

Human Relations Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
September 22, 2016 5:00 p.m.

**Attendance:** Brandie Doyle, Henry Fernandez, Richard Kagan, Rev. Thea Racelis, Howard Thody, Jeanette White, and staff, Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

**Excused Absence:** Dr. Marcia McIntosh, Debbie Ruimerman, and Tamika Browne, Youth in Government Representative

**Absence:** Justin Carbonella and Angel Biney, Youth in Government Representative

**QUORUM:**            Yes:   X          No:           

**Call to Order:** Brandie Doyle, Vice Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 5:24 p.m. She asked the commission members to state their names for the record.

**Public Session:** None

**Regular Meeting:**

**Approval of Minutes:** Richard Kagan motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes of July 14, 2016. Rev. Thea Racelis seconded. The vice chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried with two abstentions.

**Old Business:**

**Round-Table Discussion:** Brandie Doyle moved the discussion to the next order of business, which was a round-table discussion of future meetings and presentations. Before any discussion began, Faith Jackson said to the commission that she wanted to apologize for the interruption that occurred at the last meeting. The commission had the room booked for two hours. Counsel was rushing out the commission at 6:00 p.m., even though the room was booked until 7:00 p.m. Chairperson, Justin Carbonella was getting frustrated with the situation because the commission couldn't conclude its discussion. However, she wanted to assure the commission that in most cases, the room is booked for two hours for their meetings.

Brandie Doyle thanked Faith Jackson for the explanation and asked the commission if anyone had any proposals for presentations. At a prior meeting, the commission had spoken about alternating meetings between working meetings and presentations. Howard Thody suggested inviting the man from New Haven to speak on refugee resettlement. Rev. Thea Racelis said that she had offered to make the connection to the group dealing with the refugee resettlement here. However, the discussion never landed on priorities, and there weren't any motions to move forward on any specific ideas, due to the fact that the last meeting was concluded abruptly.

Faith Jackson recommended that the commission resume discussion on the items that were brought forward at the last meeting. Rev. Thea Racelis asked if the commission would be interested in hearing

a presentation regarding refugee resettlement. She further explained that having the commission hear presentations may not be the best use of Chris George's time as there have been multiple presentations already, and the coalition has been active in this area. Therefore, it may be a more effective idea for the coalition to take a leadership role and provide an update to the commission on what's been happening. For example they are preparing to resettle their second family.

Brandie Doyle asked the commission to revisit the specific role the Human Relations Commission would serve in regards to refugee resettlement. She added that, while not at the last meeting, she understood that the issues raised previously were surrounding the feelings of opposition in the community in receiving the refugee families. There was further discussion on the resistance, and Rev. Thea Racelis clarified that while the refugee resettlement has been publicized and in the forefront of community discussion, the identities of the family members are not public knowledge. Therefore, the recipients of the hate mail and other negative letters have been people such as herself, the mayor, and others active in the effort. The coalition Middletown and other areas and is made up of secular, religious, and private groups and individuals, who have worked and trained through IRIS to do the work of helping these families. We have made a commitment to resettle three families, one of which is here and doing wonderfully. The coalition is preparing for the second family.

Brandie Doyle asked about the time frame for the second family. Rev. Thea Racelis explained that IRIS is the parent organization. A private individual can't say he or she wants to invite a refugee to live in an apartment. There is a process. At the point where the coalition says its ready, which requires an apartment, furniture, etc., it can be any time with as little as a week's notice. Additionally, they don't know what time someone is arriving until the day of arrival. Also, there's a commitment to have a culturally appropriate hot meal waiting for them when they arrive. If the intention of the commission is to receive more information about the Middletown aspect, having some of the leadership from the coalition come to speak to the commission may be a better use of resources. However, if the commission has a great number of follow up questions, Chris George would probably be willing to be a speaker.

Faith Jackson advised the commission that Mr. Chris George was selected to receive the 2016 Willard McRae Diversity Award for his work with refugees and others. Rev. Thea Racelis said that was great, and it was a well-deserved honor.

Faith Jackson added that this topic is a good one on which to focus. Possibly Doug Clark of the coalition could come to talk to the commission. Rev. Thea Racelis agreed and added Linda Miller, another person involved in the coalition, as a suggested speaker. The speakers could talk to the commission on how it may assist in this effort, such as accepting donations or raising funds. The coalition is set up as a nonprofit, and the Human Relations Commission could ask for funding, etc. on behalf of the coalition. Faith Jackson advised that her office or the mayor's office could be a drop off point for donations, if this was acceptable to the mayor. Also, they could consider utilizing jean day as a way to raise funds. Both Faith Jackson and Rev. Thea Racelis spoke on how organized the coalition was in tasking different committees with all aspects of getting the families settled, such as household needs or help with employment, schooling, and language skills. Brandie Doyle asked if the commission wanted to make a motion to have Doug Clark and Linda Miller make a presentation regarding refugee resettlement efforts in Middletown. Richard Kagan clarified that the commission would be interested in how it can assist and what it could do, as opposed to a presentation geared toward providing background information.

Rev. Thea Racelis motioned to invite Doug Clark and Linda Miller to present to the commission the coalition's work on refugee resettlement in Middletown in order for the commission to determine how it can support the work. Richard Kagan seconded. The vice chairperson called for a vote. The motion properly carried.

Brandie Doyle requested Rev. Thea Racelis to reach out to Doug Clark and Linda Miller. She agreed to do so. Brandie Doyle then asked the commission if the presentation should be made public. Henry Fernandez said that based on the potential for hostility, this presentation should be for just the commission. There was further discussion on this issue. However, Faith Jackson advised the commission should stay on track with its motion, which was to ask the speakers to present to the commission for further understanding of how the commission could assist with the efforts. The commission agreed that the presentation would be for them only. Rev. Thea Racelis confirmed that she was inviting them to speak at the November 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. There was agreement to that date.

**New Business:**

**Review and Discuss Miscellaneous Articles:** Brandie Doyle moved the discussion to New Business and asked if there was any discussion on the miscellaneous articles. Faith Jackson advised that she send articles regarding various issues of interest to the commission for review so it can stay up to date on different topics, such as housing, race relations, etc. She specifically mentioned the article from the National Housing Coalition. Additionally, she drew the commission's attention to the article regarding the worst cities for affordable housing and the follow up information on Connecticut's affordable housing. There was further discussion on the issue of affordable housing, median income, and the cuts in funding for certain programs.

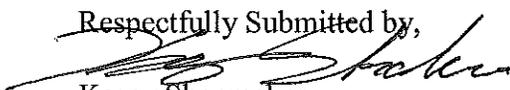
Rev. Thea Racelis said that this issue ties into homelessness, and it's something being dealt with by the Middlesex homelessness task force. Additionally, it could be a good topic for the Human Relations Commission to address next year. Faith Jackson advised that she would be very interested in learning more about the task force and its funding because the Walter C. Jones Fund works closely with the program to bridge tenants who are behind in their rent and facing eviction, especially now that CRT's Eviction Prevention Program is no longer funded. The commission agreed this topic would be a great one on which to focus after hearing the upcoming presentation and having another working meeting.

**2016 Attendance:** There was no discussion on this topic.

**Announcements:** The next regularly scheduled meeting will be **Thursday, November 17, 2016**, in conference room 208.

**Adjournment:** With no further discussion, Brandie Doyle asked for a motion to adjourn. Richard Kagan motioned to adjourn the meeting. Jeanette White seconded. The Chairperson called for a vote. The motion was unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,

  
Kasey Shoemaker,  
Administrative Sec. III