



Meeting Minutes

January 5, 2017

The Human Relations Commission (HRC) convened for its regular monthly meeting at 6:00 p.m. on the above date in the Board Room at the YWCA of Greensboro. **Chair Zac Engle** presided over the meeting.

Commissioners Present: Sevier, Arbuckle, Kennedy, Perry-Garnette, Engle, King, Burkart, Cobbler, Hawkins, Issifou, Wils, Murphy

Commissioners Absent: Phillips, Wesley Lamin

Human Relations Department Staff: Love Crossling, Jodie Stanley

Legal Department Staff: Rosetta Davidson

Council Liaison: Marikay Abuzuaiter

Visitors: Barbara Harris (Assistant City Manager)

I. Call to Order

Chair Engle called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

II. Moment of Silent Meditation

Chair Engle called for a moment of silent meditation.

III. Chair Report

Commissioner Engle welcomed new Commissioner David Sevier and invited him to introduce himself.

A Retired Naval officer, Sevier praised his experience at Greensboro's City Academy for what he learned and for the introduction to the Commission. He explained that he had former experience with Mercy Ships and in DC working with a nationwide think tank working on health policy. He was thankful to have moved to Greensboro, what he considered a progressive city, adding that he looked forward to working with the Human Relations Commission.

Engle also welcomed Barbara Harris, the newly hired Assistant City Manager responsible for Human Relations, among other departments. She thanked all and said she was happy to be in attendance.

Engle shared his report, encouraging commissioners by saying that there was much work to do in 2017 and he would like to see everyone jump in. Engle advised that there had been recent discussion around sending Council a letter, but after much thought, he had decided against it. In lieu of a letter, he stated his intention of connecting personally with each council member in the coming year, adding that communication between the commission and council was critical and something to be fostered.

Commissioner Arbuckle asked what content specifically was to be included in the letter. Engle advised that it had to do with comments made at the closed session held by Council.

Commissioner Wils stated that he was still confused by the entire situation, adding that it was his impression that it was well within the purview of the HRC to advise council on matters of interest to the public. It was not outside their role to relay the message to Council and ask that they release the information related to the Yourse/Cole case. It was meant to be a stand and a statement, and Wils' perception was that the HRC was being told they did wrong. Wils asked if the HRC had done something wrong. Engle said that no, it was within the purview of the HRC to represent the people of the community per the Department of Justice's guidelines. Engle agreed that what the HRC had decided was within their purview. However, there were some specific requests they included in their resolution that could not be played out the way they were requested, including the request to allow the PCRB to review the information from the Yourse/Cole case. Engle added that he had attended the PCRB monthly meeting the night before and they had discussed reviewing and discussing the goals and vision of the PCRB, and possible advocating for changes to their scope.

Engle opened up the floor to others who wanted to share their perspective. Commissioner Issifou stated that in his opinion, there was a perception that the community believed the PCRB could do something that was not actually within their power to do. He stated that perhaps the PCRB was oversold, and now people were disappointed because what they expected was not happening. It was important to remember that no one would benefit from tension, but that peace and tranquility was beneficial to all.

Wils stated his intention was not to be contentious, that he wanted a good working relationship with Council. He clarified that this was not the first time he had heard Mayor Vaughan make a negative comment about the decisions of the HRC. Wils pointed out that raising difficult decisions was part of the role of the HRC, and shared his desire that Engle's approach in reaching out personally to council was fruitful and effective.

Engle encouraged all commissioners to reach out to Council personally, reminding them that they were appointed and bore a responsibility to maintain a working relationship with their council member. Love Crossling asked Engle to consider whether or not to maintain the quarterly council/commission luncheons, which were designed to encourage open dialogue with council. Discussion was held around the fact that the only council members that attended were the council members that spoke regularly to the Commission anyway, and that the point was to connect with council members that did not already have a working relationship with the commission.

Engle shared his perspective that quarterly was too often, and that luncheons should not take place in months where people took vacations. Commissioner Hawkins suggested that council members could perhaps be allowed to sign up for a quarterly luncheon up to a year in advance, thus allowing them to work it into their schedule. Commissioner Cobbler stated his opinion that the luncheons should continue, that he attended the last one and found it fruitful. He acknowledged that all were busy and could not always attend. Because he formerly served with Council Member Abuzuaiter on the HRC, he asked her to share her perspective on why other council members were not engaging with the HRC.

Council Member Abuzuaiter shared that because Council was not present to hear the concerns shared by the community, they often could not develop a full picture of what had happened. Some resolutions that came out of these meetings took some council members off guard, to the point of feeling blindsided. That is why she personally always preferred the personal approach. Abuzuaiter also shared that sometimes Council was contacted at the last minute and had scheduling issues that prevented them from attending. Abuzuaiter suggested that perhaps she could have gone to each council member personally to invite them to the council/commission luncheons and if they could not attend, inquire as to the reason. She added that while the commissioners felt there was disrespect, it was her opinion that council did not feel disregard or disrespect towards the HRC. Abuzuaiter used the example of the landfill to share that when she was on the HRC, they were told not to discuss it. They did, but it caused tension with Council at that time.

Commissioner Kennedy commented that so much of the tension around this particular issue was because it had something to do with the Police Department. In her perspective, the HRC hit a tender spot when they approached Council with the resolution because Council was a group that was focused on being very cautious around this issue. Kennedy pointed out that there was also an understandable power dynamic, comparing the situation to entering an employer's office and asking how they missed something important.

Commissioner Perry-Garnette stated that the commission did not come up with any statements on their own, that they acted on the stories and the many speakers that had come to HRC meetings. Perry-Garnette added that she had an issue with the defensiveness often encountered by the Mayor, suggesting that listening was an important, and missing, component in interactions with City Council. She continued by saying that the relationship should not be adversarial, that the HRC was in a good position to support and help Council by handling community issues that came their way. The problems were at a boiling point, and the HRC was in a perfect position to allow people to vent and pose their issues to a body that was connected to the City. In the Vo case, she knew of some people that were ready to take to the streets but chose not to because they were able to share their concerns with the HRC. They didn't because they felt heard, they felt that someone cared about their problems. Perry-Garnette shared that in her opinion, no one around the table felt adversarial towards council. Engle agreed that yes, the HRC's role was to lobby on behalf of the community, but perhaps steps could be taken to be more tactful about the messaging.

Commissioner King thanked Abuzuaiter for offering to go to Council members to invite and discuss concerns and solicit support for the HRC, but added that the role was the Mayor's to play.

Wils commented that local activists had been blaring the closed session tape since they obtained it. Because of that, he was concerned that the relationship between Council and the HRC was now out in the open. Wils also pointed out that when community concerns were shared, the HRC could not always table an issue for a month until they met again, that sometimes issues were time sensitive and needed to be addressed in a timely manner. Kennedy added that the Mayor was well aware of tensions that existed in the community around police-community issues. Wils finished by stating concern about the HRC being too cautious about a statement or taking a stand for fear of what Council would think.

Engle encouraged all to consider that they all had a charge. As commissioners, they were tasked with social justice and social equity, and that this would sometimes come into conflict with governing bodies. He was fine with that, but asked all to consider that their approach mattered, as did the responsibility to maintain a working relationship with Council.

Crossling reminded commissioners in their role as liaisons to council, which was a bidirectional relationship, communication was critical. The benefit of building a relationship was that the HRC could provide an answer to the community when concerns were brought forward.

Perry-Garnette agreed that the communication should happen both ways, stressing that perhaps concerned council members could have come to the HRC meetings or approached their appointees with either information or concerns. Engle asked if commissioners were open to approaching 2017 with a relational approach to the issues.

Perry Garnette suggested that they should specifically invite Mayor Vaughan to meetings. Discussion was held around the topic. Perry-Garnette stressed the potential benefit if the public could witness the HRC's ability to advocate and work with Council. Hawkins and Arbuckle stressed the importance of staying transparent, civil but open about intentions, not adversarial but clear.

Crossling clarified a point of importance: in inviting the Mayor to the HRC meeting, which was a public meeting, the meeting had the potential to become adversarial. She suggested that quarterly luncheons may be a better, closed venue to hold the discussion. Commissioner Burkart suggested that perhaps they keep the quarterly luncheons as they were, but to extend a separate invitation to the Mayor and the council liaison for another event. All agreed that it would be better to schedule a meeting sooner rather than later. Engle asked staff to follow up with that invitation and to schedule something by March.

Crossling confirmed her understanding that this invitation was specific to the HRC, the council liaison and the Mayor (not to include other commissions or bodies). All were in agreement, and Crossling continued by clarifying that it would be scheduled for February at the earliest, March at the latest. For the sake of the minutes, all expressed general consensus by raising their hands if they were in agreement about the decision to extend an invitation to the Mayor.

Engle reminded all to be mindful of the attendance policy, and to let Jodie Stanley know if they were planning a program.

Engle finished by thanking Arbuckle for opening her home to the commissioners for the holiday party.

Committee Reports

Education

Commissioner Arbuckle shared that they were looking at two issues: the impact of the election results on children (commenting that this reflected on the decision the HRC had made on DACA) and she shared an event that was happening in their district, promising to pass along information as it was made available. Wils thanked Arbuckle for sharing the report.

Police Community Review Board

Commissioner Cobbler shared that they had a meeting the previous night, six members attended and while they had a case to review, the video was not ready to be viewed yet. The case would be discussed at the February meeting. The PCRB did discuss their concern and desire to broaden their scope, and Cobbler emphasized their commitment to pursuing the changes. Engle shared his appreciation for their work and for the last meeting, and also for their efforts to document the meeting so as to keep a record of their progress and work.

Employment Committee

Commissioner Burkart reported her excitement about the Hidden Side of Housing Series session three on January 26, which would be hosted by the Barnabas Network. She added that the CSW was partnering with her committee and the AAUW on a series focused on equity for women in business. The first partnership event for HRC and CSW would be at the end of April. She was aware that many conversations were being held around the issues of re-entry and ex-offenders and expressed a desire to know what was happening. She invited feedback from all who knew about or were working on re-entry issues.

Human Services Committee

Commissioner King shared that the MLK Breakfast was well under way, that over 600 tickets had sold. She added that it was the goal of the Human Services Committee to coordinate a mental health fair. She asked Commissioner Sevier to partner with her on an event for veterans.

Commissioners Hawkins shared that according to NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), there were several groups in Winston that may be interested in partnering with them on a project.

Montgomery/Wells Housing Committee

Commissioner Issifou shared that he had had a conversation earlier that day with Jodie Stanley about the housing session coming up on January 26 and invited all to be a part of that program.

Committee for Social Equity

Commissioner Hawkins announced that the Committee for Social Equity's future meetings would be held the third Tuesday of each month. Hawkins discussed the possibility of partnering with the IAC on an initiative that would involve schools, targeting issues and bullying in the post-election climate. Commissioner Arbuckle asked to be informed of the events when they happened. Hawkins advised that it was still in formation stages, and Engle encouraged Hawkins to follow up with Arbuckle and Wils, as they would be natural and beneficial partners.

International Advisory Committee

Chair Engle advised all to review the IAC report for details, bringing commissioner's attention to their upcoming election on March 12.

Staff Report

Love Crossling shared details from the printed report, sharing that from a staff perspective, they were ready to support the PCRB in their desire to explore the purview of the PCRB. She encouraged commissioners to inform staff if they had an idea or program to develop, that it was the role of staff to ensure that their programs and efforts were effective and productive.

Crossling announced that the next planned date for the retreat was March 22, but staff planned to send a doodle out to determine availability and the best time for their schedules.

Engle asked that in the future, minutes be made available to him within 7-10 days after each meeting.

Additional Comments

Commissioner Perry-Garnette inquired if there was any more information about the Monday meeting focused on policing to be held at the Special Events Center at 6 pm, January 9. Crossling responded that it was an effort created in response to the recent homicides. Perry-Garnette commented on the importance of trust. If people didn't trust the police, they wouldn't talk, and they wouldn't contribute to meetings and efforts like these.

VI. Review of Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Hawkins requested a revision, stating that the word "meeting" should be inserted in the committee for social equity.

Commissioner King also requested a revision to her comment about not being available for the next meeting. She was referring to a trip she was taking later in the year.

Motion to Approve December Meeting Minutes as Amended

Moved by: Commissioner Cobbler
Seconded by: Commissioner Burkart
The motion was passed unanimously.

IX. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn.

Moved by: Commissioner King
Seconded by: Commissioner Hawkins
The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:21 pm.

Minutes Approved by:

Signed: _____

Chairperson

Greensboro Human Relations Commission

_____/_____/_____

Date