

Human Relations Commission
Meeting #2021-02
March 22, 2021 - 5 p.m.

A meeting of the Human Relations Commission (HRC) was held via Zoom on Monday, March 22, 2021 at 5 p.m.

IT Director Nicole Leininger noted that there were no remote attendees 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 Supervisors Kimberly Koch and Jeffrey Campolongo, Township Manager Roman Pronczak and Assistant Township Manager David Mrochko.

A motion was made by Mr. Badami, duly seconded by Ms. Cunningham to approve the minutes of February 22, 2021. Chair Hightower called a roll-call vote: Ms. Cunningham, aye; Ms. Carpenter, aye; Mr. Badami, aye and Chair Hightower also voted in favor. The motion carried.

Discussion followed regarding the mission statement. Chair Hightower said there was much dialogue back and forth. She asked Mr. Maltin to highlight the edits he suggested to the initial draft statement. Mr. Maltin explained that he condensed the draft to make it more succinct with the idea that this statement will be the basis for community outreach. It will guide the group focus and objectives of the HRC. Chair Hightower read the statement and asked if any member wanted to offer any comments. Ms. Carpenter thought it should be made clearer and more concise to encompass all who might be discriminated against, and maybe it should be revisited after the members receive training before approving it this evening. Ms. Cunningham believes “assisting, adapting and upholding” is an important aspect of purpose with the nature of the commission. Chair Hightower suggested that a committee of two members be established to work toward finalizing the mission statement, with several community members so as not to violate the Sunshine Laws. Mr. Badami suggested that a more concise statement be established so as not to leave anyone out unintentionally, with a supplemental set of languages to include all of the protected classes. Chair Hightower appointed Ms. Carpenter and Mr. Maltin as the committee members to work on the mission statement and confirmed that every member would be available for consultation as needed. Mr. Campolongo offered that there is no risk of omission if the mission statement is patterned after our ordinance. Mr. Pronczak noted that this is consistent with established Board policies as well. Ms. Cunningham added that if we want the mission statement to parallel the ordinance, it may make sense for the committee to evaluate if a shorter, more

direct approachable language statement would be more appropriate, and then get into details.

Chair Hightower called for a moment of silence for the many things that have been going on in the news recently referencing people that we are going to serve.

Chair Hightower moved forward with an update on training, noting the PA Human Relations Commission held a town hall with a powerful presentation covering what is happening currently. She asked Mr. Maltin to summarize what was covered. Mr. Maltin shared that the message “stopping hate in our state”, and the organization that exists at the state level would handle questions from hearings to complaints to education to support. He added that it was a realization for him as to how extensive the Pennsylvania organization is to deal constructively with the issues of discrimination. Our role at the local level is education and keeping everyone aware with understanding how we can deal proactively with discrimination in the Township. Ms. Cunningham added that it was a wonderful event with a great spectrum of experienced participants. It is also rare that there would be more than one Asian panelist in a presentation like this. She added that it is important to understand how the Asian community is different than other minority communities, as the majority of those who are in the United States are immigrants, and there is a fear of reporting what is happening. Chair Hightower agreed and added that as a committee who will be educating people it is good to have resources for people who need them.

The next topic of discussion centers on website content. Ms. Cunningham noted that the EEOC passed a resolution condemning the recent violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to reaffirm their commitment to combat all forms of harassment and discrimination. In light of everything that is happening, we need to say it again. Mr. Maltin said that PA and other HRCs that deal with the reticence of affected groups in reporting, and it is important to identify the rights people have. Ms. Cunningham responded that it is important for community members to be able to receive information in a way they can understand it.

Chair Hightower moved forward with a review of the estimated 2019 Census information. Our role as an HRC is to focus on protected classes and this information is helpful in identifying the origins of the members of the community. Mr. Maltin questioned how to ensure that the feedback from our outreach is received from the Asian community in order to be able to address what we are discussing. Ms. Cunningham said she and her husband are Asian Americans and attended a vigil for victims of Anti-Asian hate crimes. There

has been a rise in hate crimes and hate incidents, as did happen on March 16th in Atlanta. For the community to understand they are seen and heard is important. Her family history models the American experiences that are brought up in these events. Ms. Cunningham then read the names of the eight people who lost their lives: Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Soon Chung Park, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Delaina Ashley Yaun and Paul Andre Michels. Mr. Maltin thanked Ms. Cunningham for her explanation, and Mr. Campolongo added that the reason this HRC exists is to be available to the community, and making sure people feel safe.

Chair Hightower began discussion about website content and suggested a subcommittee for that purpose. Ms. Cunningham and Mr. Badami volunteered, and they will work with Mr. Mrochko and Ms. Leininger. Mr. Mrochko suggested that the subcommittee can work to build up the website after meeting with Mr. Summerson from the PA HRC. Ms. Cunningham asked about a social media presence. Mr. Mrochko said it will be made part of their discussions. Chair Hightower added that they should review the Township's social media policy as well, also noting volunteers are welcome.

In preparation of training on April 26th, Chair Hightower suggested each member review the ordinance in case any member would have questions for the presenter. Ms. Cunningham said she knows the Township is looking into amending the ordinance to add protection for age and family status. She noted upon reviewing the Philadelphia HRC, it has a strong focus on protection of individuals who have criminal records, which is not a protected class under our Township's ordinance. Ms. Cunningham asked what the process is for identifying additional protected classes. Mr. Campolongo said we can entertain the idea of additional protected classes and offered that the HRC should bring anything before the Board that they would like to have considered to potentially amend the ordinance. Ms. Carpenter offered to create a Google doc to add links to resources we find for easier searching. Mr. Badami suggested taking a look at California's effort at protection of classes. Chair Hightower thought it would be good to have a growth plan. Mr. Maltin mentioned that the HRC website page in Lower Merion is a good one.

Chair Hightower said it should be noted that the training on April 26th is only for this HRC, and future training in conjunction with local HRCs will be scheduled over time. Mr. Badami said the Lansdale HRC reached out to our newly formed group to meet at some point. Mr. Campolongo has a listing he will circulate to the HRC of other municipal HRCs.

Ms. Cunningham asked about the mailed Township newsletter and how the HRC could be included in that. Mr. Mrochko said any info that the HRC

would like to incorporate in the newsletter should be submitted by August. Chair Hightower again noted that volunteer input from the community would be welcomed. Ms. Cunningham asked if it makes sense to reach out to Wissahickon High School for student participation. Chair Hightower said it would be best for a strategic planning subcommittee to take the lead with businesses in the community. She offered to participate, and Ms. Carpenter will join her. Ms. Carpenter said it is important to ask for help from a diverse population, though not a marginalized group. Ms. Cunningham noted that this is the first day of LGBTQ Health Week, and we want to support our community.

Chair Hightower called for any public comment. There was one attendee who had no comment. She then called for closing comments. There were none. She thanked everyone for their participation and reminded all that the next meeting is April 26th at 5 p.m. followed by a training session. Mr. Maltin asked when the information about the Sunshine Act will be shared. Mr. Pronczak responded that the brochure put out by DCED that he intended to share is specific to elected officials, and in talking with the Solicitor, he confirmed that all meetings are public meetings and must be advertised.

Chair Hightower called for any additional discussion. There was none. Upon motion by Ms. Cunningham, seconded by Ms. Carpenter, the meeting was adjourned at 6:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Alissa Carpenter
Secretary