



**City of Salisbury**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**June 6, 2019**

**Committee Members Present**

Reverend John Wright, *Chair*  
Mark Decker  
Chalarra Sessoms  
Amber Green  
Billy Earl Amos  
Nance Held

**Committee Members Absent**

N/A

**In Attendance**

Laura Baasland, *Mayor's Office Administrative Assistant*  
Briana Murphy  
Jerad Halcott

**The Human Rights Advisory Committee (HRAC) met at 6:00p.m. in Conference Room #306 of the GOB**

**Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:05pm by Mr. Wright.

**Last Meeting Minutes**

The meeting minutes from May were acknowledged. A motion to approve the last meeting minutes as written was brought forth by Mrs. Sessoms and seconded by Mr. Amos. The motion carried by a unanimous vote in favor.

**Open Public Forum**

Mr. Halcott brought up concerns about the opioid crisis and drug use in general. He mentioned that individuals are switching from opioids to methamphetamines, particularly locally. Mr. Halcott is a part of a clean needle exchange program that includes 47 persons on the Eastern Shore, and he is working to treat addiction as a health concern rather than a crime. This is a grass roots effort intended to reduce harm. Rev Wright asked what the Committee might be able to do to address this issue. Mr. Decker wondered whether the City had a dedicated staff person to deal with addiction issues, and Ms. Held and Mrs. Sessoms expressed that that would fall under the purview of the Health Department. Ms. Green asked Mr. Halcott what he thought the solution was, and he doesn't have one, but he is happy to be a part of the solution and work towards affecting positive change. Mr. Halcott expressed that while the opioid crisis is severe, it is not the only crisis, and other drug use concerns are being overlooked. Ms. Green drew comparisons to the crack epidemic of the 1980's and society's lack of concern for the poor communities of color while they were being affected until it started to infiltrate more privileged communities. Mr. Decker mused that the Committee could discuss making a possible recommendation to the Mayor.

Mrs. Sessoms stated that the annual Overdose Awareness event is on Friday, August 9, at City Park. Ms. Murphy expressed concerns that there is not enough awareness of this event.

Ms. Green relayed that she had a meeting with a representative of PFLAG. Her suggestion is that the City of Salisbury release a social report card that would grade the City on various human rights issues. This would be achieved by utilizing various existing partnerships to collect data and then use that data to issue a report card that will then hold the City accountable. Ms. Green expressed that the City has not been able to get a clear assessment of these type of issues. Her suggestion is that we use the report card and the ratings to provide transparency and ownership of these issues. Ms. Murphy asserted that the report should include issues such as the lack of basic human needs being met in the City, such as affordable housing. Ms. Green also mentioned issues of hunger and mental health. Ms. Green stated that Salisbury University's BEACON has the funding, staff, and capability to carry out a study such as this. Ms. Held expressed concerns over the potential cost of such a study.

Mr. Amos clarified that Mr. Halcott is suggesting that this drug use epidemic needs to be moved from the realm of law enforcement to public health. Ms. Green suggested that a task force get established that would be Chaired by a member of HRAC and include members from all throughout the community. Mr. Halcott works for Progressive Maryland, an organization that collects a substantial amount of data, and may be able to be useful to the HRAC.

Mr. Decker expressed that costs spent on BEACON to have such a study performed would be money well spent by the City of Salisbury. Ms. Green explained that her idea of the social report card was derived from a project she worked on during her time as an AmeriCorps Member with the City called On The Table, which was a real-time community assessment that would create a vast database. Ms. Green motioned that the HRAC create a task force to address these issues and discuss it at the next meeting, the motioned was seconded by Mrs. Held and passed by unanimous vote in favor.

#### **Current Events and Local Issues**

Ms. Green mentioned that the Salisbury Festival is this weekend, and the Juneteenth Festival is next week. Wicomico County is the target audience for the Juneteenth event, but festival organizers are reaching further out as well. The festival is being put on and funded by the Chipman Cultural Foundation, who will soon start hosting Third Friday events in an effort to increase their visibility. The Chipman Cultural Center is the home to the EJI soil collection jars. There was brief discussion among the Committee about the history of Juneteenth.

Ms. Green also discussed that representatives of the Haitian community and NAACP are working on the 2020 census committee.

#### **Old Business**

Ms. Held suggested that we schedule Chief Duncan to visit our Committee in September to address training that is given to SPD Officers. Ms. Green expressed that she is less concerned about the SPD's interaction with the Salisbury community than she is with the interaction of police officers in schools, which is the Wicomico County Sheriff's Department. She discussed that sometimes a juvenile's first interaction with the police is with a school resource officer. Ms. Green said that we need to decide where we want to focus our concerns: school policing or community policing. Mr. Decker reminded the Committee that public schools fall under the jurisdiction of the County Sheriff, not the City police. Ms. Green acknowledged this fact and discussed a partnership between the County Sheriff and the SPD. Rev Wright asked if addressing these concerns is not something Chief Duncan should be doing, and Ms. Green expressed that this is something Chief Duncan is working on. She suggested a collaboration between the Wicomico County Board of Education, the Wicomico County Sheriff, the Salisbury

Police Department, the local Maryland State Trooper Barrack, and the City's Youth Development Advisory Committee,

The Committee would like to have Kevin Lindsay come to a meeting to discuss having a community conversation about the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project. Ms. Green suggested that he come to a task force meeting with herself and Mr. Yamakawa. Rev Wright requested that a report from the task force be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

Rev Wright asked who from the Committee would represent that HRAC at the next Youth Development Advisory Committee since he will be unable to make it. Ms. Green will be there, and Mrs. Sessoms may be able to make it.

### **Update from Mayor Day**

Mrs. Baasland informed the Committee that Mayor Day will be signing on to an amicus brief to the United States Supreme Court in support of employment nondiscrimination protections for the LGBTQ community. This news was met with enthusiasm by the Committee.

### **Recap of Pride Flag Raising**

All Committee members expressed joy and gratitude for the Pride Flag Raising event on Saturday, June 1. Ms. Held expressed some slight dissatisfaction with the news coverage. All members were very pleased with the outcome of the event and the way that it played out. Ms. Green asked about the African American representation at the event, and Mrs. Sessoms said there were few persons of color there, but Mr. Decker did remind the group that Mr. Wright was the featured speaker. Ms. Green discussed that homophobia remains a serious problem in the black community, and there is a significant amount of work to be done there. Ms. Murphy expressed concern for a lack of community involvement. Mr. Halcott expressed that in Salisbury, black LGBTQ persons are double oppressed.

Rev Wright asked the Committee if they had any estimation as to how many people were in attendance. He brought 70 small Pride flags to the event, and ran out of them, so he estimates that there was around 100-150 people there.

The Committee discussed the Mayor's enthusiasm in possibly moving the Rainbow Fun Run to Downtown Salisbury and said that would require further discussion.

### **Possible Tabling at the Salisbury Festival**

The Committee had discussed that many of them were not aware of the Salisbury Festival at all, and the City does not advertise events well. The Committee suggested that the City utilize media more effectively. Due to time constraints, the HRAC won't be tabling at the Salisbury Festival.

### **Fight for \$15 Bill in the City**

Ms. Green discussed examples of Universal Basic Income rather than minimum wage bills. She researched what other municipalities are working on, and found that UBI's are an option. Ms. Murphy suggested that the HRAC work on the original form of the Fight for \$15 bill. Mr. Halcott suggested that the City of Salisbury do community outreach to get residents to support the bill. The Committee members agreed that they would like to review the original legislation and discuss whether or not suggesting that the Mayor pass a local Fight for \$15 is something they would like to do.

Ms. Murphy and the Committee discussed the issue of affordable housing in Salisbury and how to address this. Ms. Murphy's suggestion was that the City introduce some form of rent control legislation rather than relying on the market-based system of supply and demand.

The Committee agrees that construction and development throughout the City is a good thing, but affordable housing remains an issue. Ms. Green expressed that while homeownership prices are better than renting, many youths are looking for rentals, and those prices continue to be out of reach.

Rev Wright asked that the committee review the original form of the legislation for the Fight for \$15 and discuss possible alternatives to it at the next meeting.

**Next Meeting**

The next HRAC meeting was set for Thursday, July 18, at 6p.m. in conference room 306 of the Government Office Building.

**Adjournment**

On a motion by Mr. Decker, seconded by Ms. Held, and carried unanimously, the HRAC meeting was adjourned at 7:53pm.

Minutes Taken By:



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Laura Baasland, Mayor's Office Administrative Assistant