



**City of Salisbury**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**May 9, 2019**

**Committee Members Present**

John Wright, *Chair*  
Mark Decker  
Chalarra Sessoms  
Amber Green

**Committee Members Absent**

Billy Earl Amos  
Nance Held

**In Attendance**

Laura Baasland, *Mayor's Office Administrative Assistant*  
James Yamakawa  
Jake Burdett

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

**Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:23p.m. by Mr. Wright. Jake Burdett, Salisbury University student and member of the public, introduced himself.

**Last Meeting Minutes**

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

**Open Public Forum**

Mr. Burdett expressed pleasure that the Committee was discussing economic issues, particularly as it pertained to the \$15 per hour minimum wage in Maryland. Mr. Burdett worked very much with the bill as a legislative intern, and it was originally supposed to be phased in by 2023, but the bill was significantly watered down by more conservative members of the government—and it has been changed to now be phased in by 2025 and 2026. Even though the bill was passed, there was a lot of backlash over the final form of the bill that was passed. It was originally supposed to be changed to align with the consumer price indexes so that it would increase automatically with inflation, but that portion was removed. According to Mr. Burdett, the bill is being called the worse "Fight for \$15" bill in the Country. If the City is still looking for something to do to support economic issues, Mr. Burdett suggested that the City could pass their own "Fight for \$15" bill in its original form. Mr. Decker expressed that he would definitely advise the Mayor to do just that. The Committee is in favor of making a recommendation to the Mayor to approve our own "Fight for \$15" bill in the City. It will be placed as a discussion item on the next agenda.

Mr. Burdett also brought awareness to the fact that environmental groups are highly suspicious of the poultry issue on the Eastern Shore. Environmental groups have been pushing the Community Healthy Air Act, and the poultry industry has continued to block it. After three years of fighting the study, the poultry industry has come out and said they will agree to a study, but they will self-fund it. Environmental groups have pushed back against this. Mr. Wright explained that our limitation in potentially making a recommendation is that our jurisdiction is limited to the City of Salisbury, and there are no concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO's) in City limits. The Committee discussed what impact they may be able to have on this topic. Mr. Burdett clarified that the poultry industry has proposed a study, but due to the public backlash, they recently held a public hearing. The study that has been proposed is not inclusive of many factors and is therefore being considered inadequate. The Community Healthy Air Act would cost approximately \$10 million, and the Delmarva Poultry Industry is putting up approximately \$125 thousand of a study that would cost around \$500 thousand.

### **Current Events and Local Issues**

Ms. Green mentioned that she has been closely following the issues with Mardela High School and their funding issues, and she has been talking to many youth and parents. She suggested that this would be a good time to focus on preventative measures as youth come in to more contact with the police over the summer with school being out.

Mr. Decker stated that the dual party consent rule does not apply to police and members of the public are allowed to record the police when interacting with them. Ms. Green discussed the possibility of doing preventative measures to inform the youth of their rights. Ms. Green's motives aren't to point fingers at any particular department, but to educate all Salisbury citizens to make sure they feel safe interacting with police. The general consensus was that this makes the entire community safer. Ms. Green proposed adding to the next agenda how the Salisbury Police Department handles complaints against officers and how accessible those reports are. She would like to know what the protocol is for someone who has a complaint against an officer and what is the chain of command. The Committee decided to add that to the next meeting agenda. The Committee decided to ask a representative of SPD join us at a future meeting to discuss this further.

### **Old Business**

The Committee reviewed the drafts written by Mr. Decker and expressed satisfaction. Mrs. Sessoms suggested that we remove the word "men" after gay in the memo and the Committee accepted that recommendation. Mr. Wright put forth a motion to approve the draft proclamation as written, it was seconded by Ms. Green, and the motion carried by unanimous vote in favor. Mrs. Baasland clarified that she would make the revision to Mr. Decker's drafted memo and pass it along to Mayor Day with the sample proclamation language. She also gave an update from Mrs. Glanz that was well received by the Committee. The Committee would like to have Chief Duncan come speak to the group in regards to police inclusivity training as well as the police complaints.

### **Discussion with James Yamakawa**

Mr. Yamakawa gave an update on the project. Since the last visit with HRAC, his group gave a presentation to the local NAACP meeting. Mary Ashanti, the President of the local NAACP, expressed immediate support, but there was some hesitancy from the members. Ms. Ashanti agreed to start a dialogue between local black clergy members and the public. Mrs. Sessoms that she has heard community members wondering why we are bringing up an old issue. A majority of the pushback is people wondering why we would want to discuss this issue and bring it back up. This very concern was discussed at the last HRAC meeting, and Ms. Green suggested we have a responsibility to address that reconciliation is directly related to human rights.

Ms. Green continued the discussion about how to de-modernized education that is very disconnected. The Committee discussed that geography has a significant influence over this issue and the lack of adequate education surrounding it. Mr. Yamakawa discussed that when you go to the EJI museum, there is a timeline that takes up an entire wall, and you can step into that timeline at any time and see the history to the right or the left of you, but it only makes sense if you look at it as a whole. There is a historical disconnect between the Eastern Shore of Maryland and the Western Shore, and there still is to this day. Education is limited by local perspectives. Mr. Decker asked if the community feels a sense of fear or vulnerability if this truth is discussed. Ms. Green expressed that they are still local living relatives of the lynchings and that perhaps talking about it is picking at a fresh wound.

Mrs. Sessoms expressed that perhaps some of the reluctance is related to race and Ms. Green supported that it's difficult to empower the community that you're trying to empower when they are not in the proper space to do so yet. Mrs. Sessoms asked if Mr. Yamakawa has been in contact with Dr. Claire Small and Mrs. Yamakawa confirmed that he has been. Dr. Small is local respected African American historian. Ms. Green said that we face the challenge of getting the buy-in of the influential black leaders. She recommended that we get the support of Shanie Shields, the current President of the Chipman Foundation, but that she will be a hard sell. Ms. Green suggested we break off into a task force of HRAC members who are willing to devote extra time into strategic planning. The overall goal of the HRAC is get community buy-in. The Committee needs to draft a formal recommendation, but the group needs to determine what they need to recommend first.

Mr. Wright expressed concern that the lack of buy-in thus far from local leaders is concerning, and Ms. Green responded that it is simply due to a lack of proper education. Ms. Green has said that if the City comes out publically in support and in collaboration with the Wicomico Truth and Justice Reconciliation Initiative, that gesture will go a long way towards getting buy-in. A collation has been formed between the City, as represented by the Human Rights Advisory Committee, and the Wicomico Truth and Justice Reconciliation Initiative. Mr. Wright continued to show concern over the idea of the City taking the lead on such a project, when this initiative should instead be coming from the community. Mr. Yamakawa discussed that the City support and the community buy-in could take place at the same time. Ms. Green said the only way to get the community to decide on this before the City takes a stance is to put it on the ballot. Ms. Green said this idea has been discussed locally for three years now.

Mr. Yamakwa recalled the story of the black community members coming out after the lynching of Matthew Williams essentially blaming him for his own lynching in order to get the white mobs to calm down. There is a real fear among the black community to lead this charge and put their face on it.

Mr. Decker thinks that since the City is willing to move forward with this project, we should continue with that, and have the City go out into the community and get support.

Ms. Green put forth a motion to establish a task force, which was seconded by Mr. Decker, and passed by unanimous vote in favor. Ms. Green will be on the task force, and she will open it to the remainder of the Committee members via emails.

Mr. Yamakawa provided the contact information for the Wicomico Truth and Reconciliation Initiative for the public record: <http://telltthetruthwicomi.wixsite.com/website>

### **Next Meeting**

The next HRAC meeting was set for Thursday, June 6, at 6p.m. in conference room 306 of the Government Office Building.

**Adjournment**

On a motion by Mr. Decker, seconded by Ms. Green, and carried unanimously, the HRAC meeting was adjourned at 7:34p.m.

Minutes Taken By:

  
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Laura Baasland, Mayor's Office Administrative Assistant