

Chairperson
Aaron Richman



Members:

Lilian Chukwurah
Izaida Gonzalez
Robyn Kennedy
Edward G. Robinson
Elizabeth O'Callahan

Vice-chairperson
Cara Berg Powers

**City of Worcester
Human Rights Commission**

**Monthly Meeting Summary – Monday August 7th, 2017, 6pm
Worcester City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber, 455 Main St., Worcester, MA**

Members Present: Aaron Richman, Robyn Kennedy, Izaida Gonzalez, Lilian Chukwurah, Edward G. Robinson, Elizabeth O'Callahan

Members Absent: Cara Berg Powers

Staff Present: Jayna Turchek, and Kathy Esparza

1. Call to Order and Introductions

A quorum was established and Chairperson Aaron Richman called the meeting to order at 6:12pm. The Chairperson welcomed the Commissioners and those present. Commissioners and staff briefly introduced themselves.

2. Approval of July 10th, 2017 meeting minutes

Commissioner Gonzalez motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Robinson seconded. Unanimously approved as written.

3. New Business

A. Brief review of City ordinance pertaining to the work of the Commission

Chairperson Aaron Richman summarized, in part, the duties and responsibilities of the Human Rights Commission as written in the city's ordinance. Chairperson Richman requested the commissioners reflect on the role of the Human Rights Commission in supporting its ongoing work for the city.

B. Request for collaboration in the production of The Trial of American Slavery

Cedric Arnold spoke on the initiative to put on a mock trial of American Slavery, and asked the commission for assistance in submitting a request to use the Levi Lincoln Chamber to stage the event.

The trial is an accompaniment to the Frederick Douglas Community Meeting hosted at City Hall earlier this year. During the trial, viewpoints of figures from throughout history provide commentary on slavery as a reflection of American values. A script was sent by Mr. Arnold for Commissioners to review.

Potential discussion points to be addressed:



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- Do values outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution line up with the lawfulness of slavery?
- How did Christianity play a role in slavery?
- How can we do things differently going forward to make our community stronger?

Although outreach for the event was already done by the organization and its community partners, Mr. Arnold suggested the Commission could also help support the event by passing along a flyer once one was developed. The potential date for the event is September 27th. Director Turcek will look into the availability of the room.

The Commission invited Mr. Arnold to return during the September 11th Human Rights Commission meeting to provide an update on the event.

C. Presentation on Youth Violence Prevention Initiative

Eric Batista and John Genkos of the Office of the City Manager provided an update on the current progress of the Worcester Youth Violence Prevention Initiative. They provided a brief history, as well as, an overview of the initiative's strategic plan, which will be published once the last details are finalized.

Following a surge in violence around the city in 2015, the Office of the City Manager conducted an assessment to study its systemic causes. It found that youth from African American and Latino communities face substantial risk factors that contribute to youth violence, and are disproportionately affected. From this assessment, multiple organizations, institutions, and community members came together to form a coalition. This partnership then began to organize and collaborate on strategies to support youth, and prevent youth violence.

Over 70 organizations and 150 community members participate under the leadership of local governance. Seven working groups, each with an individual focus, report findings of their monthly meetings to a Planning Committee. The Planning Committee evaluates the findings, collaborates on potential interventions, and reports to the Governance Committee, which oversees the initiative and can effect change at a policy level.

The multi-organizational alliance focuses on prevention utilizing a comprehensive, trauma-informed approach. Identifying trauma as a major risk factor in later involvement in youth violence, the WYVPI employs strategies to prevent and proactively address the effects of trauma by increasing access to resources for high-risk families, diverting youth from the court system, and pro-actively providing support for victims and witnesses of violence.

A multi-disciplinary risk team, based on the HUB model out of Scotland, and comprised of several mental health and community agencies, works in partnership with the Worcester Police Department to evaluate the most high-risk cases. This process allows inter-agency cooperation to provide wraparound support as well as to streamline and optimize resources.

When asked if diverting resources to the most acute cases, Mr. Batista explained that agencies are able to provide more services to more individuals sooner, because catching the intensive cases early ultimately decreases the amount of time and resources needed to help them stabilize.

Mr. Batista and Mr. Genkos summarized preliminary findings of this approach, citing a decrease in specific types of youth violence, a shift in beliefs about youth violence and police, and evidence of a quantifiable cost savings to the city. Youth and Police Dialogues were conducted in two schools and a youth agency in a specific area in the Main South neighborhood as one of the initiatives of the Byrne Grant, which was awarded to the Main South Community Development Corporation. When participants in this initiative were surveyed, it showed that there was greater trust among youth and a greater understanding among police officers. All officers surveyed reported seeing value in these dialogues and recommended that more police officers have some involvement in the program.

In response to a question of universal supports that decrease risk factors, Mr. Batista described Recreation Worcester, a program aimed at getting kids engaged in activities at local parks that served 1,300 kids this

summer. The program was expanded into schools this past year. Behavioral mental health training is provided for staff. After school activities provides youth with engagement and skill building that protect against youth violence. In the 2017-2018 school year, 600-700 students are expected to register.

On behalf of the Commission, Chairman Richman thanked the Mr. Genkos and Mr. Batista for their time and presentation and asked if they would be available for follow-up questions. They extended an invitation for the Commission members to attend a working group meeting to observe the WYVPI in action.

D. Discuss involvement at upcoming city neighborhood watch meetings

Kathy Esparza presented information regarding Crime Watch Groups in the City of Worcester. Each month, 51 meetings are held, thirteen hosted by the Worcester Housing Authority. The format of each varies. Ongoing outreach includes emails lists, save-the-dates and flyers. Meetings average 15 in attendance per meeting, and 30-50 on average for Shrewsbury Street. Commissioners were provided with a list of meetings and re-committed to attending, at least, one meeting this quarter.

Commissioner O’Callahan reviewed a survey for meeting attendees and a field note template for commissioners. Both were developed to gather additional information about Neighborhood Watch Meetings. The field note template contains a set of closed and open ended questions on a single sheet. The template can be utilized by Commissioners to record their observations about salient aspects of the meeting, such as whether the meeting started on time. The survey contains a combination of closed ended questions and Likert-scale responses for individual attendees to complete anonymously at their Neighborhood Watch Meeting. The survey would be given out by meeting organizers to encourage all attendees to respond. Commissioners were asked to review both templates, in addition to Ms. Esparza suggested questions for field note template and determine if any information can be added.

E. Review of proposed definitions for racism, discrimination and health equity as approved and forwarded by the Worcester Partnership for Racial and Ethnic Health Equity

Director Turchek presented a list of proposed definitions for racism, discrimination, and health equity. The commission was asked to review the definitions approved by the Worcester Partnership for Racial and Ethnic Health Equity. The definitions were created to fulfill the objective to “create a body of language or terms that can be used as references to improve CHIP Health Equity.” Director Turchek also cited a need for consistency among city departments, and stated that these definitions would also be adopted by the city.

Chairperson Richman asked Commissioners to review the material individually prior to the September 11th meeting, and come prepared to make recommendations to amend or adopt the language as written.

F. Announcements:

- Departure of Dr. Malika Carter and City to post shortly for replacement of the Chief Diversity Officer position
- August 22, 2017, 4pm- Forum and Q&A with Michael Botticelli (former Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy on the future of addiction recovery), Levi Lincoln Chamber of City Hall
- August 31, 2017, 5:30pm, International Overdose Awareness Day Candlelight Vigil, Worcester City Hall Plaza
- September 6th-9th, 2017, PRIDE activities and parade
 - September 6th, Pride Paints the city rainbow on main street - 9am-1pm
 - September 7th, pride flag raising 3-4pm
 - September 7th, Free shuttle bus to Burns bridge for a bridge lighting ceremony

- September 9th Pride parade 11am-12pm. Assembly begins at Institute Park. The parade route will follow Main Street. And be followed by the Pride Festival 12pm-5pm
- September 9th, Youth pride dance

Chairperson Richman asked Commissioners to review their availability and consider attending the parade.

Commissioner Robinson asked if the proposed ban on conversion therapy had been reviewed by the legal department. Director Turchek will look into the status.

4. Old Business

A. Recommendation to Citizen Advisory Council for resident requirement as threshold requirement for boards and commission membership

Director Turchek provided clarification that the CAC could change the requirements as a procedural rule without a vote from the City Council. Changing the name may be a city ordinance request because the name of the council is described in the city's ordinances.

This is an opportunity for the Human Rights Commission to make its intent known and present a single item to the Citizens Advisory Council directly. Chairperson Richman will attend a meeting on behalf of the Commission to suggest that a residency requirement replace the registered voting requirement to be considered for participation in boards and commissions.

Commissioner Kennedy put forth a motion for the Human Rights Commission to request attending the next CAC Meeting and put forth this recommendation. Commissioner O'Callahan seconded. Unanimously approved as stated.

B. Review assignments for police community relations work plan

This item was tabled due to time constraints. To be reviewed at a future meeting.

5. Location of next meeting (September 11th, 2017, 6PM): City Hall, Esther Howland Chamber

6. Adjournment at 8:05pm