



City of Salisbury
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
April 8, 2021

Committee Members Present

Stephen Feliciano, *Chair*
Amber Green, *Vice Chair*
Ben Pheasant, *Administrator*
Reverend John Wright
Ron Pagano
Marcel Jagne-Shaw
Tyler Anderson

Committee Members Absent

D'Shawn Doughty

In Attendance

Laura Baasland
Councilwoman Angela Blake
Logan Prushansky
Cinzia Lombardo

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 5:59pm by Mr. Feliciano. He also reminded everyone to please make him aware if they will be late to a meeting or miss one altogether, and he pointed out that he has recently redistributed the committee roles to the entire group for the benefit of the new members joining. Mr. Feliciano explained that his biggest struggle so far during his chairmanship has been communication, and he reminded the group to please be mindful of that.

Review of Minutes

A motion to accept the minutes from the March meeting with a typo corrected were put forth by Mr. Pagano and seconded by Rev Wright; the motion carried by unanimous vote in favor.

Maryland Lynching Memorial Task Force Update

The official date for the lynching memorial marker unveiling ceremony remains May 22nd. There will be a march from the hospital to the courthouse, following the same route that Matthew Williams was taken when he was lynched, beginning at 10AM. Tidal Health Peninsula will be providing water and masks. The soil collection will be at 1PM and the ceremony is tentatively set for 3PM. The task force is trying to secure Brian Stevenson as a speaker for the ceremony, and if that happens there will be a virtual component on Facebook Live. Descendants of Matthew Williams will be present and speaking. The task force is working on securing press for the event.

HRAC Social Media Pages

Mr. Pheasant has set up an HRAC page on Facebook, as well as an Instagram page, and both are ready to go. He has compiled the posting guidelines that were given to him by the City and is working on a manual of sorts for the committee. Mr. Pheasant strongly suggests that the group use a two-person authenticator mode for post for maximum accountability. He envisions posts falling into five general categories:

1. Administrative (such as: links for meetings, minutes, new members, etc.)
2. Announcements (such as: new positions, collaborations, events, etc.)
3. Current Events (related to Human Rights topics)
4. Pre-planned Posts (such as: posts for International Women’s Day, Transgender Day of Visibility Day, etc.)
5. Discussion Series (such as: introducing members, guest posts, etc.)

Managing this page will be a significant amount of work, so the group needs to divide it up and determine who will be responsible for what. Ms. Lombardo asked if the group has considered how content will be planned and scheduled. Mr. Pheasant responded that he is working on a proposal for this that he will include in the social media guideline packets that he will be sending to the committee this month. Ms. Lombardo further inquired as to whether the City provided suggestions for the group about how to handle moderating inappropriate comments, to which Mr. Pheasant replied that the documentation he was provided is somewhat ambiguous on this but that his understanding is that best judgement should be used in those scenarios and it is up to the discretion of the group. The page will also prominently display a disclaimer that it is a moderated forum and that comments containing hate speech, threats, vulgarity, etc. will be hidden at the discretion of the moderators.

HRAC Membership

Three vacancies remain on the committee, one of which may be filled by Hannah Cechini. Of the two other vacancies, the group needs at least one to be filled by a representative from a religious organization. Mr. Feliciano has exhausted his efforts to reach the individual that he had in mind for the position. Ms. Green suggested that Mr. Feliciano contact Timothy Palmer of The Well in Salisbury, and Mr. Pagano suggested Martin Hutchison of Community of Joy – Church of the Brethren. Rev Wright contacted Farah Yahya, the Public Affairs Coordinator for the Islamic Center, who said she would take the information to their board, but he has not yet received a response. The group will continue their efforts to recruit individuals to fill the remaining seats.

Memo to the Mayor’s Office Regarding AAPI Hate

Mr. Feliciano worked with Mr. Pagano to draft a memo to send to the Mayor’s Office recommending that the Mayor take a formal stance denouncing Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) hate. Rev Wright asked for clarification on the call to action portion of the memo, specifically who that call to action would be coming from—the Mayor’s Office or the committee. Ms. Green’s interpretation is that the committee is a de facto representative of the City as far as the community is concerned, so the distinction is irrelevant. Rev Wright expressed his belief that it would be pertinent for the group to have ideas in mind for specific actions in the event that the Mayor’s Office would like to know what actions the committee suggests. Ms. Green feels that one important call to action would be to create a facilitated discussion between the Black and AAPI communities to address the common enemy of White Supremacy. Ms. Lombardo added that there is already a Nonviolent Communications Community group facilitating conversations between various communities about being able to hold space for current events, and that may be relevant here. Mr. Pagano state that the committee needs to encourage the City to start the actionable process beyond issuing a proclamation, and that we as a community specifically need forward-moving action; he plans to edit the memo to include this perspective.

Community Engagement

Mr. Feliciano posed the question: How does this committee engage with the community? Mr. Anderson responded that engaging social media posts are a key method, and Ms. Green added that initiating and moderating discussion forums is vital. She urged the committee to meet people where they are, and to remember that not all people have equal access to transportation or even to internet and virtual meeting software. Ms. Prushansky inquired as to whether the committee has ever tabled community events such as One Stop Shop, and Mr. Pagano suggested Third Friday as another option. Ms. Green answered simply that no, the group has not tabled at events as a group or in any official capacity. Ms. Prushansky continued that accessibility is significant barrier, and that younger people do care about these issues but they do not know how to get involved.

Mr. Jagne-Shaw added that community service and volunteering is a great way to build not only the group’s brand recognition but also its brand affinity, that way the group isn’t “just asking for membership and help, they’re out there helping.” He also stressed an “and” rather than “or” approach, and urged the committee to try some components of each of these ideas in order to reach the most people. Mr. Feliciano is working on creating a brochure for HRAC, and would love to see the committee eventually have their own booth with a banner. Mr. Pagano asked about the possibility of getting name tags so that members of the public would be able to immediately recognize HRAC members. Mrs. Baasland discussed how grant funding could cover those things.

Ms. Green would like to ultimately see the group provide a service; she has seen that the community needs a resource for reporting human rights issues. Mr. Pagano suggested establishing guidelines to route people where they need to go, and Ms. Green expanded that idea to a resource guide to “help people help themselves” that could be posted to the committee’s webpage. Mr. Pheasant asked Mrs. Baasland if the Mayor’s Office has a protocol for this and she explained the resource document that the Mayor’s Office uses to help constituents who call with a variety of issues. Mr. Pagano asked for a copy of that document and said he would be happy to edit it to be relevant to this committee.

Community Reparations

The committee began a discussion about reparations, which is expected to be an ongoing conversation amongst the group. Reparations are about a lot more than money, it’s a way to close the gap that currently exists between the Black and white communities and address the disparities. Ms. Green expressed that she would like for the committee to be inspired by other communities who have begun reparations, and to dream of what is possible here in our own community. Ms. Green touched on some of the disparities of the racial gap, and specifically mentioned that the Black infant mortality rate is twice as high as white infants. She also discussed the ALICE report, which stands for Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed and is a report that evaluates financial hardship. ALICE data shows that 50-80% of Wicomico County is in fact made up of ALICE households, and of those, a large portion are Black. Through her nonprofit organization, Ms. Green deals specifically with youth homelessness, which is an issue that disproportionately affects the Black community.

Mr. Feliciano explained that he was formerly ignorant about reparations and previously thought it was only about money, and that he has since educated himself on the topic and learned that it is about much more than that. For him, this is an example of how our committee can facilitate these types of learning opportunities on controversial subjects. He explained that reparations are a debt, not a charity. He continued that this conversation does not need to be finished today, but he wants it to be something that the committee thinks about and is aware of—he wants the group to be prepared to be a part of the larger ongoing conversation.

Mr. Pagano added that when discussing reparations, it is important to understand that we are talking about actions in addition to money; people tend to hear the word “reparations” and think their taxes are going to increase, which leads to frustration and stifles any initiative. He continued that most people do not understand the institutional and systemic nature of this issue, and it is the responsibility of this group to be able to explain that and get that message across in a non-confrontational and informative way.

Ms. Lombardo contributed that truth commissions serve as one way to allow people to reveal their truth and have it recorded. She also suggested that one consideration that may be pertinent is to use different language than “reparation” since that term is so culturally loaded. Ms. Green reminded that group that Wicomico Truth and Reconciliation Committee has done this type of work in the past, and has recently been focused on the lynching memorial marker, but as that initiative concludes they will resume their listening sessions.

Sherriff Lewis

In the interest of time, Mr. Feliciano reserved this discussion for a later date so that it can be given the attention it deserves. Ms. Green expressed that she is unsettled by the recent uptick in mass shootings and hate crimes, and she emphasized that not being aware of these types of things happening in our own community puts us all at risk. She would like the committee to find time as a group to discuss hate crimes. Rev Wright would like us all to be mindful of Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is today.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The next HRAC meeting will be held on Thursday the 13th of May, 2021 at 6pm on the virtual platform Zoom. In honor of May being Mental Health Awareness Month, Mr. Feliciano will be presenting and he will have a guest speaker from Chesapeake Health Care who will address the group. He asked that the group send over any questions for the speaker in advance. He will also have a guest who will lead the group in a five-minute guided meditation. A move to adjourn the meeting was put forth by Ms. Green, seconded by Mr. Pagano, and carried by unanimous vote in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 7:23pm.

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