

Human Relations Commission
Meeting #2021-04
May 24, 2021 - 5 p.m.

A meeting of the Human Relations Commission (HRC) was held via Zoom on Monday, May 24, 2021, at 5 p.m.

IT Director Nicole Leininger noted that the remote attendees are from the Abington HRC and turned the meeting over to Chair Hightower who called the meeting to order. In attendance were Chair Hightower, Vice-Chair Cunningham, Secretary Carpenter, Mr. Badami and Mr. Maltin. Also in attendance were Supervisor Jeffrey Campolongo, Township Manager Roman M. Pronczak and Assistant Township Manager David J. Mrochko. The two members of the Abington HRC include Rosemary Jenkins and Joanne Kleiner.

A motion was made by Mr. Badami, duly seconded by Ms. Cunningham to approve the minutes of April 26, 2021. There were no comments or questions.

Chair Hightower noted that the Commission members have been busy training and learning since the last meeting, with much to learn about running an HRC. She turned the meeting over to Ms. Cunningham who has met a few local HRC members and expressed how wonderful it is to be connected to this greater community. She welcomed the two members from Abington who are here to present what their HRC does.

Ms. Jenkins began with a mention of Tri-States, and Ms. Cunningham said this group has been attending the sessions and the information is extremely valuable. Ms. Kleiner added that it is the best place to connect with other HRCs and learn about what others are doing. The presentation began with Ms. Kleiner noting that their commission was formed with five members in 2012 when Abington passed a non-discrimination ordinance. There are now seven members. They received training from the state HRC and then began to learn on their own. They have not had a complaint to date. The Abington HRC Mission Statement states in part "...will promote the provisions of Ordinance 2029 which prohibits discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations" and "...recognize the inherent dignity and worth of all people". Ms. Jenkins quickly scrolled through the pages of their presentation that is shown to local groups in Abington Township, and offered to share it with our HRC to assist with preparing one for Whitpain. The Abington members had in-house training with the Department of Justice (DOJ) regarding facilitating community dialog. They reach many through their Facebook page with information also present on the Township's website. With their outreach, they have generated goodwill throughout the Township. They

have developed programs for the Abington YMCA and for the staff of the Keswick Theater, and have provided training within the Abington Police Department in implicit bias. Chair Hightower asked if they track attendance when they provide community outreach programs. Ms. Kleiner responded that they do not generally provide outreach to the entire community, but to organizations that request it, so no, they do not keep track of attendance. When Abington Night Out is held, they do gather information such as business cards and make connections that way. More recently they have become involved with the AAPI Community as a result of recent events.

Ms. Kleiner continued by noting they have one big project a year that they work on, as they are all volunteers and meet once a month. This year was the showing of the film “Walking While Black: L.O.V.E is the Answer” with the Abington Police Department and Citizens and Police Together (CAPT). Going forward, they will be doing something with the AAPI Community. Ms. Carpenter asked that they share the contact information of the DOJ so our HRC can initiate community dialog. Ms. Kleiner also suggested that mediation training be taken through Good Shepard Mediation, although there is a charge for their services – approximately \$500 for a three-day training. Chair Hightower thanked them for attending and sharing their experiences.

Chair Hightower moved to the next agenda item with the discussion of old business. The HRC members attended the Tri Sates meeting, and she and Mr. Maltin attended a couple of local HRC meetings, and they are much the same as this one in being newly formed. She thanked Supervisor Campolongo, as well as Ms. Leininger, Mr. Pronczak and Mr. Mrochko for being good partners. It does not seem as though other groups have the same support. Ms. Carpenter added that she enjoyed the Tri States meeting and its informality with open dialogue. It was a good mix of representatives, and many were generous with their time and content. Mr. Maltin said he has learned much about many different communities. Various approaches suit the communities/organizations they serve. Chair Hightower noted that Tri States is putting together a series of speakers for training purposes, and she has volunteered to assist with getting speakers for different subjects with Tri States. Ms. Carpenter will also assist with contacting two prospective speakers.

Chair Hightower then opened discussion about the training the HRC had with the PA HRC. Much good information came from that training, which Ms. Carpenter summarized for them. It was suggested that the ordinance be edited, and Chair Hightower asked how difficult that would be. Supervisor Campolongo said it isn’t difficult, though it would make sense to make a collective update, rather than piecemeal. The edits would require approval

from the Board of Supervisors at a public meeting. The Board would entertain a recommendation from the HRC for an amendment, the Board would take it under consideration and then have the Solicitor review and prepare an amended ordinance. Chair Hightower said they will review the suggestions that have come up and present them as one. Supervisor Campolongo said he would be interested in seeing the distinctions between the state HRC and Abington's HRC. It may help to form our suggestions. Ms. Cunningham suggested that a subcommittee to review the updates might be helpful. She also mentioned that during the training with the state HRC, Mr. Summerson said this HRC has the power to edit the ordinance. Mr. Pronczak explained that what was said is not accurate, as the HRC has the power to execute the duties set forth in the ordinance, not the ability to amend it. Mr. Badami agreed with Mr. Pronczak, as he reviewed the ordinance after the explanation by Mr. Summerson. Mr. Pronczak also discussed the suggestions made by Mr. Summerson, one of them being the number of members on the HRC. Mr. Summerson suggested that the number be increased to five. Our ordinance is structured a bit differently than other ordinances he has reviewed. It states that the Chair will designate one person to take in the information but not be involved in the mediation process or anything else related to the complaint. It would be good for Mr. Pronczak or the HRC to follow up with the Solicitor to see if that is why it is structured as it is. Confirming what Supervisor Campolongo stated, Mr. Pronczak said a recommendation from the HRC with the requested updates would be sent to the Solicitor by his office to draft an amendment, which will have to be advertised for a hearing to be held before the changes go into effect. Supervisor Campolongo added that in reading the ordinance, he believes that because our ordinance is broader than the state ordinance and provides protections in areas that the state does not, we the Township, as well as the HRC, have the final say with respect to how to interpret our own ordinance. It is possible that Mr. Summerson did not review our ordinance specifically, though it is clear we all agree that any amendments need to go through the Board of Supervisors.

Chair Hightower asked if we have an MOU with the state. Supervisor Campolongo said we do not, but probably should. He will run it by the Solicitor. It might be a best practice to have one based on the nature of what we do. Chair Hightower thought it might be good if other HRCs could share what they have with us. Ms. Cunningham asked if it would be possible to have a recorded copy of the training session to help with any necessary edits to her notes. Mr. Pronczak said he would check with Mrs. Leininger to possibly set up a drop box specifically for the HRC. Mrs. Leininger agreed that it is a good idea which will enable the HRC and others designated to access the drop box and share information as opposed to emailing back and forth. Chair Hightower agreed that using the drop box for sharing information will be great.

Chair Hightower moved on to subcommittee reports, asking Ms. Cunningham to update website content. Ms. Cunningham reviewed with everyone what Abington HRC has done to spread good news and events and engage with the community. She added that Mr. Mrochko is checking with the Solicitor to see if there are any concerns, and we are still waiting for more details on that. Mr. Badami followed up stating he has been going through several HRC sites in an effort to see what a best practice is, and what we should include in ours as far as drop-down menus and the level of content. He is preparing a report for review by the group which should be available by the next meeting. Some of the best he's found are accessible to all and easy to find. Others are difficult. We need to make the information easier to find quickly. Chair Hightower thanked him for his update. Ms. Cunningham requested that the email box be added to the website.

Chair Hightower said she and Ms. Carpenter are working on strategic planning. The state HRC has a strategic plan that the two of them are reviewing in order to compose ours which will be posted on the website. We want to make sure we are moving forward in a way that is well documented and formatted and will become the lighthouse of our HRC.

Chair Hightower then discussed additional committees that will have to be created. One will be a document committee, another an ordinance committee and also an outreach committee. Mr. Maltin volunteered to be part of the outreach committee. Ms. Cunningham will lead the ordinance committee. Mr. Badami will work with Ms. Cunningham on the ordinance committee, and Chair Hightower and Ms. Carpenter will work on the documents. In discussing volunteer interests, Chair Hightower sent an email to the person who reached out to volunteer, though as of yet, she has not responded.

Chair Hightower asked if anyone else was on to offer public comment, and Mrs. Leininger responded there was no one. She asked for any comment from the Supervisors and staff. Mr. Pronczak said the motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the last meeting, though a roll-call vote was not taken. Chair Hightower called a roll-call vote to approve the minutes of May 24th: Ms. Cunningham, aye; Ms. Carpenter, aye; Mr. Maltin, appointed for Mr. Badami, aye, and Chair Hightower also voted in favor. The motion carried.

Supervisor Campolongo noted that the Facebook page will have to be put on hold for the moment. As long as we are able to get the information out as proposed, we can revisit the Facebook matter or something similar down the line. He also discussed raising the Pride flag for the month of June. At the last

Board meeting, the Board of Supervisors voted to raise the Pride flag in support of Pride month. An event will be scheduled for early June, which hopefully will be attended by the Board of Supervisors, members of the HRC and community members. Details will be shared when available. Mr. Mrochko will notify the HRC members when the date is secured. Mr. Maltin raised a concern of how to communicate this event other than through the Wire. Mr. Mrochko responded that it will be on the Police Facebook page, sent out through Twitter, through the Parks and Recreation Facebook page, and also on our website. We will try to get media attention to this as well. Ms. Cunningham is pleased that the Board of Supervisors supports the efforts of the HRC and its values.

Chair Hightower thanked everyone for their participation. Upon motion by Ms. Cunningham, duly seconded by Mr. Maltin, the meeting was adjourned at 6:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alissa Carpenter", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Alissa Carpenter
Secretary

/v