



City of Salisbury
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
April 16, 2020

Committee Members Present

Reverend John Wright, *Chair*
Mark Decker
Nance Held
Chalarra Sessoms
Billy Earl Amos
Amber Green
D'Shawn Doughty
Ron Pagano

Committee Members Absent

Marcel Jagne-Shaw

In Attendance

Laura Baasland, *Department of Water Works Program Specialist*
Stephen Feliciano

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. Rev Wright also asked that when each person introduced themselves that they also share their biggest adjustment to this COVID-19 situation that we are all in.

Last Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes from February were acknowledged. A motion to approve them as written was brought forth by Ms. Held and seconded by Mr. Amos. The motion carried by a unanimous vote in favor.

Open Public Forum, Current Events & Local Issues

Ms. Green discussed the temporary shelter that the City of Salisbury has established for persons experiencing homelessness, Camp Hope, at the Lake Street Park. Twenty-four tents have been set up and are providing shelter for those in need. Ms. Held asked for more information about the site. Ms. Green also mentioned that she has concerns that this pandemic will create many more homeless youths.

Mr. Pagano said that From Roots to Wings has stopped going out into the community for the most part due to the threat of COVID-19, but they do have supplies to share as needed. Ms. Held discussed who to contact to pick up supplies.

Maryland Lynching Memorial Project: Task Force Update

Ms. Green informed the Committee that the Task Force has gotten off to a great start and has already had two meetings. The group has been familiarizing themselves with each other, and Ms. Green is happy to share that it is a large and eclectic group. Ms. Green and Makayla Moses are the co-chairs of the task force. The task force recently had a conference call with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) and they are continuing their memorial marker program. The earliest that EJI can foresee having a public unveiling ceremony for the Salisbury marker is in the fall, due to the constraints of COVID-19.

The company that manufactures the markers needs about an 8-week lead time from the order being placed to the marker being finished. It is the responsibility of the local task force to create the design and text of the marker. EJI still does the youth essay contest associated with the lynching memorial marker project, and the task force is working on ideas to engage the youth in this effort, such as a possible art project. EJI is willing to fund three individual markers and three individual essay contests for your community. The essays are an 18-20 week project timeline and the school calendar should be taken into consideration when planning them. EJI suggested to the task force that another soil collection with large community engagement might be a good idea to introduce the broader community to this project, and that would have an 8-10 week timeline. EJI mentioned the marker to the unknown victim can be the first to go up in Salisbury in order to gauge the public reaction to the project.

This Saturday, April 18, is the conference of the state-wide Maryland Lynching Memorial Project, which will be held virtually in light of COVID-19. The first meeting of the coalition members was held back in November 2019 and produced a significant amount of feedback. The Maryland Truth and Reconciliation Initiative was present at that meeting.

Rev Wright asked Ms. Green if the original May 2020 timeline for the task force deliverables was still in place, and Ms. Green confirmed both yes and no. A location should have been decided and community engagement should have been started by May, but an unveiling ceremony will take place later in the year or early 2021, due to the constraints of COVID-19. Mr. Pagano shared with the committee that he is very familiar with the project and has been involved to some degree already.

The task force's last meeting was large—over 30 people were in attendance. Rev Wright asked if a meeting that large was unwieldy, but Ms. Green said that has not been an issue thus far. The larger group has divided themselves into smaller groups who are each interested in different aspects of the project such as: language of the marker, community engagement, history and genealogy, etc. The next task force meeting date and time is to be determined, but it will also be held virtually.

Ms. Green gave an overview of the lynching memorial project for the benefit of Mr. Feliciano, a guest in attendance who was unfamiliar with the project. Mr. Pagano asked about resources available from EJI. Ms. Green discussed how the committee and task force have been able to take advantage of the resources that EJI has made available.

Renaming Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day

Mr. Decker sent a draft to the committee of a proposal to Mayor Day that the City of Salisbury henceforth recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day rather than Columbus Day. Columbus was a person shrouded in historical myth who does not deserve recognition or praise, and as the ones who suffered, Indigenous persons should instead be celebrated for the hardship they endured at the hands of Columbus. The suggestion to the Mayor is two-fold—there is the importance of not recognizing the misconstrued history of Columbus, as well as the importance of recognizing the contribution of indigenous peoples to this nation. Sixty percent of modern agricultural crops originated from the indigenous people, including corn and potatoes. Many popular games and forms of recreation, such as lacrosse and canoeing, are also derived from indigenous culture. Indigenous persons and their culture have also influenced geography and place names, as well as language. Additionally, indigenous persons have served the US in times of war and also peace.

Rev Wright complimented Mr. Decker for the draft he wrote, and Ms. Held asked if this would affect the City's holiday. Mr. Decker and Mrs. Baasland clarified that City employees are not given that day as a holiday.

Ms. Green is worried that the gesture will be forgotten. She pondered whether the City can do more to educate the community about indigenous persons and their culture and history, and Mrs. Baasland suggested that the City may be able to launch a social media campaign. Mr. Decker asked if any of the committee members have any contacts with local indigenous community, and Ms. Green mentioned a woman by the name of Cheryl Sidwell. Mr. Pagano suggested that the committee recommends that the City do even more than just change the name of the holiday. Mr. Pagano expressed concerns about pushback and wanting to be able to educate and spread awareness. Ms. Green recommended adding a suggestion to the recommendation for a community engagement component, and Ms. Sessoms agreed that that would be appropriate. The committee decided to vote on a revised version of the draft and what to include in it at the next meeting.

Committee Membership

Mrs. Baasland discussed with the committee the possibility of sprucing up the website, including the membership page. Ms. Green asked Mr. Amos about the future of live-streaming meetings. The current virtual meetings that the committee is having to hold is a good start as far as the potential to live stream. The virtual software can be used to make the meetings even more accessible to the public.

Mr. Doughty asked about vacancies and discussed a Haitian woman who had expressed interest in the community, and he cited an overall underrepresentation of the Haitian community in Salisbury.

Ms. Green stated that she is willing to create an official City HRAC page on social media if the committee would like her to. Mr. Decker mentioned that there is one or was one at some point, but he doesn't know who runs it. Mr. Amos clarified that he started an HRAC page about two years ago but interest had waned. It was decided to ask Julia Glanz for permission to create such a page and use City branding and logos. Rev Wright expressed reservations about such a page and Mr. Doughty asked him to elaborate. Rev Wright is concerned about the committee expressing themselves as a mouthpiece and voice of the City. Ms. Green and Mr. Doughty discussed the committee's role being necessary as representatives of the committee. Rev Wright implored that there is a difference between advising the Mayor and informing the public. Ms. Green discussed that this a potential opportunity to extend community communication. The committee as a group would be in charge of what would be posted to social media and would vote on a plan, schedule, and content, so that no one person would be using the platform as an individual outlet.

Ms. Held asked if other City boards, commissions, and committees have social media pages of their own. And Mrs. Baasland and Ms. Green confirmed that other groups do, and cited the Green Team as an example. Mr. Pagano expressed legal concerns, while Ms. Held liked the idea of keeping it as a "what we are up to" information-style page. Rev John asked the Committee to consider how they would handle strong negative reactions to online content.

Mr. Pagano asked about the possibility of including a form on the HRAC page of the City's website for individuals to be able to submit comments or questions directly to the committee. The rest of the group liked that idea and Mrs. Baasland agreed to set it up.

Mr. Feliciano addressed the committee and expressed excitement about the possibility of joining as an official member, and stated that it would be his honor. He relayed that he is excited about the diversity and discussion of the committee, and that he would like to represent the Hispanic community in Salisbury. Mr. Feliciano explained that he has been in the community for ten years, and is now at a point that he would like to give back and he is very interested in serving the Committee in this capacity. The committee agreed that Mr. Feliciano was a favorable candidate and recommended that his application for appointment be given to the Mayor for consideration and further processing.

Next Meeting & Adjournment

The next HRAC meeting was set for Thursday, May 14th, at 6p.m. and will again be held virtually on a software platform to be determined. On a motion by Mr. Decker, seconded by Mr. Pagano, and carried by unanimous vote in favor, the HRAC meeting was adjourned at 7:35p.m.

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