



City of Salisbury
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
January 14, 2021

Committee Members Present

Stephen Feliciano, *Chair*
Reverend John Wright
Billy Earl Amos
Mark Decker
Ben Pheasant
Ron Pagano
Amber Green
Nance Held
D'Shawn Doughty
Marcel Jagne-Shaw

Committee Members Absent

Tyler Anderson

In Attendance

Laura Baasland

Call to Order

The meeting began with a few moments of silence for each member to center themselves. The meeting was officially called to order at 6:10pm by Mr. Feliciano, introductions were unnecessary and were skipped.

Goals & Intentions

Mr. Feliciano set the tone for the meeting by describing qualities that he sees in all of the members of the group. He listed the words: selfless, compassionate, committed, steadfast but flexible, bold but humble, dreamers but present. He stated that his intention for the group is to capitalize on all their strengths and assist each other with their challenges so they can deliver what the community needs and deliver an impact based on what they do. He believes that the group can do that by sharing their experiences and by teaching each other and others, and that every member of the group has something to offer.

Member Accolades

Mr. Feliciano took time to thank Mark Decker and Chalarra Sessoms for their service to the committee. While Mrs. Sessoms was not present, Mr. Decker was, and Mr. Feliciano gave each member the opportunity to thank each of them and describe them in one word. All the members present expressed their appreciation for both Mr. Decker and Mrs. Sessoms.

Mindful Housekeeping

Mr. Feliciano asked the group to please be mindful of the following three things: punctuality, attendance, and group discussion times. He had some suggestions to help, including creating a group calendar to add when members will be unavailable to attend meetings. Mr. Feliciano reviewed the committee bylaws against the previous group's minutes to get a clear picture of the committee's past attendance. He requested that people who will not be able to attend please let the group know that they won't be there. The goal is that the meeting does not get interrupted by people coming in late. He would like to see that topics are kept within the timeframes as spelled out in the agenda to try and keep the discussion moving along smoothly.

Review of Minutes

Ms. Held brought to attention a typo in the November meeting minutes that Mrs. Baasland promptly corrected: “lynching” was spelled “lunching.” A motion to accept the minutes from the November meeting with Ms. Held’s correction was put forth by Rev. Wright and seconded by Mr. Decker; the motion carried by unanimous vote in favor.

Goals and Plans for 2021

Mr. Feliciano would like to have a City Council member commit to this group, as spelled out in the bylaws, and attend at least two meetings annually, and his personal recommendation was to invite Ms. Gregory to act as Liaison. The group reviewed the bylaws to determine what is required as far as City Council involvement, and several members concurred that Mrs. Baasland should approach the Council President and ask him to assign a Council Member to serve the committee. All group members were surprised to realize that the bylaws require City Council involvement. A motion to have Mrs. Baasland contact City Council President Jack on behalf of the committee and ask a member to be Councilor to be assigned liaison to the committee was put forth by Ms. Held and seconded by Rev. Wright.

Human Rights Award

The group discussed the idea of presenting a Salisbury citizen with a Human Rights Award, and there was lively debate as to whether or not this is something within the group’s purview. It was ultimately determined by reading through the bylaws that this is something that falls within the group’s scope, and the group is interested in pursuing this further. Some members cited the Sustainability Advisory Committee (Green Team) awarding businesses with Green Business Certifications as an example of the type of outreach, presence, and influence an advisory committee such as this one can have on the community.

Youth Creative Writing Contest

Mr. Feliciano pitched an idea to have the Human Rights Advisory Committee sponsor a youth creative writing contest, and Ms. Green expressed full support with the suggestion that the group focus on the high school age group rather than elementary and middle school aged children. Mr. Pagano had budgetary concerns and asked how we might fund these types of things. There was discussion about how the Green Funds their community programming as perhaps being an example on how the HRAC may proceed.

Individual Member Assignments

Mr. Feliciano suggested that in order to keep the committee focused and efficient, each member could specialize in a human rights subtopic that is particular interest to them and take leadership on that topic. For example, May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and mental health is a human rights topic that Mr. Feliciano is particularly passionate about. He has invited a local clinician to May’s meeting to talk to HRAC about mental health in our community and how it affects Salisbury. If this model of sub-assignments were to be implemented, each member assigned to that topic would undertake the work of researching that topic and preparing some information to bring to the group, and inviting someone from that field to speak to the group.

Update from the Lunching Memorial Task Force

Ms. Green gave an update on the work the Task Force is doing. The marker is currently projected to be up by the end of May; Ms. Green is pushing for June because of Juneteenth. Notable people have been invited to attend to ceremony, including relatives of lynching victim Matthew Williams. The scholarship essay contest will be announced next month, and the winner will be announced at the marker unveiling.

Mr. Yamakawa sent the draft language for the marker to the committee for review and approval. The draft language is copied here:

Side One - Lynching in Wicomico County - 1450 characters

Between 1898 and 1931, at least three Black men were victims of racial terror lynchings near this courthouse. On May 26, 1898, a mob of over 100 white people lynched Garfield King, a Black teenager who lived near present-day Allen, MD. Garfield was being held in the Salisbury Jail after an alleged altercation with a white man outside of Twigg’s Store. The mob kidnapped Garfield and hanged him from a nearby maple tree before riddling his body with at least 50 bullets. On December 4, 1931, a white mob lynched Matthew “Buddie” Williams, a 23-year-old Black man recovering from gunshot wounds at Peninsula General Hospital following an altercation with his white employer. Without resistance from hospital staff, the mob kidnapped Mr. Williams from his bed and dragged him to the courthouse lawn where he was beaten, stabbed, and hanged. The mob set Mr. Williams on fire and dragged his charred remains through Salisbury’s Black community as a reminder of the lethal racial order. Days later, on the morning of December 6, the body of an unidentified 33-year-old Black man was found beaten to death near a railroad track in Salisbury. Evidence indicates the man was killed by the same mob that lynched Mr. Williams just hours

before. During this era, a strict racial hierarchy prevailed in Wicomico County that enabled white people to lynch and terrorize Black people with impunity. No one was held accountable for the lynchings of these three men.

Side Two - Lynching in America - 1445 characters

After the Civil War, violent resistance to equal rights for African Americans and an ideology of white supremacy led to fatal violence against Black women, men, and children who were frequently falsely accused of violating social norms or crimes. Although Maryland did not join the Confederacy, in 1860 more than 87,000 Black people were enslaved in the state, where slavery remained legal. These enslaved people were not freed by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, which only authorized freedom for enslaved people in the Confederacy. White enslavers in states like Maryland believed they should be rewarded for not joining the South's rebellion, and their resistance to emancipation was strong. Racial violence and lynching emerged post-emancipation as forms of terrorism intended to intimidate Black people and enforce racial hierarchy and segregation. From 1865 to 1876, mass lynchings of Black people were common, and the total number of deaths is unknown. From 1865 to 1950, at least 6,500 Black people were lynched for resisting exploitation, violating social customs, or after mere accusation of crime. Losing loved ones to racial violence inflicted lasting pain upon the Black community, causing millions of families to flee their homes and lands as refugees hoping for greater safety in the North or West. Of the 40 racial terror lynchings documented in Maryland between 1865 and 1950, at least three took place in Wicomico County.

On a motion put forth by Mr. Doughty and seconded by Ms. Green, the committee elected by unanimous vote in favor to accept the draft marker language with few suggestions for edits that include only punctuation, grammar, and spelling corrections.

Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Month Memo

Mrs. Baasland informed the group that the Mayor's Office has accepted the committee's recommendation to proclaim January as Human Trafficking Prevention and Awareness Month in the City of Salisbury.

Market Street Inn A-Frame Incident

Regarding the recent incident involving Market Street Inn displaying an a-frame sign with an offensive joke on it, Ms. Green expressed strong disappointment in PFLAG's response to the incident because they are the only organization who represents LGBTQ youth in the community and they are perceived to have told the community to accept Market Street Inn's apology and move on. Rev. Wright, who sits on the PFLAG board, thanked Ms. Green for her honesty and straightforwardness, and asked Ms. Green how she would have liked to see PFLAG respond. Ms. Green responded by citing a particular problematic comment on social media that was "liked" by the official PFLAG Facebook Page. Ms. Green asked that PFLAG respond rather than react and suggested that businesses could be trained and certified as "LGBTQ friendly businesses." She also would prefer that more young voices are allowed to have room to respond because there are generational differences that occur in instances such as these, and she thinks there was a complete disregard for a multi-generational approach. Mr. Pheasant reminded everyone to be cognizant that there is a distinction between sexual orientation and gender nonconformity, and one group is not necessarily sympathetic to the other despite the two consistently being grouped together. He also stressed that training is a necessary step but not a wholly sufficient one, there needs to be more. Rev. Wright, on behalf of PFLAG, brought to the committee that PFLAG is considering a certification process very similar to what Ms. Green suggested.

The Insurrection

In light of recent national events, the committee took the opportunity to discuss the January 6th insurrection at the United States Capitol. Ms. Held expressed horror and astonishment, Mrs. Baasland expressed safety concerns, and Ms. Green discussed the reluctance of the local community to even address the past history of lynching, the same people who were adamant that this county be a 2A sanctuary, let alone address something as grave as this. Ms. Green and Mr. Feliciano both emphasized the importance of this group being a space where people can come and be safe.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The next HRAC meeting will be held on Thursday the 11th of February, 2021 at 6pm on the virtual platform Google Meets. A move to adjourn the meeting was put forth by Ms. Green, seconded by Rev Wright, and carried by unanimous vote in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 7:58pm.

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