

Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
July 14, 2016 5:00 p.m.

Attendance: Justin Carbonella, Richard Kagan, Rev. Thea Racelis, Howard Thody, Jeanette White, Youth in Government Representative Angel Biney, and staff, Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

Excused Absence: Brandi Doyle, Henry Fernandez, Dr. Marcia McIntosh, Debbie Ruimerman, and Tamika Browne, Youth in Government Representative

Absence: None

QUORUM: **Yes:** X **No:**

Call to Order: Justin Carbonella, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 5:08 p.m. He asked the commission members to state their names for the record.

Public Session: None

Regular Meeting:

Approval of Revised Meeting Agenda: Rev. Thea Racelis motioned to approve the Revised Meeting Agenda for July 14, 2016. Richard Kagan seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Approval of Minutes: Rev. Thea Racelis motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes of May 18, 2016. Jeanette White seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried with one abstention.

Old Business:

Commission Contact Sheet: Justin Carbonella pointed out the commission contact sheet. The commission members reviewed their personal information. Justin Carbonella provided a better main number for his department. There was no further discussion on the contact sheet.

Review Email Message to Izzi Greenberg: Justin Carbonella told the commission that in the meeting package was a thank-you email to Izzi Greenberg for her presentation. There was further discussion on how informative her presentation was. Rev. Thea Racelis advised that Izzi Greenberg will be giving a presentation at South Church in the fall, which will be open to the community. The church will be promoting it and offering child care, as well.

New Business:

Reschedule September's Meeting: Justin Carbonella moved the discussion to rescheduling the September meeting. He advised that the department was offering Thursday, September 15th and Thursday, September 22nd. Richard Kagan motioned to move the meeting to **Thursday, September 22nd**. Rev. Thea Racelis seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. Motion properly carried.

Reschedule November's Meeting: Justin Carbonella moved the discussion to rescheduling the November meeting. He advised that the department was offering Thursday, November 10th and Thursday, November 17th. Richard Kagan motioned to move the meeting to **Thursday, November 17th**. Jeanette White seconded. The chairperson called for a vote. Motion properly carried.

Round-Table Discussion: Justin Carbonella proceeded to the round-table discussion. Previously, the commission had discussed the need to have a focused discussion of the issues of the community in order to plan an objective for the commission. This goal of the round-table discussion would be to best pinpoint where the commission should focus its time and energy. Izzi Greenberg's conversation provided the opportunity for the commission to think through some things. The commission has discussed the work happening around refugees. Also, the commission has considered the issue of juvenile justice. He welcomed informal conversation from the commission.

Richard Kagan said he felt it was important to deal with issues of the police, community, and Black Lives Matter. He added that negative stories and rumors get a life of their own, and it would be good to have someone come in and address this issue. The commission could learn what it could do to counter the negative issues going on. He suggested bringing in someone from the Public Defender's office or the Police Department. He also referred to an article in the New York Times indicating that studies have shown that the white community in no way understands the black community. They don't understand what problems they have and think they live in a country that has equality and equal opportunity in education. He offered the example of an African American who was staying with his family for some time and received negative reactions in the community. He also has an African American adopted child and said many people are not aware of the issues the African American community faces. Faith Jackson responded that Captain Wallace sent out communication that certain initiatives are already underway. Additionally, Rev. Harvill sent an email from Debbie Calucci, the Equity Compliance Director and Deputy Title IX Coordinator at Wesleyan University's Office of Equity Inclusion. There will be a program Tuesday, July 19th from 6:30 to 8:30p.m. at Faith Congregational Church, 2030 Main St, Hartford, CT, and they have invited a number of representatives, community leaders, etc. to talk about this issue. There was further discussion of this issue, the escalating violence in the country, police response, and race relations.

Rev. Thea Racelis spoke on her experience as a first responder in Orlando after the Pulse nightclub shooting. She was there doing ministry. One of the issues that emerged, as they were working with public agencies that were failing to respond appropriately, was the need for ongoing bridge building with vulnerable communities. Here the Latino gay community was impacted, but when well-meaning people were trying to respond, things were happening such as hospital staff mispronouncing names or communication not being translated. So, people didn't know if their loved one was being talked about because information was not being translated or pronounced properly. In general, there was an issue of people not having cultural competence, such as an understanding of family structure and immigration

status. Part of what emerged was the need for ongoing connection with vulnerable populations. At the moment of crisis, everyone wants to help, but if the community relationships aren't in place, it's not always clear what type of help is immediately needed.

Richard Kagan mentioned the possibility of contacting representatives on the state level and asking them to be more engaged in doing research in the areas that the commission thinks or other parts of the community thinks is necessary. Faith Jackson added that research requires funding. There was further discussion on that topic.

Justin Carbonella asked the commission to consider the focus of its work. Is it advocacy, and if so, is it advocacy on the local, state, or federal level? Or is the work of the commission to be community builders or bridge builders? Should the commission work to connect to under-represented, under-served populations and try to reach out to them and understand their needs? Is there an opportunity to reach out to populations that are not talking? Also, the commission should work within the understanding that some of this work is already happening. For example, at this time there is an initiative and ongoing work to bridge the gap between the police community and youth in Middletown.

Rev. Thea Racelis said she feels there's an opportunity to focus on bridge building. Advocacy is also meaningful and effective, but in terms of leveraging resources, there are a lot more opportunities in the community for bridge building that can lead to advocacy, which could be more effective. Justin Carbonella agreed and said a follow up question would be where are we building a bridge? What are we trying to connect? He briefly summarized the commission's discussion topics surrounding topics such as violence and fear being the root of violence, issues around defined groups, such as police, and issues around under-represented, vulnerable populations.

Howard Thody asked if community building was being done in the school systems because that's where the population meets. He elaborated that people worship in their own churches and attend events that are comprised of people of similar interests and backgrounds. At times when churches try to reach out to churches of different backgrounds, the effort can be misguided or seem insincere or inauthentic. There was further discussion on diversity, race relations, and worship styles. Justin Carbonella said that these issues speak to a lack of authentic relationships with each other or authentic exchanges. Because these exchanges don't happen in an authentic true way, they happen in times of crisis, and the interaction does more harm. An opportunity to blend can actually offend. Howard Thody went back to his original point and asked if these issues are being addressed in school. Justin Carbonella answered with an example from one of his other community meetings with Middletown youth and asked if issues of privilege were being discussed in school, and the answer was no. Rev. Thea Racelis mentioned that this issue was lifted up in Izzi Greenberg's presentation. If students do not see themselves reflected in positions of authority in the school system, there's a systemic inequality.

Justin Carbonella asked the commission to refocus the discussion to what it wants to do next. There was discussion of inviting a school representative to a dialogue to get a better understanding of the needs of the students surrounding social and emotional learning and cultural competency.

Review and Discuss ALICE Update: There was no discussion on this topic.

2016 Attendance: There was no discussion on this topic.

Announcements: The next regularly scheduled meeting will be **Thursday, September 22, 2016**, in conference room 208.

Adjournment: With no further discussion, Justin Carbonella asked for a motion to adjourn. Rev. Thea Racelis motioned to adjourn the meeting. Richard Kagan seconded. The Chairperson called for a vote. The motion was unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kasey Shoemaker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kasey Shoemaker,
Administrative Sec. III