

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 16, 2016 5:00 p.m.

Attendance: Justin Carbonella, Brandi Doyle, Richard Kagan, Debbie Rqimerman, Howard Thody, Youth in Government Representatives Angel Biney and Tamika Browne, and staff, Faith Jackson, Director of Human Relations

Excused Absence: Henry Fernandez, Marcia McIntosh, and Jeanette White

Absence: None

QUORUM: Yes: X No:

Call to Order: In the absence of a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, Faith Jackson called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. She explained that she is the Director of Human Relations and staff to the commission. David Boyce was the Chairperson, and he resigned last year after being on the commission for over 15 years. The Vice Chairperson, Arthur Meyers, resigned at the beginning of this year in conjunction with retiring from his position as director of the Russell Library. Therefore, in accordance with the City Code of Ordinance, the commission members need to elect a new Chair and Vice Chair, which requires a quorum.

Faith Jackson then asked those present to say their names for the record and introduce themselves. Additionally, she welcomed the new members: commissioners Howard Thody and Brandi Doyle and Youth in Government Representative, Tamika Browne. Justin Carbonella said that he is the Youth Services Director for the City. He said he plays a role in making sure that Middletown is a good place for kids and families, which can involve both policy and committee work and sometimes direct service work. He is a Middletown resident and a graduate of the Middletown public school system. Brandi Doyle introduced herself and said that she is the Circulation Services Department head at the Russell Library. She's been with the City since 2011. She explained that she's in charge of the checking in and checking out of books. She is not a resident of Middletown. She lives in Clinton. She described herself as an "Air Force brat" and has done her fair share of moving around.

Faith Jackson introduced herself as the Director of Human Relations for the City of Middletown. She is the Affirmative Action Officer for the City and in that role addresses Equal Employment Opportunity issues and discrimination issues and conducts investigations of Sexual and Other Harassment and violence in the workplace. Also, she is the Fair Housing Officer and deals with landlord/tenant issues through mediation. Additionally, the office oversees the Walter C. Jones Fund, which assists people who have fallen behind on rent or a utility bill. She has three commissions and committees that report to the Human Relations Department: the Affirmative Action Monitoring Committee, the Human Relations Commission, and the Walter C. Jones Fund committee. Additionally, she is the City's veteran's service contact person.

Howard Thody introduced himself and said that he grew up in Middletown. He is a graduate of the Middletown public school systems. He said that he really enjoys living in Middletown and has seen the changes on Main Street. He's a member of the Democratic Town Committee. Additionally, he

explained that he got on the Human Relations Commission by knowing Cyndi Sanders, who recently resigned from the commission. Angel Biney, Youth in Government Representative, said that she is a student at Vinyl Tech. She got involved on the commission because she wanted to learn ways to give back to the community. Debbie Ruimerman introduced herself as a long-time Middletown resident. She said that she works for Gilead, which is a program for those who suffer from mental illness. Tamika Browne, Youth in Government Representative, introduced herself as a Junior at Middletown High School. She joined the commission because she has an interest in government. Richard Kagan introduced himself as a retired professor from Minnesota. He's been in Middletown for about five years and has been on the commission for about a year and a half. Additionally, he is a member of the Democratic Town Committee and ran for the Board of Education a few years ago. He said that he is very much involved in human rights issues and laws.

Faith Jackson thanked the commissioners for sharing a little bit about themselves and proceeded to move to the next agenda item.

Public Session: None.

Approval of Minutes: Richard Kagan motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes of November 18, 2015. Debbie Ruimerman seconded the motion. In absence of a Chairperson, Faith Jackson called for a vote. Brandi Doyle and Howard Thody abstained. The motion was properly carried.

Old Business:

Nomination and Election of new Chairperson and Vice Chairperson: Faith Jackson read from the City of Middletown Ordinance Article I Chapter 14-2, Membership; terms of office; Chairman; vacancies: "This Commission shall consist of nine members who shall reside in or be employed in the City of Middletown. They shall be appointed by the Mayor with the consent of the Common Council and shall serve without compensation. Of the nine members first appointed, three shall serve for a term of three years (one of whom shall be designated as the Chairman of the Commission)..." She advised that tonight the commission must elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. Generally, the way the election is done is that the floor is opened for nominations. Hopefully, the person accepts the nomination, and the nomination gets carried.

Brandi Doyle asked about the responsibilities of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. Faith Jackson responded that the Chairperson Chairs the meeting and leads the group in meaningful activities. The commission provides input on the activities it wants to do or issues that need to be addressed in the community. The Chairperson leads the commission in a way to approach those issues. In the past, the commission has participated in a number of activities in collaboration with City events. It has participated in the Holiday on Main Street and the Kid's Health and Safety Fair. Also, the commission did a collaborative program with the Board of Education about bullying.

Faith Jackson referenced the City of Middletown Ordinance Article I Chapter 14-3, Functions: "To foster mutual understanding and respect among all racial, religious, and ethnic groups of the community." She said that the commission has in the past worked with other entities in the City that have similar objectives, such as NEAT and Youth Services. Faith Jackson said the Human Relations Department maintains the Agenda, produces the minutes for the commission, and serves as a liaison between the commission and mayor since they are appointment by the mayor. However, it's the

commission that decides the activities and plans them. Brandi Doyle asked about the responsibilities of the Vice Chairperson. Faith Jackson answered that the Vice Chairperson fills in when the Chairperson is not present.

Nomination of Candidate(s): Faith Jackson asked for nominations of candidates for Chairperson. Howard Thody nominated Justin Carbonella for Chairperson. Brandi Doyle seconded the nomination.

Candidate(s) Accept Yes/No: Justin Carbonella accepted the nomination as Chairperson with the primary responsibility of facilitating the meeting. He explained that his office is experiencing staff shortage, so he would not have very much time for work between the meetings, but he would be happy to lead the meetings.

Election of Chairperson: With a proper nomination and second, Faith Jackson called for a vote. The vote was unanimous. Justin Carbonella was elected Chairperson of the Human Relations Commission.

Nomination of Candidate(s): Faith Jackson asked for nominations of candidates for Vice Chairperson. Richard Kagan nominated Brandi Doyle for Chairperson. Howard Thody seconded the nomination.

Candidate(s) Accept Yes/No: Brandi Doyle accepted the nomination as Vice Chairperson.

Election of Vice Chairperson: With a proper nomination and second on the table, Faith Jackson called for a vote. The vote was unanimous. Brandi Doyle was elected Vice Chairperson of the Human Relations Commission.

New Business:

2016 Goals and Objectives for the Commission: Faith Jackson asked if Justin Carbonella was comfortable taking over the meeting as Chairperson at this point. He responded that he was and began discussion on the 2016 Goals and Objectives for the Commission. He spoke on the importance of strategic planning on the part of the commission. He said the priorities and goals for the upcoming year do not necessarily have to drive directly towards action. They could drive towards education. He suggested that the group take some time to listen to experts on different topics, such as when the group heard Ed Bonilla speak on ALICE. Upon hearing about different issues, the group could then pick one topic on which to focus its attention. He suggested the commission spend a few minutes at this time brainstorming and asked for open discussion on local issues or national issues.

Faith Jackson added that the bimonthly meeting schedule helps to provide time between meetings for the commission to get certain things done or function like a sub-committee. Also, she advised the commission to think of their function and role in interfacing with other entities or bringing awareness into the community. She reminded them that whatever the commission decides gets presented to the mayor for approval.

In response, Brandi Doyle said something that would help her as a new member of the commission is some form of education, such as a speaker to come in and describe to the commission the different communities of people and how those groups may be changing over time. This knowledge would be helpful in looking ahead to get a better idea of the different types of groups and their potential need. It

would be a good step forward if we could find someone who could speak to that and educate the commission.

Faith Jackson asked Justin Carbonella about the possibility of having Izzi Greenberg speak to the commission. He responded that she is now with the Middlesex Coalition for Children. She has a presentation on the education system and the changing dynamics of who makes up the children in Middletown and the intersection of that group and poverty. She gave the presentation as part of training to Wesleyan students who volunteer in Middletown schools. Additionally, this presentation was in line with a report she is doing. However, the report does focus primarily on the young people in the community. But, the young people in the community are a reflection on the older people in the community, to a degree. He agreed that Izzi Greenberg could be someone the commission looks to bring in soon. He then asked if there were any other issues on which the commission would want better or further education.

Richard Kagan said he would be interested in the relationship between the police and the minority community and ways the relationship could be improved. He specifically mentioned traffic stops but alluded to other problematic issues. He then spoke on an interaction he personally had with an officer that upset him. He reported it and was told that it had been handled.

Faith Jackson responded that another consideration would be to have the Chief of Police meet with the commission and provide an update on racial profiling. She said most police departments capture that data. Therefore, the Chief should be able to report on it. Also, the commission could have a dialogue with the Chief where it can share its concerns and the Chief can explain the measures the department has put in place to address the issue.

Howard Thody said he would feel more comfortable going over the ordinance to gain a better understanding of the commission's charge. Additionally, he asked about a way to stay in contact with the commission and staff, preferably via email. Then, he made mention of the refugee program. Faith Jackson responded that there is a task force that addresses this issue. She is on the email list for the group but hasn't been able to attend any of the meetings due to scheduling conflicts. She will reference the minutes to see how they are working with IRIS – Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services, which is based in New Haven. Howard Thody said someone from the New Haven group spoke at his church, and he was quite good. He added that he would love to hear from the youth.

Angel Biney said she would like to learn more about the relationship with the police department and the community. Also, she would be interested in having the person from IRIS in New Haven speak to the group, especially since she studied the refugee issue in school. Faith Jackson responded that the local taskforce is still in the development stage and preparing to receive three refugee families in Middletown. The major concerns are housing, education, and employment. There was further discussion on Middletown's readiness to receive the families. Justin Carbonella said that Mayor Drew is supportive of this project, which is very fortunate.

Justin Carbonella mentioned another area of interest may be issues of implicit bias and institutional racism. There have been notable examples of this in political campaigns. Also, the Middlesex Coalition for Children will be working on these issues. Recently, the coalition got a grant to do work on implicit bias in Middletown, and they may need advocates for this work. However, they are at the beginning stages of this project.

Howard Thody asked how the work of the commission is made known to the public. Faith Jackson answered that all committees, commissions, and boards post Meeting Notices with the City/Town Clerk's Office, and Agendas and Meeting Minutes are available on the City of Middletown website. However, if the commission has a specific focus or initiative, it can be made public on a larger scale. For example, the Chairperson could do a press release. Justin Carbonella further explained that public outreach would depend on the topic and function. At times, the commission has received a presentation to become more knowledgeable and aware. At other times, the commission has done community outreach, whereas that effort would be more aggressively publicized.

Justin Carbonella said in the interest of time and without major objection, the commission could try to schedule Izzi Greenberg as a speaker for the next meeting, if her schedule will allow it. She could talk about the different types of people in the community and possibly piggyback off of her implicit bias work. Additionally, she is working on the refugee project. He said he would approach her on that.

Commission Vacancy: Justin Carbonella asked Faith Jackson to speak on the commission vacancy. Faith Jackson said that at this time the commission has one vacancy. She sent communication to several churches announcing the vacancy. As she spoke, she handed out a copy of the vacancy announcement to the commission. She then explained that the reverend from South Congregational Church is interested in serving on the commission. She said that she will touch base with her about her interest and then submit her name to the mayor for appointment at the next council meeting. There was further discussion on the vacancy.

2015 and 2016 Attendance: Faith Jackson advised the commission that the attendance of members is tracked. There was no further discussion on the 2015 and 2016 attendance.

Announcements: Faith Jackson announced that as of January 2016, the Meeting Minutes for all boards, commission, and committees will be posted on the website.

Justin Carbonella said that the commission has two pieces of homework. First, he will reach out to Izzi Greenberg about speaking at the May meeting. Second, he asked the commission members to spend some time thinking about the goals and objectives for the upcoming year, not only topics but people with whom the commission can partner. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be **May 18, 2016.**

Adjournment: With no further discussion, Justin Carbonella asked for a motion to adjourn. Richard Kagan motioned to adjourn the meeting. Howard Thody seconded. The Chairperson called for a vote. The motion was unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,



Kasey Shoemaker,
Administrative Sec. III