



City of Salisbury
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
January 9, 2020

Committee Members Present

Reverend John Wright, *Chair*
Mark Decker
Amber Green
Nance Held
Billy Earl Amos
Marcel Jagne-Shaw
D'Shawn Doughty

Committee Members Absent

Chalarra Sessoms

In Attendance

Laura Baasland, *Department of Water Works Program Specialist*
Julie English, *Mayor's Office Administrative Assistant*
Eli Modlin, *Salisbury University Chief of Staff*

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

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:05p.m. by Rev Wright and began with introductions of everyone in attendance.

Last Meeting Minutes

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

Open Public Forum, Current Events & Local Issues

No current events or local issues were discussed at today's meeting.

Discussion with Salisbury University Chief of Staff, Eli Modlin

The Committee addressed Mr. Modlin and turned the floor over to him.

I. Timeline and Description of Racially Charged Events

- a. Mr. Modlin discussed that there were four incidents of graffiti in Fulton Hall that he planned to explain them each in full. The first instance of graffiti was on October 8, 2019 and was sexual in nature. The second incident occurred on October 10, 2019 and was also sexually explicit. October 22, 2019 was the date of the third instance of graffiti that had a largely sexual message, but also included racist language. On November 4, 2019 graffiti was again found, however, it was very different from the first three instances,

particularly the first two. The language was racist and threatening and was taken very seriously by Salisbury University (SU) Police. SU Police, a fully accredited agency, chose to reach out to allied police agencies for assistance. The graffiti was done in Sharpie throughout various walls in Fulton Hall, and at this time the University has no reason to believe that the four incidents of graffiti are not connected. On November 4, 2019 an impromptu meeting was held with students, and approximately 200 students attended. The University's top priority is safety and security, and a close second priority is the students' *sense* of safety and security and belonging. Mr. Modlin emphasized to the students that one person with a Sharpie marker is not representative of the entire institution of Salisbury University. Mr. Modlin feels that this issue is very important to address and take seriously, but the focus of the discussion should not necessarily be centered on this issue alone. Two days after the first impromptu meeting with students, the President of the University had a scheduled Town Hall that had over 1,000 people in attendance.

II. Progress of Investigation

- a. The incident is being taken very seriously by the University administration and Police department and is currently under and ongoing investigation.
- b. Ms. Green asked Mr. Modlin if there would be an opportunity, once the investigation is concluded, to discuss race issues among students. Mr. Modlin responded affirmatively, and said that such a discussion does not necessarily have to wait until the conclusion of the investigation. One big question throughout the investigation is whether or not there will be repercussions for the culprit. The University does not have prosecutor powers. Mr. Modlin discussed an incident in 2016 that occurred on a white board, and because it was erasable, it was legally not considered graffiti or a hate crime. Mr. Modlin wants to be clear that this issue ultimately has to be something that the State's Attorney has to take forward because the University does not have prosecutorial powers. The Salisbury University Police Department is the lead investigatory agency, but when the investigation is concluded, it will be handed over to the State.

III. Steps Being Taken to Prevent Further Incidents of this Nature

- a. In response to this issue, the President has committed to quarterly town hall meetings, Administrators are now holding open office hours, and there is a new anonymous reporting system in place on the President's website that is already being used. The first of the new quarterly town halls is scheduled for Tuesday, January 28, at 6pm in the Wicomico Room of the Guerrieri Student Union and is open to the public.
- b. The President has instituted a new cabinet, that is made up of the: Faculty Senate President, Staff Senate President, Graduate Student President, Student Government Association President, the head of the Adjunct Faculty Caucus, the President's executive staff, the Title IX Coordinator, and the Chief Diversity Officer. Additionally, the University is making a sincere effort to communicate with students on their level, including using a new text messaging alert system, and social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram.
- c. Mr. Decker raised the point that these incidents were a catalyst for discussion and the sense of security and belonging being an important subject. Students have expressed that the University, in some ways, feels like an island of progressive thinkers that is surrounded by a region that is not necessarily as forward thinking or accepting.
- d. Mr. Modlin made the point that a large percentage of the student body at SU is made up of students that are new to the Eastern Shore, many of them are from communities across the bridge such as Prince George's County, Montgomery County, Howard County, Baltimore County, etc. Ms. Held asked Mr. Modlin what SU is doing to work on the relationship between the University and the greater community. Mr. Modlin responded that SU does several things to try and integrate the student body into the greater community, and plans to include the community in the quarterly town halls now in place.
- e. Mr. Doughty and Mr. Modlin discussed recruiting student volunteers to participate in community events as well as University specific events.

- f. Mr. Modlin discussed that he does not feel these incidents ignited any tensions between students, although he did say that he got some limited feedback that some students expressed they did not always feel welcome at SU, but that was a more isolated response and was not the overall takeaway. In fact, Mr. Modlin noted that he and other administrators saw this incident bringing together students from all across the University to support one another.
- g. Mr. Amos asked Mr. Modlin if there was an element of White Supremacist recruitment potentially in this incident, and Mr. Modlin said that University has no reason to believe there is any imminent threat or danger, but that that angle is certainly being investigated.
- h. The President has created a new task force on diversity and inclusion that has a sunset date in March 2020 and has been tasked with very specific work and measurable deliverables. The longer-term work of the task force will be carried on by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee. This task force includes members of the public and greater community.
- i. Ms. Green asked Mr. Modlin if there have been any student groups at Salisbury University, such as the NAACP or the Black Student Union, that have reached out to the University to discuss what they would like to see next. Mr. Modlin responded that there was a coalition of student groups that released a list of demands to the University administration in December 2019. One demand, for example, was that curriculum be changed. Because of the University's system of shared governance, the President cannot dictate a change to courses because the curriculum is owned by the faculty and can only be changed by the faculty through the faculty Senate. Another demand was that the University Police undergo sensitivity training, and they already do, so the University will work on better communication to make that fact known. The University is used to bringing about change through existing structures, but an issue such as this engenders the needs for a broader collaboration.
- j. Rev John Wright asked the Committee if he felt it would be important to the Committee that a member attend the upcoming President's Town Hall. The Committee responded affirmatively, and Rev Wright made a commitment to attend the upcoming town hall on the Committee's behalf.

Maryland Lynching Memorial Project

Ms. Green discussed the response to the recently published press release from the Mayor's Office announcing the establishment of a Maryland Lynching Memorial Task Force. This press release, as well as the memorandum to the Mayor from the Committee that prompted it, were distributed at the meeting to all in attendance and are attached to these minutes. One job as the Human Rights Advisory Committee is to ensure that the task force is representative of the community. Task force applications are being received by Ms. English as well as Julia Glanz, who is reviewing them and will be interviewing applicants. The Committee discussed who would be in charge of selecting the members, and the group discussed that it should most probably be the Committee itself. Ms. Green, who will serve on the task force with James Yamakawa, has asked the Mayor's Office to provide the group with a concrete number of applications received so far, and if the Committee will be provided with the applications. Ms. English informed the Committee that applications are being received by Chris Demone, Rebecca Brown, Julia Glanz, Mayor Day, Julie English, and Donna Haag and that to date, nineteen applications have been received. Ms. Held asked Ms. English to clarify what the Committee's role will be in the selection process of the Task Force. Additionally, Ms. Green asked for a timeline on application review. Ms. Green suggested that the HRAC website should have a link to the task force press release to help publicize the project and the work that the Committee and task force is doing. The Committee also discussed the delicate nature of recruiting members for the task force and getting buy in, and that it may take the Mayor's personal invitation to handle this situation.

Renaming Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day

Rev Wright made the decision to table this agenda item for the next meeting in the interest of time.

Committee Membership

Rev Wright made the decision to table this agenda item for the next meeting in the interest of time.

Discuss Liaison Status

Ms. English explained that at the discretion of Mayor Day and City Administrator Julia Glanz, Mrs. Baasland will continue to serve the Human Rights Advisory Committee in the role of Liaison, and that Ms. English will serve as back-up Liaison. Ms. English is happy to serve the Committee as needed and will be in touch with Mrs. Baasland and agreed to be copied on all future Committee correspondence.

Next Meeting & Adjournment

The next HRAC meeting was set for Thursday, February 13, at 6p.m. in conference room 306 of the Government Office Building. On a motion by Ms. Held, seconded by Mr. Amos, and carried by unanimous vote in favor, the HRAC meeting was adjourned at 7:33p.m.

Minutes Taken By: Laura Baasland, *Department of Water Works Program Specialist*