

**CITY OF NEWARK
DELAWARE
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMISSION MINUTES**

January 25, 2022

MEETING CONVENED: 7:01 p.m. GoToMeeting

MEMBERS PRESENT: Marihelen Barrett, Annalisa Ekbladh, Tamesha Garnett, Blaine Hackett, Jacob Higgins, Patrick McCloskey (arrived at 7: 11 p.m.)

Absent: Sasha Aber

STAFF: Jayme Gravell, Chief Communications Officer
Tara Schiano, Legislative Coordinator/Deputy City Secretary

1. CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Blaine Hackett, at 7:01 pm.

2. MOMENT OF SILENCE:

The Chair offered a moment of silence.

3. ROLL CALL

In attendance were Marihelen Barrett, Annalisa Ekbladh, Tamesha Garnett, Blaine Hackett and Jacob Higgins. Absent from the meeting were Sasha Aber, and Patrick McCloskey arrived at 7:11 pm. Staff members in attendance were Jayme Gravell and Tara Schiano.

4. APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 28, 2021

MOTION BY: MR. HACKETT, SECONDED BY MR. HIGGINS: TO ACCEPT THE NOVEMBER 23, 2021 MINUTES AS RECEIVED.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 5 to 0.

Aye – Barrett, Eckbladh, Garnett, Hackett, Higgins .

Nay – 0.

Absent –Aber, McCloskey.

5. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

THE AGENDA WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Aye – Barrett, Eckbladh, Garnett, Hackett, Higgins .

Nay – 0.

Absent –Aber, McCloskey.

6. DISCUSSION : OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Hackett asked if any commission members wished to discuss any new business. Ms. Barrett believed it would be helpful if there was a process to glean more input from citizens and groups that may feel under-represented. It was her opinion that the commission had just jumped right into setting priorities. She further stated she did not have a problem with that but believed there had not been enough input from people in the community. Mr. Hackett explained that had been discussed at the last meeting and the suggestion was made to have a Town Hall style meeting eventually. Ms. Barrett apologized for missing last month's meeting and thanked Mr. Hackett for the update. Mr. Hackett understands due to Covid it was understandable that any Town Hall meeting considered in the very near future would be virtual. He reminded the commission that if there were any members of the public present they would be able to speak at 7:45 pm. Ms. Eckbladh reminded the commission that not everyone has the ability or the resources to join the meetings. She said she would be willing to chair a subcommittee on community input so the commission could potentially meet outside of the monthly meetings to see if there are people within the community who represent other community groups or even other committee members to see if they may have good ideas on how to continue to get input from the community. She suggested the commission take a more active approach as she believes the Town Hall approach is asking interested parties to come to the commission. Mr. Higgins expressed interest and believed that would be a good idea. Ms. Schiano interjected and reminded the commission since there were visitors present at the meeting to identify themselves when speaking. Mr. Hackett reminded the commission he offered his church as a venue as they have a fellowship hall and the space holds at least 30 comfortably spread out. He thought rotating special interest groups may be a viable idea as well. He also suggested considering some more locations that may be more centrally located. He understands the logistics may be difficult in reaching the intended groups. Ms. Garnett reminded the commission there were several people that were not present at last month's meeting. She mentioned that she had said there are events that are coordinated through the City and she had recommended finding out how to "tag along" to these events and perhaps set up a table. She reminded all the virtual events were suggested by the commission until Covid subsides as some community members may not feel safe at an in-person event. Ms. Eckbladh suggested Mr. Higgins and she brainstorm the ideas put forth thus far yet but still ensure that FOIA rules are followed. Ms. Barrett informed she had a conversation with individuals from the Newark Partnership about something similar they are trying to do. She volunteered she will share that information with the commission. Mr. McCloskey said he was happy to help as well. He believed it was a challenge to get the information out to certain demographics. He believed the black community may be reached through church groups. He stated he was not aware of any local LGBTQ coalitions or commissions. He believed some of the church outreach programs may be able to offer direction. Mr. Hackett stated the Newark City website was an option to disseminate information and reaching out the Newark Post may be an option. He informed he attended the City Council meeting the previous evening virtually and the issue of reaching the public was raised as well as community engagement and he believed the City's position was "we are putting it on our website and if people do not go on the website then, oh well." He added that it was his opinion that public comment was limited in that the public may comment on an issue in some instances. As an example, he used the Casho Mill Road project (parking) and that people can comment but basically he believed the decisions are already made. Ms. Garnett said she receives email newsletter which include activities through the City including community events. Ms. Barrett suggested asking Council what projects they believe to be priority. Ms. Schiano interjected that Ms. Gravel was present and had some information to offer the commission on different social media platforms that are a great tool in reaching the public. Ms. Schiano also reminded the commission of Community Day to provide information to the public on what the Diversity and Inclusion Commission has to offer. Ms. Barrett suggested asking the City what they are doing to recruit more diverse employees. She also asked what the City was doing to try and get more people from different aspects to come and attend the Council meetings to offer input. Ms. Ekbladh said she did not

necessarily feel comfortable with making a statement like “Vacant spots in the police department should be filled with people from more diverse cultures” or very specific things like that until the commission has more data and information about what the representation is in every level of City government. She would like to make a request of the mayor to provide a breakdown at every level of City government including staff members and boards and committee members. After obtaining the information and reviewing and then if the information shows there is no diversity or limited diversity the commission can make a strong statement saying the City has to do better and there has to be a goal to do better. Ms. Garnett interjected and stated in the first meeting it was recognized by the City and stated “the City has struggled with recruiting and retaining diverse candidate pools for both paid employment opportunities and volunteer boards and commission position. While efforts have been made to increase diversity in applicant pools particularly for the police department, ideas from this commission (Diversity & Inclusion Commission) are the purpose of this commission. Additional tasks are identifying any barriers that may be present that are not being addressed. She stated that Council already recognizes that they are lacking in the area of diversity when it comes to recruitment not just for the police departments but other positions as well. Mr. Hackett stated when meeting with Will Smith, he was informed that out of maybe 75-80 police officers, there were only 3 of color. Ms. Schiano informed the discussion of the breakout of employee statistics had been discussed at the first or second meeting. Ms. Schiano further added she will ask Ms. Hardin to provide the report to the commission. Ms. Ekbladh stated while she appreciates the City willingness to listen to the commission, she acknowledged that the commission are not HR professionals. Ms. Garnett said she believed it was not important to be an HR professional and that the commission were looking at the topic with fresh eyes and a unique perspective. Mr. Hackett said when individuals met with Corporal Smith of NPD he stated there were difficulties with recruiting all across the state. Mr. Hackett had said when he was talking with an officer he believed they stated one of the issues they reported encountering with minorities was they were having difficulties with the psych test and he thought maybe the test was biased and Ms. Eckbladh agreed. Mr. Hackett also stated some were having difficulties passing the drug test. He recalled a meeting at his church with four or five potential candidates and NPD is trying to recruit but he still wonders what else can be done. Mr. McCloskey said he could not speak on NPD but was very familiar with UDEL and can say police applications across the board in the industry have been down significantly. He believes it is a cultural issue perhaps it is a change in policing in general and noted there have been uncertainty and tensions in police/community relations. He does know that NPD makes very good efforts to recruit all types of people of all types of backgrounds. He would check the racial background of NPD and was not certain there were only 3 people of color. He suggested using the whole city employment base as a whole. He added that the psych evaluation is pretty important to make sure that police departments are hiring people that are not predisposed to violent tendencies including racist tendencies and is pretty standard across the board. He said he has never heard of people from diverse backgrounds having more difficulty passing a psych evaluation. He suggested taking a deeper dive on these issues. Ms. Barrett suggested new ideas and believed thinking out of the box is a good idea. However, she believes it would be helpful to hear from the City what they have done and what they believe does not work. Mr. Hackett stated he may try and reach out to Corporal Smith to see if he is available to attend a meeting. Mr. Higgins asked if the Juneteenth item would be discussed. Mr. Hackett apologized and said the topic would be discussed shortly.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT (TOWN HALL STYLE) (3 MINUTES PER PERSON) 7:45 IF PUBLIC IS PRESENT

There was no generalized public comment. There was an individual present that experienced technical difficulties and was unable to speak. Ms. Schiano reported she forwarded the letter from Yin Dan. *(entered into the record)*

8. DISCUSSION OF JUNETEENTH AS A POTENTIAL CITY HOLIDAY

Mr. Higgins suggested not just making it a holiday but have a way for the community to learn about

what Juneteenth is. He suggested doing things in the community to celebrate. There was an individual present that experienced technical difficulties and was unable to speak. Ms. Schiano reported she forwarded the letter from Yin Dan received via email (*entered into the record*). Ms. Schiano read the letter into the record. Mr. Hackett said Juneteenth is one of the oldest national celebrations commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States. Mr. Higgins suggested making a recommendation to City Council to make the week or even a few days leading up to Juneteenth of events and celebrations to inform the community of the significance of the holiday. Mr. Hackett informed the commission that the City of Wilmington has many venues that offer recognition during the month of June. Mr. McCloskey offered that UD had made Juneteenth a paid holiday two years ago and they offer information on the holiday to commemorate. Ms. Schiano reminded the commission that consideration for a City holiday to mark this event in history came from the City Manager with the hope that not to just have a paid holiday but to celebrate the significance of the date. Ms. Bennett liked the idea of engaging black owned businesses in the City to organize events around their businesses. Mr. Hackett said he would reach out to the area churches including the black churches to put something together as well. He noted that Father's Day is around that time as well but believes the churches could incorporate something. Mr. Higgins suggested having members from the commission to suggest to City Council as well. Ms. Eckbladh suggested this commission propose or make a public statement stating their support of a proposed holiday. Mr. Hackett said he plans to attend future Council meetings. Ms. Eckbladh cautioned against the commission going to City Council with a request at each Council meeting that may not be a well thought out idea or well vetted. She wanted the commission to focus on ideas/issues that are well thought out and doable. Ms. Schiano interjected and noted there was a lot of good information going back and forth and added that when she worked with another City commission as a staff person the commission would submit their finalized ideas in the form of a recommendation (voted on by the commission prior to submission to Council). Following the submission to Council, if Council wanted to discuss the item further, it would be placed on a Council meeting agenda for further discussion. She informed the commission that she would forward the commission a sample of a recommendation. Mr. Hackett expressed his intent is not to go to each Council meeting and suggest ideas without the commissions approval first. Ms. Ekbladh informed that each member of the commission is appointed for a two year term enabling the opportunity for others to serve on the commission if they so desired. Therefore, the representation on the commission is rotating and ever changing. Ms. Schiano reminded Mr. Hackett that Jayme Gravell was still in attendance at the meeting and would be happy to discuss the social media platforms available.

Ms. Gravell, Chief Communications Officer reported there is a citizen notification platform whereby citizens can sign up for seven categories of notifications via phone call, text or email. The categories are public safety, traffic, community events, public meetings, etc. One can sign up for all three methods of communication so there is no chance of missing anything of importance that is happening within the City. Ms. Gravell also reported there are email blasts used in conjunction with email lists. Parks and Recreation also has their own list as well. Ms. Gravell reported the City uses the following social media platforms; Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Nextdoor app. There is also a resident newsletter that is mailed with every utility bill. The newsletter includes such information as applying for a board or commission, who is your Council person and tips on how to become involved. Electronic billing includes the links for the newsletter. Ms. Gravell hopes this information provides more information to the Diversity and Inclusion Commission as she believes through various avenues the City has a large reach and much effort is made to ensure this and impact the most people. Mr. Hackett asked how such information gets to the public if someone does not have a cell phone or is homeless. Ms. Gravell added that City Hall has customer service professionals working in PUBS that ask walk in customers as well as phone customers if they would like to be included on the InformMe messages and there are signs and posters available. Ms. Gravell also added that customer service

representatives at the City will assist a customer via telephone or in person to help them sign up for InformMe messages. Ms. Barrett thanked Ms. Gravell for her information and Mr. Hackett added he will be signing up as well for some additional features. Yin Dan offered a thank you for including them in the conversation and thanked the commission for offering the information on the terms of the commission members. Ms. Schiano informed she reached out to Yin Dan via email prior to the meeting to make sure they were aware they could participate they can participate in the meetings during public comment and will follow up with them following the meeting to let them know the process in the future should they wish to submit their application.

9. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2022**

10. **ADJOURNMENT**

Tara Schiano
Legislative Coordinator/Deputy City Secretary

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