



**Human Relations Commission
Meeting Notes**

Sept 19, 2022, 7:00 PM

In-person and Zoom Meeting

66 Main Street

West Orange NJ 07052

*Building Our Awareness. Engaging Our Community. Creating Change for Greater Inclusion.
West Orange Township Human Relations Commission*

This is to inform the general public that this meeting is being held in compliance with Section 5 of the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, Public Law 1975. The annual notice was emailed to the Star Ledger and filed in the Township Clerk's office on November 17, 2020 and published in the West Orange Chronicle on December 10, 2020.

1. Call to order at 7:09pm

[HRC Attendance 2022](#)

Commissioners: Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones, Vice Chairperson Shannon Gattens, Patrecia West, Joyce Harley, Asmeret Ghebremicael, Caroline Harris, Elizabeth Milhim, and Dagmar Hobson

Volunteers and Community Guests: Natacha Clesca, Peter Kolbe, Sage Gajarawala, Kanene Henry

2. Commissioners Check-In - "Rose and Thorn of the Month"

3. Acceptance of minutes of the last regular meeting of the Commission

Vice Chairperson Shannon Gattens motions, Commissioner Asmeret Ghebremicael seconds, all in favor, motion passes

3a. Acceptance and *(if necessary - discussion)* of Subcommittee Reports

4. Report - Chairperson Update

Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones:

- Anticipating online discussion could get heated over the next few months during the Mayoral race.
- Commissioners need to be mindful of how they respond to residents online as it reflects on the HRC and Office of the Mayor.

5. Old business

- Retreat planning
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones:
 - Scheduling a challenge over the Summer but want to commit to solidify a date.
 - Proposes Friday evening or Saturday morning.
 - October 21st
 - Group: Discussed meeting spaces in a restaurant or club with food options. Town Hall could be a back-up.
 - Options include: The Rock 1925 (Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones will call).
 - Arts Center is a good option for future HRC event.
 - Agenda Committee: Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones, Commissioner Patrecia West, and Commissioner Joyce Harley.
 - Goals and Desired Outcomes:
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones: Discuss strategy to streamline thinking so HRC can execute

- on ideas; how to engage community; acknowledge that new leadership in January may change the HRC direction.
 - Vice Chairperson Shannon Gattens: Spend time at the beginning to reflect on the previous year.
- Diwali Fest
 - Sage:
 - Thanked HRC for partnership.
 - 3-6pm at WOHS band field.
 - Highlight South Asian community in WO: 10-12 performances, trivia, fashion, HS student dance, HS Step Team Bollywood dance, music; 2 food vendors; 20 vendors/exhibitors/teachers.
 - Hindi Temple and Empty Cloud Monastery partnerships.
 - Local South Asian-owned businesses invited.
 - Commissioner Patrecia West: Recommended Sage to contact Megan Brill to include the event on the Public Relations app.
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones will speak on behalf of the HRC.
 - Sage:
 - HRC Table: Commissioner Asmeret Ghebremicael and Commissioner Patrecia West can be there from 3-6pm and will reach out to Dawn for HRC items. Will bring voter registration forms.
 - Mayor invitation: Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones will extend the invitation to the Mayor and/or the Town Council President. Sage will send details.
 - HRC Banner: Commissioner Asmeret Ghebremicael will get it to Sage Sunday morning.
 - Flyer: Post to UAV and HRC pages.
 - Expenses: Request for HRC support for insurance (\$137) and stage rental (\$363) = \$500
 - HRC to discuss and vote after the meeting.
 - Sage needs to include vendor specifics.
 - Commissioner Patrecia West: Carl Brister may have a connection with a stage supplier.
 - Volunteers: Commissioner Caroline Harris will send out an email to solicit volunteers with specific asks.
- MLK Event
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones:
 - Date will be January 16th, 2023.
 - Intention to plan in-person event and get the bulk of the planning done by December 23rd.
 - Planning Committee: Commissioner Joyce Harley, Vice Chairperson Shannon Gattens, Commissioner Caroline Harris, Natacha, Commissioner Elizabeth Milhim, and Commissioner Asmeret Ghebremicael.
 - Commissioner Caroline Harris will send Doodle for kick-off meeting.
- Community/Resident engagement
 - Commissioner Patrecia West circulated the proposed survey.
 - Commissioner Patrecia West: There may be interest from the community in the “education arena.”
- HRC Community Award
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones: Last community award was last Spring. Aim for Spring 2023.
 - Commissioner Joyce Harley: Worked with Dawn. Establish award criteria at retreat.
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones: Recommended Dawn and Commissioner Joyce Harley meet and come to the retreat with proposed criteria.
- Back-to-school event
 - Vice Chairperson Shannon Gattens:
 - Shillelagh Club collected over 150 backpacks. Low attendance.
 - HRC members donated. Next year, HRC could organize something larger to make a bigger

impact.

6. New business

- DEI Panel with Mayoral Candidates
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones
 - The idea came out of observing the backlash and conversation that unfolded when a Mayoral town hall was scheduled over Rosh Hashanah.
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones had commented on social media that the HRC was working with organizers to move the event.
 - HRC hosted event to give candidates the opportunity to discuss their ideas around inclusion in West Orange, using the backlash as a backdrop and prompt.
 - Commissioner Joyce Harley:
 - Supports the idea of the HRC moving the discussion further.
 - Will reach out to local President of League of Women Voters of the Montclair area (WO is included in their area) about partnering.
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones will investigate legal parameters for HRC's involvement in a panel involving political candidates with Township Attorney.
 - Vice Chairperson Shannon Gattens suggested HRC can reach out to candidates to encourage them to organize a similar panel.
 - Commissioner Caroline Harris suggested protocol for HRC Commissioners sharing information and events publicly.
 - Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones: Not suggesting every Commissioner post get reviewed through Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones.
 - Vice Chairperson Shannon Gattens: HRC can scan external groups' communication requests before sharing/publicizing on their behalf.

7. Other/Public Comment

Natacha Clesca:

- Regarding HRC response to controversy over Mayoral Town Hall scheduled on Rosh Hashanah: advised HRC to be careful about response (if the HRC responds) and be mindful of both sides of the argument.
- Kanene Henry: Community needs to have open and honest discussion about what is going on in West Orange.
- Vice Chairperson Shannon Gattens: Inclusivity is the full charge of the HRC.
- Commissioner Joyce Harley: HRC did not plan the event and would not have held any event on Rosh Hashanah; HRC should make people aware that HRC had nothing to do with it.
- Commissioner Patrecia West: This was not the only time this event was scheduled on Rosh Hashanah and members of WOAHO received backlash for the rescheduling. Inclusivity is not easy space to operate in. HRC needs to do more in education and give people skills to process these types of issues.
- Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones: HRC did the right thing by stepping in and advocating for the event to be rescheduled.
 - We are operating within the Mayor's office so there are political aspects to what the HRC can and cannot do vs. an independent, social-justice organization.
 - Commissioners will be aligned with our roles and need to be ready for that.
 - Inclusion is about creating spaces for marginalized and underserved people and communities.

8. Executive Session

9. Adjournment at 8:49pm

Chairperson Dr. David E. Jones motions, Commissioner Elizabeth Milhim seconds, all in favor

10. Future Meeting Dates: October 24th, 2022

~ Fostering good will, cooperation and conciliation among groups in the Community ~