



Human Relations Commission Meeting Notes

Oct 25, 2021 7:00 PM

Zoom Virtual Meeting

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 7:04pm

HRC Attendance 2021

Dr. David E. Jones, Chair; Commissioners Shannon Gattens, Patrecia West, Elizabeth Milhim, Shakira Adams, Dawne Adams, Dr. Joyce Harley, Dagmar Hobson, Reji George, Asmeret Ghebremicael, Marguerite Foster, and Rabbi Tobin; Secretary Caroline Harris

Guests: Township Council President Matute-Brown; Community Volunteers Danielle Wallace, Kim Bazz Chen, Maria Vera, Natacha Clesca, Carl Brister

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

- Commissioners shared their updates for the month.

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

July and September - Commissioner Shannon Gattens moves, Commissioner Dawne Adams seconds; all in favor

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

- Subcommittee reports

4. Report - Chairperson Update

- Virtual Town Hall co-sponsored with Music Village on Wednesday, October 27th at 7pm
 - Dr. David E. Jones, Chair will be co-moderating with chair of Music Village
 - Panelists of Town Officials and Leaders; members of groups in town
 - 45-minute moderated Q&A and questions from the audience
- Attendance
 - Dr. David E. Jones, Chair thanked Commissioners and Volunteers for attendance and commitment to the meetings

5. Old business

- Italian Heritage Month Flag Raising
 - Commissioner Rabbi Tobin – Event went smoothly. The entire town is growing in terms of unpacking its history.
 - Mayor Parisi member of UNICO, the organization HRC partnered with
 - Moved Flag raising to week prior to the former Columbus Day
- Indigenous People’s Day Proclamation from the Mayor
 - Commissioner Rabbi Tobin - Mayor Parisi embraced the opportunity to recognize marginalia Commissioner Elizabeth Milhimed Indigenous peoples
 - Some blowback on social media against the proclamation
 - Important to try to reach people that may be struggling to accept these new steps the town is taking
 - Reminder to the Commissioners to vocally show support
 - Challenge moving forward is recognizing upcoming heritage months; need to get ahead and meet within the next week. Ex. Diwali is coming up and there is an event in town this month.
 - November is Indigenous Peoples Month, so HRC needs to explore how to recognize the month since there is no official heritage group in town
 - Commissioner Shannon Gattens – She and some friends not on social media sent emails to the Mayor thanking him for the proclamation.
 - Dr. David E. Jones, Chair – Thanked Commissioner Rabbi Tobin for his leadership and navigating some difficult conversations. Some hateful things said on social media most likely said by a very vocal few; large majority were supportive. Spoke with the Mayor last week and strategized on what could be done differently moving forward. Sometimes doing what is morally right may not always align with someone else’s views.
 - Commissioner Patrecia West – Acknowledged the fact that everyone has missteps, and we must be willing to let each other make mistakes and learn from them. This will not be the only time the HRC has to manage these issues. Find a way to work across differences.
- Love and Unity Town Hall Panel and Future Series Initiative (Dr. David E. Jones, Chair)
 - HRC co-sponsoring the Town Hall mentioned above.
 - Follow-up to the Love+Unity week in September
 - Discuss ways leadership in town is working to embrace the idea of strengthening love between us, despite differences.
 - How can we use this dialogue to start a series of dialogues on different subjects and issues.
 - Carl Brister – Thanked HRC for donation and support behind Love+Unity festival. Objective of the festival was to foster dialogue with the goal to create a more unified community. Thanked Dr. David E. Jones, Chair for co-moderating upcoming Town Hall. Desire to expand the Town Hall into a series with different voices and topics from West Orange. Proposed a bi-monthly series with different topics, ex. Faith-based, local businesses, and youth.
 - Proposed an official township statement on commitment to diversity and inclusion, as a form of accountability. Examples of this exist in neighboring towns.
 - Subcommittee: Commissioner Dr. Joyce Harley and Subcommittee on Community Conversations (Commissioner Patrecia West, Secretary Caroline Harris, Dr. David E. Jones, Chair, and Volunteer Shelley Slafkes)
 - Commissioner Patrecia West – Hoping to carve out time to bring the issue of re-segregation in schools to this forum.
- Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Diwali – Commissioner Rabbi Tobin and Commissioner Asmeret Ghebremicael will work on next steps. Maria Vera would like to help.
 - Commissioner Dagmar Hobson – Will reach out to WO African Heritage group to partner.
- Latinx Heritage Month Flag Raising
 - Dr. David E. Jones, Chair - Flag raising at Town Hall in September was well-attended. President of the

Dominican Republic attended along with the Mayor, Township Council President Matute-Brown, and BOE President Terry Trigg-Scales. Good opportunity to celebrate the Latinx culture.

6. New business

- Native American Heritage Month (November)
- In-person meetings
 - Secretary Caroline Harris secured the library for in-person meetings if Commissioners are ready for in-person.
 - Commissioner Dagmar Hobson – Afraid to venture out but suggested if Zoom could be an option as well.
 - Commissioner Dr. Joyce Harley – Likes the idea of in-person and knows the library has worked on improved ventilation; hybrid would make sense for the HRC.
 - Commissioner Shannon Gattens – Need to investigate options for hybrid as it's difficult to mandate that everyone attends in person. Need to make it accessible for everyone.
 - Dr. David E. Jones, Chair – Recommended hybrid meetings start in November if a few members can arrive at 6:30pm to help with the setup. Secretary Caroline Harris to speak with the library about tech capabilities and space capacity.
 - Commissioner Shannon Gattens – Should be preregistration to limit the number of people in person. Publicize it with note that there is a max number of in person guests that can social-distance, but that it will also be on Zoom.
 - Commissioner Dr. Joyce Harley – Motions to conduct hybrid meetings; Commissioner Shannon Gattens seconds; all in favor.
 - Members need to email Dr. David E. Jones, Chair and Commissioner Shannon Gattens their preference of in person or virtual.
- December 27th meeting date?
 - Dr. David E. Jones, Chair – Suggest moving date up a week and need to be conscious of other holidays that may overlap with future dates. Commissioner Dr. Joyce Harley motions to change the December date to the 20th.
- MLK Celebration Planning
 - Dr. David E. Jones, Chair –
 - Identify planning group and theme
 - Commissioner Dr. Joyce Harley, Commissioner Asmeret Ghebremicael, Dr. David E. Jones, Chair, Commissioner Shannon Gattens, Secretary Caroline Harris, Commissioner Dawne Adams, Commissioner Rabbi Tobin, and Commissioner Elizabeth Milhim
 - Date would be 1/17/22 to keep it on the actual holiday
 - Planning for in-person but need a back-up of virtual
 - Secretary Caroline Harris to send Doodle and set up a planning meeting
 - Commissioner Asmeret Ghebremicael – Commissioner Patrecia West uptick in COVID cases; suggested limiting in-person to speakers, Town Officials, and a limited audience.
 - Possible themes: “A Time to Dream: Imagine, Believe, Act”, “Dignity, Excellence, Worth: What’s Your Life’s Blueprint”, “The Fierce Urgency of Now”
 - Commissioner Patrecia West – Hybrid version could make it possible for certain members of the community to partake in the celebration, who cannot travel or would prefer not to be in-person. Need to bring people together that have different agendas.
 - Commissioner Dr. Joyce Harley – Can create a ceremony and celebration that doesn't put people in harm's way. Arts Council is ready to help judge.
 - Commissioner Dawne Adams – Agrees hybrid would be in the community's best interest. Commissioner Elizabeth Milhim and Commissioner Dawne Adams suggested a logo contest. Could present winner at the MLK event.
 - Dr. David E. Jones, Chair – Nomination process for honorees. Start in November.

- Township Council President Matute-Brown – Suggested honoring freedom fighters like John Lewis to expand the reach of why his legacy should be honored.
- Commissioner Shannon Gattens – Would be good to limit event to Commissioners, Honorees and their guests, and Town Officials. Could consider entertainment and singing groups, if safe. Loves the idea of a logo that differentiates HRC from other town logos and would suggest engaging the community with a poll.
- Secretary Caroline Harris – Find ways to invite local heritage groups to get involved.
- Commissioner Shannon Gattens – Previously WOAHO was a collaborator, but there are more heritage groups that could be engaged, not only in this event but in more moving forward. It is a challenging balancing act to be inclusive while impossible to represent everyone. Need to create opportunities like these events to invite people to speak.
- Township Council President Matute-Brown – Suggested theme of inclusivity. Tie in relationships Dr. King Jr. had in his activism like with India, which inspired his non-violence ideology.
- Dr. David E. Jones, Chair –
 - Inclusion means everyone feels accepted and affirmed, but it also means acknowledging traditionally marginalized groups. Communities control and own most “spaces” in this country, but people not part of dominant groups/identities need inclusion efforts to become part of a community.

7. Other/Public Comment

Natacha – Thanked Secretary Caroline Harris for her help. Town never ceases to amaze her. Warmed her heart to see how the St. Cloud school community came out to help.

Township Council President Matute-Brown –

- Raising funds via Mayor’s Sunshine Fund, and GoFundMe, and support for the displaced the 44 families in town. Advocacy from realtors in town to help is needed to help families find housing and get around typical red tape. Asked group to reach out to network to ask for volunteers to help.
- Seen growth in Mayor in the last 3 years she is very proud of. The Mayor is participating in BLM rallies but also taking initiative to educate himself. Thanked HRC for time, commitment and dedication to the community because there has been a noticeable improvement in town.

8. Executive Session (if necessary)

9. Adjournment – 8:46pm all motioned to adjourn.

10. **Future Meeting Dates:** November 22, December 20

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