

Metuchen Human Relations Commission

Tuesday, April 6, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Call To Order: 7:38

Attendance of Commission Members & Liasions

✓	Robin Brown	✓	Shannan Gonzalez	✓	Richard Green III
✓	Hazel-Anne Johnson-Marcus	✓	Lorraine LeSter	✓	Amanda Lin
✓	Asela Mourao	✓	Ozair Omarzai	✓	Andrea Orlando
✓	Edward Porowski		Max Rubin		Sheri-Rose Rubin
✓	Michelle Tang	✓	Nadia Tariq	✓	Reena Wade
✓	Ed Zelley				

Present member(s) of the public: Bobbie Theivakumaran

Review & Approval of minutes: March minutes - Approved by all, with the exception of members who were not in attendance at the last meeting.

Role of Secretary: Richard Green III resigned from his role of secretary and nominated Nadia Tariq to take on the role. All approved. Richard will send Nadia access to the MHRC Google Drive where meeting minutes are stored.

Council Liaison Report: Sheri-Rose Rubin (via email to Hazel-Anne)

Team vaccine is working diligently to get Metuchen residents vaccinated. 40% of Metuchen has been vaccinated thus far.

There is a new candidate, Dr. Joel Branch, that will be running for the seat of Councilwoman Rubin, as this will be her final term on Borough Council. Dr. Branch is running with Councilman Jason Delia on the Democratic ticket. Steven Kitsko will be running against them as the Republican candidate.

There is progress in the construction of a new pump station that will service both Metuchen and Edison. There will be a bond ordinance to approve funding for it at the next council meeting.

Public Comments:

Via email from Sheri-Rose Rubin to Hazel-Anne: James Belikove reached out to the HRC in regards to the Race Relations Council which was in place a while back. He is interested in sharing the history of this organization during the Civil Rights era. Sheri-Rose Rubin had a conversation with Reverend Owens to begin planning a future event. Mr. Belikove is also interested in creating a Human Relations/Civil Rights college scholarship to be awarded annually to a Metuchen High School senior.

Bobbie Theivakumaran: Bobbie is eliciting the help of the HRC to highlight issues that members of our AAPI community have faced around racism. She along with others are working on a PSA campaign to get the message across about this issue. One idea is to feature adults and younger individuals stating some of the racist comments made to them on camera followed by a statement about how these types of micro/macroaggressions are tolerated but shouldn't be because they are harmful. Bobbie asked Michelle for help with recording these messages.

Bobbie also brought up the Police Transparency Bill. More information is available at:

<https://www.speakupnj.org/nj-police-transparency-bill/>

NJ is behind when it comes to police transparency so this bill is very important, although very basic. Other states like FL have already passed this bill. Bobbie is asking for us to support the bill and the policies that can make a difference, by clicking the link and sending a letter.

Old Business:

Update on Windows of Understanding Collaboration with Metuchen Arts Council: Reena scheduled and held a planning meeting on 3/22 that Reena, Richard and Andrea attended. There will be another meeting with the presenters and artists on 4/14. The format will be similar to those in the past. The event will focus on Climate Change and the Greenway. The artists will talk about their art and the connection to Climate Change. The date of the event will be on 4/21. Richard will create and send out an event invite. Hazel-Anne brought up that it would be important to note during the event how climate change specifically impacts communities of color. Father Zelle mentioned that someone should at some time talk about the toxic sites in Metuchen and notice where they were located and how cancer rates were impacted in certain neighborhoods as a result.

New Business

Tentative 2021 Event Planning Schedule

Apr 21 - Windows Of Understanding - Climate Change Conversation @ 7:30 PM

May 21 - World Day: Hazel-Anne asked, what might this event look like this year? Asela offered a suggestion to hold a virtual event to highlight cultural diversity of businesses in Metuchen. Maybe a campaign to highlight businesses and give back to them. Shannan's husband is on the Metuchen Farmer's Market committee and has offered to help get involved with MHRC in some way. Asela mentioned that she isn't sure if the event will be held virtually or in a physical space so there may or may not be a need for food but we can discuss further. Asela and Amanda will help with planning.

June - Ongoing Ally Conversations LGBTQ+ will be on June 9th

Juneteenth - Andrea proposed doing an event for this holiday. Bobbie mentioned that Speak Up NJ is planning an event around the anniversary of George Floyd's Death. HRC and Speak Up NJ will work together to create events around Juneteenth and the anniversary of George Floyd's Death.

October: Indigenous Peoples Day - Will be held in October. Hazel-Anne will discuss with the Mayor and Councilwoman Rubin to how best to secure Reverend Norwood for speaking at the event and to see what his vision is for this event.

December: Human Rights Day in December. Reena along with the help with other members will help bring in art component similar to last time

Social Media Strategy: Michelle, Nadia, Andrea and Hazel-Anne are part of the sub-committee. Hazel-Anne asked if anyone would like to head the committee and take over posting on social media on behalf of the HRC. Richard will allow Nadia and Michelle to be admins so they can post content. Andrea will look into a free Hootsuite account and what that will allow us to do. Nadia will send out an email to set up a meeting for the subcommittee to discuss further. Ed P. will help us figure out ways to use Tik Tok as a means to get messages across.

Board of Education Update: There is a plan to open full day/5 days a week at the elementary and middle school levels. All staff that wanted vaccines have been offered the opportunity to obtain them. After those staff members are vaccinated and also after looking at the rate of infection in our area, Dr. Caputo plans to allow for a full day/ 5 days a week opening for all students.

The BOE is having discussions about incorporating all gender bathrooms. The Administration has started to measure and plan out how to include an all gender bathroom in the high school. Then plans will be made to do the same at the middle school. There will be a referendum on how to make all school spaces more inclusive for our students.

Other New Business:

Robin mentioned an event that the Accessibility Committee will host around housing accessibility in our town next month. She mentioned that she is very limited as to where she can move to. This is an important topic to discuss. Hazel-Anne and Richard mentioned other individuals on the council and in town that have done work around this issue in town and may be of help for the event.

Shannan proposed thinking about how we can be better allies to our neighbors that are in low income housing and senior citizens. It was discussed that there is a judgmental undertone when the discussion of renters is brought up. What can we do to be better allies to our neighbors that rent? What opportunities can we create for mingling with residents that live in the apartments that are tucked away and hidden to create more opportunities for neighborliness? Shannan will work on creating a subcommittee around this topic. Hazel-Anne will share a template with Shannan on how these events are typically run.

Father Zelley: The Metuchen-Edison Area Interfaith Clergy Association and the Jewish Community Center of Middlesex County Invite You to Attend Our Annual Yom Hashoah Holocaust Remembrance Program. This Thursday is the Holocaust Remembrance Day. Thursday April 8, 2021 @ 7:00 PM streaming live from the JCC Facebook page and the MEAICA Facebook page

MEAICA has been offered a chance for our parishioners to have a day of vaccines via JFK on 4/17. If you know of anyone that needs to be vaccinated, this is an opportunity for them.

Also another MEAICA event on 4/19. Panel discussion about how our faith communities have been talking about racism over the past year.

Upcoming Meeting/Important Dates

- Apr 21 - Windows Of Understanding - Climate Change Conversation @ 7:30 PM
- April 28 - Silent No More: Congregational Anti-Racism hosted by First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/146476995637>

- May 21 - Metuchen World Day, details TBD

2021 Metuchen HRC Meeting Schedule

May 4 | Jun. 1 | Jul. 6 | Aug. 3 | Sep. 7 | Oct. 5 | Nov. 2 | Dec. 7

Adjourned: 9:07 PM