



City of Salisbury
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
January 24, 2019

Committee Members Present

John Wright, Chair
Billy Earl Amos
Nance Held (arrived at 5:21pm)
Mark Decker
Chalarra Sessoms

Committee Members Absent

N/A

In Attendance

Laura Baasland, City of Salisbury Mayor's Office Administrative Associate
Amber Green (arrived at 5:34 pm)

The Human Rights Advisory Committee (HRAC) met at 5:00p.m. in conference room 306 of the Government Office Building

Call to Order

The HRAC meeting was called to order at 5:13pm by Mr. Wright.

Welcome and Introductions

There were no new persons at the HRAC meeting, so introductions were skipped and the welcome was brief.

Minutes

On a motion by Mr. Amos and seconded by Mr. Decker, the HRAC minutes from the January 10th 2019 meeting were approved by a unanimous vote in favor.

Membership and Meeting Schedule

The Committee discussed current membership and determined that the five current members are all able and willing to serve the HRAC in its fullest capacity. The meeting schedule and frequency was also reviewed, and the Committee determined that it is best to continue meeting on the second Thursday of every month at 6pm. Although only required by the HRAC bylaws to meet six times per year, Mr. Decker suggested that it would be best for the HRAC to meet at least once per month, and the rest of the Committee agreed.

Recruiting HRAC Members and Committee Vacancies

Mr. Wright recounted that he has been in contact with Farah Yaya, a leader in the local Muslim community, and has asked her if she knows anyone who would be interested in serving the HRAC. Noting that the HRAC is required to appoint a high school student to the Committee, Mr. Wright also suggested to Ms. Yaya that she recommend some high school students from her community. Mr. Decker asked who made the HRAC's membership rules and the Committee clarified that membership rules are spelled out in the HRAC's bylaws and were determined at the time of the Committee's establishment. Limitations of high school students' potential membership were discussed, such as transportation barriers and the graduating

seniors that move away to attend college. Mr. Decker expressed that he thinks it would be beneficial to HRAC to have a current high school student as a member at all times, and therefore suggested that high school students only serve the HRAC in an official capacity for as long as they remain a high school student, at which time another high school student be appointed to the Committee. Mrs. Held suggested that the Committee recruit high school students by contacting local high schools, and Mr. Wright mentioned that he knows a woman by the name of Laura Bradford who may be a useful resource to reach high school students.

Mrs. Sessoms suggested the HRAC develop and adhere to a selection criteria for potential new members. The Committee discussed the possibility of having interested persons attend HRAC meetings to gain an understanding of what the Committee does and how it operates, and then asking the candidates a few short questions afterward to determine their capacity to make a commitment to the HRAC.

Mrs. Baasland read a short piece that had been written to advertise HRAC vacancies and was meant to be published on the City's website and social media pages. Members provided feedback to help finalize the piece.

Ms. Green suggested that HRAC recruit young members through internal mechanisms at first rather than reaching out to local high schools. She mentioned the Salisbury Youth Council, and said that would be a good starting place to pool potential members from. Additionally, Ms. Green suggested reaching out to members of the Salisbury Summer Work Force program. Ms. Green further suggested Junior Achievement (JA) of the Eastern Shore as a potential source for new members. It was decided that Mrs. Baasland would work with the City to get contact information from members of the Salisbury Youth Council and the Salisbury Summer Work Force, Ms. Green would reach out to JA, and Mrs. Held would contact to the local Boy Scouts.

Committee Purpose and Identity

Ms. Green suggested that the HRAC cannot serve in an advisory capacity without knowing what is going on in the community, and by extension, what to issues to advise on, and therefore the HRAC must involve the community in discussions. Both Ms. Green and Mrs. Held felt as though it would be prudent to allocate a portion of the meeting as an open forum where members of the public are welcomed to contribute. HRAC members discussed putting an open forum on the agenda at the beginning of every meeting, and limiting it to a half of an hour of discussion time.

Mrs. Sessoms expressed that the lack of order and continuous public discussion at the previous meeting was overwhelming, and the Committee echoed her sentiments. Mr. Decker clarified the take-away from the last HRAC meeting, and the Committee reiterated the importance of not allowing the public to run and consume the entire meeting. Mrs. Green clarified that the request from the public persons present at the previous meeting was that the City support the establishment of a marker commemorating the local victims of lynching. Mr. Decker asked if it was the role of the HRAC to make a recommendation to the Mayor about the memorial marker project, and the Committee established that they should, but that they needed to discuss it further at a later meeting.

There was discussion amongst Ms. Decker and Ms. Green about how active in the community the HRAC should be, and conversation about whether the community should come to HRAC or HRAC should go out into the community ensued. It was determined that perhaps the best strategy was a combination of the two approaches. Mrs. Sessoms expressed concern about the HRAC should establish trust in the community, and mentioned that if the HRAC is given information and does not follow through with it, that discourages that community from wanting to work with HRAC. Mrs. Sessoms used the LGBTQ+ survey that was conducted last

year on behalf of the HRAC as an example, and asked what came of that. Mr. Amos announced that he would follow up with the group that conducted the survey and request a copy of the report be sent out again so that the HRAC could follow up. Ms. Green reiterated the Committee's need for accountability and follow through. Both Ms. Green and Mrs. Sessoms suggested that the HRAC develop a follow-up system to ensure that the Committee is conducted with the utmost professionalism. Mr. Decker suggested that HRAC members spend time going out into the community and attending other group's meeting to get the HRAC name out there and gain an understanding of the issues the Salisbury community is facing.

Mrs. Held expressed that she would like to HRAC to address homelessness and human trafficking in the Salisbury community, and she suggested several contacts that the HRAC may be able to work with on these issues.

In the interest of project management, Ms. Green suggested that the Committee focus on specific issues on a monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis. Mrs. Held expressed that the HRAC needs a roadmap to follow. Mr. Wright asked if the HRAC will be more proactive, and Mr. Decker responded "We have to be." Mr. Wright posed that the HRAC serves as both an advocate and a middle-man for the community. Mr. Decker asserted that having a project helps the Committee stay focused and maintain momentum. Mrs. Sessoms expressed that she is aware the Committee can only do so much in the sense that their role is simply to advise the Mayor, but she conveyed that the Committee would like to know the outcome of their recommendations and, ultimately, what the Mayor has decided to do based on their advice, so that they can then report back to the persons and organizations for whom they are advocating.

Committee Officers

On a motion by Mrs. Held and seconded by Mr. Decker, Mr. Amos was elected as HRAC Secretary by a unanimous vote in favor.

The Committee decided to wait to elect a Vice Chair until new members had been appointed, and discussed that Officers should have a term limit of one year. On a motion by Mrs. Sessoms and seconded by Mrs. Held, the HRAC established term limits of one year for all Committee officers by unanimous vote in favor.

Requested Additions to the Agenda

On behalf of Mr. Amos, Mr. Wright requested that the Committee be allowed to discuss three new items that were not on the published agenda: 1) Advise the Mayor to make a public comment of condemnation in regard to Lil' Plantation; 2) Advise the Mayor to support the Maryland General Assembly's fight for a statewide fifteen dollar per hour minimum wage; and 3) Advise the Mayor to call for an independent third party investigation into the death of Anton Black. The Committee briefly discussed all three items, and agreed to add them to the next meeting's agenda, where they would be deliberated in full after all Committee members had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with each issue.

Next Meeting

The Committee agreed that the next HRAC meeting would be a full one, and the agenda should include: 1) open public forum; 2) the memorial marker project; 3) the LGBTQ+ survey results; 4) a report on youth recruiting efforts, 5) Lil' Plantation; 6) the Maryland General Assembly's attempts to institute a statewide fifteen dollar per hour minimum wage; 7) the death of Anton Black.

The HRAC's next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 21st, 2019 at 6pm in conference room 306 of the Government Office Building.

On a motion by Mr. Decker and seconded by Mr. Amos, and approved by unanimous vote in favor, the HRAC meeting was adjourned at 6:39pm.

Minutes Recorded By:



Laura Baasland, Mayor's Office Administrative Associate



Date Approved