



**ANTI-RACISM TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT**

REGULAR MEETING

March 13, 2023

Present: Chairman Darnell Ford, Chairwoman Sacha Armstrong-Crockett, Pat Alston, Kirt Hart, Dr. Lee Morgan, Councilman Marino, Rev. Joshua Cotten, Brian Gartner, Samantha Rival, Ahmad Daniels, Bobbye Knoll Peterson

1. **Call to Order** Councilman Ford called the meeting to order with Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett at 6:11p.m.

2. **Public Comment**

Nick Puorro, 222 Main Street Middletown, President of the Middletown Police Union, spoke. First, he gave thanks to Chairman Ford for always being a supporter of law enforcement and the Middletown Police Department. He continued his comment by expressing concerns regarding the supporting documentation for the Anti-Racism Task Force's agenda. He specifically addressed the Criminal Justice Conversation Starter packet. Lieutenant Puorro identified the documentation as a preconceived, incorrect notion of the Middletown Police Department and its officers. He stated that the summary of the document implies lack of accountability within the Middletown Police Department, and indicated that this implication was false. Lieutenant Puorro also addressed other items in packet he felt were a false implication of the Middletown Police Department. Lieutenant Puorro mentioned that he spoke for his fellow union members, as he represents 115 heroes and their families. He concluded his statement by saying, "Tonight we are here to listen."

3. **Approval of Minutes for the January 31, 2023 Anti-Racism Task Force Special Meeting**

MOTION: Task Force Member Gartner made a motion to approve the minutes for the January 31, 2023 meeting. Task Force Member Hart seconded the motion. The matter passed unanimously.

4. **New Business**

Chairman Ford took a moment to introduce the new members of the Anti-Racism Task Force, Dr. Lee Morgan and Rev. Joshua Cotten. Chairman Ford provided the context of why the Anti-Racism Task Force was formulated, and what the group has done. He shared what the group has done over the past couple of years, and explained how the overall task is to



send recommendations to the Mayor's Office.

A. CRB Discussion

(1) Discussion on reestablishing the relationship with Yale's Justice Collaboratory

a. Review of their models for CRB's

Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett explained how the Task Force has been working with Jorge Camacho and Yale's Justice Collaboratory to come up with CRB models. She mentioned that the Task Force has taken the time to acknowledge if a Civilian Review Board is appropriate for the City of Middletown. Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett introduced three (3) CRB models. Model #1 Civilian Review Board, Model #2 Advisory Boards +, and Model 3 Appeals Board.

b. Prepare and make recommendations for April 2023

Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett explained how the hope is for the Task Force to push forward a recommendation to the Mayor's Office by April 2023. Referencing a report from 2017, Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett explained the history of Middletown blocking out Black and Brown folks from opportunities. She further indicated that in that report over 700 Black residents called for a Civilian Review Board. Further discussion ensued.

(2) Planning BIPOC citizen community think tank around community policing and CRB

Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett asked for feedback from the Task Force on whether or not they wanted to hold a town hall or community discussion regarding Civilian Review Boards. Member Gartner spoke and explained his point of view. He thought the idea of holding a town hall or public meeting would be appropriate. By doing so, it would prove that a CRB is necessary. Member Gartner shared an experience of a family member having been racially profiled here in Middletown.

Member Hart expressing how he disagrees with the idea of holding a town hall. He indicated that there had been several meetings and the NCCJ Report has proven that a CRB is necessary.

Member Barka called in and provided feedback, and stated that she was against holding another meeting regarding CRB's.

Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett proposed the option to vote on inviting the Mayor



to the next meeting to review the three CRB models. Further conversation ensued regarding whether a vote was necessary at this time.

MOTION: Task Force Member Hart made a motion to vote on inviting the Mayor to the April Regular Anti-Racism Task Force Meeting for review and discussion of the three (3) CRB models for recommendations. Task Force Member Gartner second the motion. The matter passed unanimously.

B. Discussion on reimagining Public Safety in Middletown

(1) Review data from Public Safety Commission (police)

Chairman Ford provided an update of the Public Safety Commission. He mentioned that Chief Costa has continued to do what the commission has asked, in regards to building community connections, by way of PAL. Chairman Ford explained that as Middletown continues to grow there would be a need for more police officers. He also explained that the reports received from the Police Department has been standard as far as investigations and responses to emergencies. However, they are still waiting to see a full report on the racial profiling/demographics. Chairman Ford reported that the Police Department seems to be on task regarding the Police Accountability Act. He lastly reported that the Police Department's online system has been unable to collaborate with the current online system to generate demographic reports. He indicated that there have been technical issues, and Chief Costa and the Police Department are working on it.

C. Discussion regarding community events

(1) Town halls/community feedback

(2) Foster collective Black joy

Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett continued with the discussion regarding community events of fostering Black Joy. She proceeded by listing events that recently took place, such as the Hip Hop Music Show and the partnership with the Middletown Racial Justice Coalition at the Amistad Ceremony. She shared her experience, and described how the Amistad event held an affinity, black only safe space, which she thought was great... In addition, she described an altar building ceremony, where people gave respect to their ancestors and shared their experiences. Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett asked the taskforce to start thinking about fun events to foster collective Black joy.

D. BLM Crosswalk

Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett initiated the discussion around the BLM



Crosswalk and the identified location. She mentioned how William Street was an approved location, but asked task force members to consider the Beman Triangle. She explained how Beman Triangle is possibly the first Black Subdivision made by freed Black people.

Task Member Barka spoke, and indicated that she liked the idea of having a crosswalk on the Beman Triangle. Member Barka asked if there could be an informational plaque to speak to the history of the Beman Triangle.

Chief of Staff Bobbye Knoll Peterson explained that the City is working on doing the research with the City Historian and Wesleyan University to have Beman Triangle placed on the National Registry of Historic Places, which will come with a plaque.

MOTION: Member Hart made a motion to approve and change the location of the Black Lives Matter Crosswalk from William Street to the Beman Triangle. Member Gartner seconded the motion. The matter passed with one abstention from Councilman Marino.

E. Update on diversity and hiring in Middletown

Chairman Ford suggested that the Task Force table this matter, as he would like to gather the data to properly address this item. He indicated that there is a lot of information that the Task Force needs to be able to digest. He thinks that this information is extremely interesting and the Task Force should consider having a meeting with Human Relations.

MOTION: Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett made a motion to table the item of 'updates on diversity and hiring in Middletown' until the next meeting. Member Gartner second the motion. The matter passed unanimously.

F. Welcome new members to the Anti-Racism Task Force

Chairman Ford announced that Member Daniels had recently joined the meeting; he introduced Member Daniels and gave him time to speak.

Member Daniels spoke, saying Good Evening to all, and apologized for his tardiness, as he was having some technical difficulties. Member Daniels expressed how it was an honor to serve on the Anti-Racism Task Force, and that he looked forward to doing great work.

G. Review, discuss, and vote on recommending Fair Rent Ordinance



Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett mentioned the need to table this item since she did not believe other Task Force Members had proper time to review the drafted Fair Rent Ordinance. She shared that the Fair Rent Ordinance was one of the last items late State Representative Quentin “Q” Williams worked on, and expressed the intention of making sure that this moves forward correctly. She explained how the City’s Office of General Counsel had already drafted the language for the ordinance, and reached out to the Anti-Racism Task Force for feedback, which she thought was nice of them consider the Anti-Racism Task Force. In addition, Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett shared some viewpoints of why the ordinance is important, and how it will effect BIPOC folks.

Chairman Ford added to her comments by asking Task Force Members to review the drafted Fair Rent Ordinance, and be ready to discuss at the next meeting.

MOTION: Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett made a motion to table this item for the next Anti-Racism Task Force Meeting. Member Rival seconded the motion. Matter passed unanimously.

H. Review 2023 Calendar and potential events

(1) Community engagement

(2) Workshops

(3) Make any changes to calendared events

Chairman Ford discussed the drafted schedule for upcoming events. He explained that the Task Force has money in the budget, and although they have been frugal with spending money, the money is there for the Task Force to use. He identified options to move forward with, such as community engagement events, workshops, and any other programs related to Anti-Racism. He asked the Task Force to think about how they would like to move forward. He also asked how the Task Force anticipates on participating in existing City events like Pride Month, Juneteenth, Black History Month, or whether there something specific, new, inventive, and creative that could be done for Middletown.

Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett added to his comments and said that if folks knew people with programming or ideas to please bring them forward. She encouraged that the ideas fall in line with the selected themes, and identified those themes as Community Engagement, Housing Segregation, Educational, Environmental Justice, and Criminal Justice.

Member Hart had a recommendation of providing legal counsel to BIPOC folks who experience issues with navigating the legal system, and/or having someone to



advocate for BIPOC folks while they navigate the legal system.

Member Lee asked if it would be appropriate to offer a series of workshops to the community and/or Middletown employees. He explained that in his experience, one-off trainings never seemed to be effective, and that this would not work to have sustainable change. He explained that the one-off experience becomes performative. Dr. Lee expressed how he would be happy to work with someone to do a proposal.

Chairman Ford expressed how he wanted to ensure that everyone remembered what his or her charge here on Anti-Racism Task Force was. Chairman Ford proceeded with expressing that, as a whole, the group should be giving recommendations to the Mayor's Office and the Common Council on how to root out systemic racism. He explained that it is not anyone's fault, but in order to see some change, it would require people to take some big risks and jumps. It would require tough conversations, and it cannot just be the performative. He ended with making sure that folks take time to make good recommendations that the administration can grab a hold of and move forward.

I. Revisit Anti-Racism Task Force Mission Statement

Chairman Ford asked folks to understand the Anti-Racism Task Force Mission Statement so that they understand what direction they are going in and why.

Chairwoman Armstrong-Crockett read the Task Force's mission statement and goals.

J. Review of NCCJ Report

(1) How we move forward regarding themes

(2) Review and discuss any reports/data collection from HRC

Chairman Ford explained the NCCJ report and how the Task Force agreed to move forward regarding the themes and working groups. He explained that the groups struggled to get together due to schedules and availability and asked that new members take some time to review the themes and decided on how they would like to move forward.

K. Quarterly Reports

(1) When the next report is due



Chairman Ford gave an overview of the March 2023 Quarterly Report provided to the Common Council. He mentioned how he will provide notes to support the report that was given.

L. Task force members check in

(1) Retaining a safe space for us

Chairman Ford opened the Task Force Member check in discussion. He asked that folks express how they were feeling to ensure that the Task Force is a safe space for everyone.

Member Hart indicated that he felt the meeting was somewhat weird seeing 30 police officers in the chat. He stated that these issues are old and systematic and are not local to Middletown. He hopes no one takes it too personally, but necessary work is being done.

Member Cotten spoke; he indicated that as a new member, he needed time to go over the information that he received. He expressed that he wanted to make sure, before he spoke, he understood what he is speaking on.

Member Gartner spoke and indicated that it was a very different meeting than what he had experienced over the last three years. He acknowledged that usually meetings are in a different space. He explained that he would be glad to invite members of the public and police officers to this space, with the idea that there would be a dialogue. He mentioned that the goal is to hold police officers accountable and to ensure that the concerns made from BIPOC communities are addressed.

Member Daniels provided feedback, stating that as a new member, he wants to take the time to review the information provided, so he can appropriately participate. He expressed how, although he is new to this, he is not interested in politics and confrontation. Member Daniels expressed that there should not be any confrontation, mainly because there is good work to be done.

Councilman Marino shared that he is a 20-year police sergeant retiree and a 10-term union president. He asked that his fellow Task Force members use him as a tool to help them understand where the Police Officers are coming from. Further discussion ensued regarding this topic.

Chief of Staff Bobbye Knoll Peterson expressed that she was involved in the architecture of the group; she confirmed that the Anti-Racism Task Force was crafted intentionally to be a space for BIPOC people to safely bring forward their experiences



and recommendations.

Member Daniels questioned if the Taskforce was all on the same page and if everyone was there for the same cause.

Chairman Ford spoke of the need for Task Force Members to be on the page to understand the direction of the Task Force.

5. Adjournment.

MOTION: Member Hart made a motion to adjourn, Member Gartner seconded. Meeting ended at 7:49 PM.