping to have something in November maybe in a draft form. He encourages everyone to be patient because they want to work together.

Mrs. Idassi wanted to make clear that it is not WGI group but it is a concern from the community because they are coming to their leaders who work with them and asks the HRC to keep this in mind.

Chair Williams stated they understand it and the HRC will work diligently.

Mrs. Kathy Hinshaw stated that communications has been an issue and therefore there is a lack of clarity. They are present in the meeting because they are partners and they are raising their voices because they have concerns and asks to keep the communication and they are willing to help and advice.

Commissioner Engle commented that they all have acquitted themselves with respect to the HRC, COG staff and the City council and he knows they are very proud of the community they represent. He wants to let them know that the HRC is listening and will give this the intention that it needs to have.



Commissioner King asked for a copy of the report and staff will provide the link to it.

On motion made by Commissioner Engle and seconded made by Commissioner Grandon, the meeting was adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

ACKNOWLEDGE ABSENCES

Excused Absences were acknowledged.

Chairperson
Greensboro Human Relations Commission

Approved: _____
Date