



City of Salisbury
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2021

Committee Members Present

Stephen Feliciano, *Chair*
Amber Green, *Vice Chair*
Ben Pheasant, *Administrator*
D'Shawn Doughty
Reverend John Wright
Tyler Anderson
Marcel Jagne-Shaw

Committee Members Absent

Ron Pagano
Nance Held

In Attendance

Laura Baasland
Councilwoman Angela Blake

Call to Order

The meeting began with a few moments of silence for each member to center themselves, as well as a breathing exercise. The meeting was officially called to order at 6:13pm by Mr. Feliciano. He introduced Councilwoman Angela Blake, and explained that the two other guests that were invited were unable to make it tonight so that agenda item will have to be moved.

Review of Minutes

A motion to accept the minutes from the January meeting with corrections that were discussed via email were put forth by Rev. Wright and seconded by Ms. Green; the motion carried by unanimous vote in favor.

Goals and Plans for 2021 and Current Works

Mr. Feliciano addressed the five committee vacancies and expressed the desire to get them filled as quickly as possible.

HRAC Social Media Presence

HRAC having a social media presence was originally discussed in August 2020, and Mr. Feliciano would like this to be readdressed since he feels it will be necessary going forward. The Mayor's Office provided a guideline for Facebook and Twitter to Mr. Feliciano, who discussed it with Mr. Pheasant, who will be the page administrator. Mr. Doughty inquired as to whether or not the City will provide any back-end support for HRAC's social media pages, and Mr. Pheasant explained that he intends to have a meeting with the Mayor's Office to discuss specific details, and he will address that question. Ms. Green suggested that he reach out to Becca Brown in the Mayor's Office, the City's Media and Events Specialist. Mr. Feliciano stated that the committee will have further discussion going forward about the social media plan.

Human Rights Award

Mr. Feliciano informed Councilwoman Blake of the group's intent to create a Human Rights Award for community members who are doing great work in the field. A transparent nomination and selection process will be developed, as well as guidelines. Ms. Green suggested that the committee develop a way to allow the public to nominate recipients. Mr. Doughty asked for clarification on the frequency of the award, and Mr. Feliciano explained that his idea was that nominations could occur all

throughout the year and awards could be given in December. Awards will be done on an annual basis and given at the end of the year. Rev. Wright suggested that the group collaborate with a City event to give the awards publicity by utilizing an established and well-attended event.

Youth Creative Writing Contest

Ms. Green explained that the committee intends to create a channel for youth to showcase what human rights mean to them, and interact with the committee and the broader community.

City Council Liaison

Councilwoman Angela Blake introduced herself and explained some of the work she does for the City. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and she works at Choices Academy. She focuses on issues such as gender identity and sexual orientation particularly as they apply to Black men. She also discussed that in her work she has seen that bullying is hugely problematic to the youth of our community, and the county and City has a lot of growth to do in that area. Mr. Feliciano discussed the group's desire to be a safe space to facilitate discussion on those issues, and he specifically inquired about the Newtown Community Center and its commitment to have a LGBTQ safe space room. Councilwoman Blake elaborated on the status of that and explained its delays. Rev. Wright confirmed that PFLAG planned to organize that room but has been somewhat sidelined due to COVID slow-downs. Ms. Green suggested that the committee invite the City's Youth Development Specialist to address this topic with the group, and Councilwoman Blake concurred.

Sub-Topic Assignments

Mr. Feliciano explained that in an effort to help the committee members engage with subjects that they have particular interest in, he is proposing sub-topic assignments to each member for them to focus on. For example, May is Mental Health Awareness month, and Mr. Feliciano has a particular passion for that topic, so he has taken the lead on that issue and has invited local clinicians to address the group in May. Ms. Green and Mr. Doughty both expressed support for that idea.

Update from the Lurching Memorial Task Force

Ms. Green updated the committee on the work the task force has been doing, and gave the exciting news that a date has been set for the marker ceremony unveiling—May 22, 2021. The task force has been in contact with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) to finalized all of the details. The task force has also broken up into smaller groups to focus on getting speakers to attend the event. They are considering a hybrid event (meaning both in person and virtual components) and possibly a community remembrance project as well. The task force is working on securing speakers and they have confirmed some major media attendance, as well as attendance of lynching victim relatives. On February 28, 2021, the last day of Black History Month, the task force and EJI are partnering to engage the youth in the EJI-sponsored Racial Justice Essay Contest, which is open to all high school students in the county. The contest will run until May 1, 2021. Submissions will be made directly to EJI and the winners will be selected by them to receive \$5,000 in scholarships awarded by EJI. The winner will also be invited to read essay at the marker unveiling ceremony on May 22, 2021. Ms. Green encouraged everyone to visit the City's webpage dedicated to Black History Month and praised task force Co-Chair Makayla Moses for having been very involved in engaging the community with this information.

Open Public Forum – Celebrating Black History Month

Mr. Feliciano began this discussion by reading two excerpts from a letter written by James Baldwin in 1962. He then opened the floor to the rest of the committee, particularly the Black members.

Ms. Green challenged the committee to consider and think critically about reparations. She shared some articles that she would like the committee to read and consider and then discuss. The articles are listed at the end of these minutes.

Mr. Feliciano said that reparations are not a charity or a gift, they are a debt. This group needs to have this conversation amongst themselves in order to be able to create a forum for the community to discuss this.

Mr. Doughty thanked Mr. Feliciano for providing this forum and acknowledgment of Black History Month. Mr. Doughty is reading Barack Obama's "A Promised Land" and he shared a poem from the first page of the book. Mr. Doughty is the 81st President of the Salisbury Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycee's) and he is the first Black president of the group; he discussed the impact this has had on him, as well as the impact of recent events and his experience as a Black man.

Mr. Jagne-Shaw shared that he felt inspired to continue the discussion with the theme of pressing on. He described his work history to contextualize the disparity he has witnessed firsthand. He mentioned the du'jour discriminatory system that the State of Maryland has ruled has taken place over the course of a 14-year investigation into Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Since living and working on the Eastern Shore, he has learned about Salisbury University's origins and how it was established as a way to pour state resources into an institution to compete with and undermine the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), the HBCU only 15 minutes down the road. Mr. Jagne-Shaw stated "We cannot grow weary in the fight for equality, we cannot grow weary in the fight for justice, because we are all deserving of it. I am glad to be part of a body that works to give voice to the voiceless." Mr. Jagne-Shaw would like to see this group give attention to the fact that this community is a majority minority community.

Mrs. Baasland explained that Julia Glanz's reasoning in choosing not to reappoint both Nance Held and Billy Earl Amos was rooted in her intent to diversify the membership of this committee and have its representative more accurately reflect their majority minority community. This new goal will affect all City boards, commissions, and committees and is not exclusive to the HRAC.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The next HRAC meeting will be held on Thursday the 11th of March, 2021 at 6pm on a virtual platform to be determined. A move to adjourn the meeting was put forth by Mr. Jagne-Shaw, seconded by Mr. Pheasant, 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*

Articles:

Brookwalter, G. (2019, November 27). *Evanston will use recreational marijuana sales tax proceeds to fund local reparations program*. Chicago Tribune. <<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/evanston/ct-evr-evanston-reparations-marijuana-tax-tl-1205-20191126-g3ifwaikrjfmrillfv6ytwvgii-story.html>>

Lutz, E. (2020, January 19). *One city's reparations program that could offer a blueprint for the nation*. The Guardian. <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/19/reparations-program-evanston-illinois-african-americans-slavery>>

Jones, T. (2020, January 31). *Slavery reparations seem impossible. In many places, they're already happening*. The Washington Post. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/01/31/slavery-reparations-seem-impossible-many-places-theyre-already-happening/?arc404=true>>