

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

February 22, 2022

MEETING CONVENED: 7:03 p.m. GoToMeeting

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

STAFF: Renee Bensley, City Secretary
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 7:03 pm.

2. MOMENT OF SILENCE:

The Chair offered a moment of silence.

3. ROLL CALL

In attendance were Sasha Aber, Marihelen Barrett, Annalisa Ekbladh, Tamesha Garnett, Blaine Hackett, Jacob Higgins and Patrick McCloskey. Staff members in attendance were Renee Bensley, Jayme Gravell and Tara Schiano.

4. APPROVAL OF JANUARY 25, 2022

MOTION BY: MR. HIGGINS, SECONDED BY MS. EKBLADH: TO ACCEPT THE JANUARY 25, 2022 MINUTES AS RECEIVED.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 7 to 0.

Aye – Aber, Barrett, Eckbladh, Garnett, Hackett, Higgins, McCloskey.
Nay – 0.

5. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION BY: MR. HIGGINS, SECONDED BY MR. MCCLOSKEY: TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 22, 2022 AGENDA.

Aye – Aber, Barrett, Eckbladh, Garnett, Hackett, Higgins, McCloskey.
Nay – 0.

6. THE NEWARK PARTNERSHIP: LEANN MOORE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ms. Moore, Executive Director of The Newark Partnership (“TNP”) stated TNP is a non-profit organization. She stated they work closely with the City. Ms. Moore reported she had hoped that Leon Weiner

and Associates, the developer for the George Reed project would be able to attend but were unable to do so. She was able to provide background information on the proposed project. She shared it will be located on East Main Street near Bings Bakery between East Main Street and Delaware Avenue. The proposed total units are still being worked out. She noted she would be happy to provide the information. She noted the developers have built similar housing projects in the Wilmington area with great success. She added they are also the management group for the Main Towers in Newark. Social workers are provided on-site as well; which is very beneficial to the senior housing. Mr. Hackett asked if the proposed George Reed project will target mostly affordable housing for seniors. Ms. Moore confirmed and noted if the project was approved and made it through the federal process it would be for subsidized housing (vouchers). Phase I would be all senior living and Phase II, if approved and would be a separate process, would be subsidized for families.

Mr. Hackett asked if there were any questions from the commission. There were no questions from the commission. Mr. Hackett thanked Ms. Moore for her participation. Ms. Barrett asked if Ms. Moore could address the community dialogues the TNP is doing. Ms. Moore stated she has been working with various groups, churches, mosques, temples in and around the City of Newark. The Newark Interfaith Leaders Group has assisted in coordinating some of the social justice efforts. She reported the big ask from them is rather than it being a smaller echo chamber it should be a combined effort to bring the groups together as different groups have different perspectives on the issues. She further added she will continue to work the Interfaith Leaders Group as well as some of the Newark residents to pull together the "Newark Dialogues of Difference" to really talk about and educate people about different experiences on the "hot button" issues like housing. Ms. Moore stated they are going to send out a registration for anyone that may be interested in joining. The groups will contain no more than 12 people and each session will discuss a different issue. The larger outcome is to get more information so the faith communities can work towards more systemic change. These groups hope to start late March/early April. The registration forms will go out to the sixteen different faith communities as well as the NAACP.

Mr. Hackett asked if there were any questions from the commission members. Ms. Aber praised the effort and thanked Ms. Moore. Ms. Barrett believed it was important to bring this topic to the forefront as she thought it would be one way for the Commission to address efforts for citizen input. Mr. Hackett believed it would be a great group to partner with. Mr. Hackett suggested making a motion to be able to partner with the interfaith group. Ms. Aber mentioned there have been a lot of different groups that offer many opportunities. She added there seems to be a lot of groups that have a strong workforce or volunteer group behind them that are moving their ideas forward. She also believes the Diversity & Inclusion Commission have struggled together as a group and what their goal is and how to reach people. She suggested maybe the goal of the commission is to reach people and to take all the great information that is out there and let different groups of people know and get more people involved in those groups. She further added that as a group that meets once a month that is not permitted to communicate outside of the group there is only so much that can be conquered. But if the commission can help to advance the groups that already exist doing wonderful work that may be something really good for the commission. Mr. Hackett said Ms. Aber was making a very good point but further added the one thing that the commission does have to do is make recommendations to Council once the commission does get enough information to do so. Mr. McCloskey agrees with Ms. Aber and as the commission determines what direction they are going to go in, it may be easier to offer more. Mr. McCloskey said he had never heard of The Newark Partnership, in terms of they are what they are working on. Ms. Aber believed that making recommendation to Council the commission needs to delve deeper into whatever aspect the commission is going to be making a recommendation because a lot of the groups have put in hundreds of hours and suggested the recommendation of the commission can be to meet with the groups and then go before Council and say we support this group if there is a way to give them more funding. She does not believe the commission should necessarily go to Council and say "hey I think they should do a, b and c" without putting in all of the research and education that these different groups have. She believes most the groups are very thorough and taking into account what she has heard and what has been presented; there is a lot of good that has been happening in Newark that a lot of people don't know about. She further

added how do we reach the groups that have done so much and make these connections. Mr. Hackett said TNP does have a diverse group and so does the Interfaith Churches. He reminded that the data already exists on a lot of these concerns. He believes all the Commission has to do is find a way to tap into the information and get it out.

At the request of Mr. Hackett, Ms. Schiano provided background on the process on how the Diversity and Inclusion Commission would be able to make a recommendation. Mr. Hackett believes the issues with the police department have been there for a long time and since the beginning of Newark history when referring to the lack of diversity in the police form. He believes this issue needs to be addressed before they go ahead and put people other than people of color in those positions; especially since there are three positions either available now or available soon; so, he believes the commission should get something into them before those positions are filled. Mr. Hackett continued with that is his belief and that is what he would hope would happen. Mr. Hackett said he has spoken with several people and including the recruiter of the police department, Corporal Smith, who has attended an event at his church. He has been trying to follow up about the four or five recruits that met with him and has not been able to get any information on them thus far. He hopes at least two of them would be African Americans. He believes there are about 70 police officers right now in the City, with one of them being African American and two Hispanics. He believes if there are three positions available, there should be two African Americans and it should not be a problem in his opinion.

Ms. Barrett asked how Mr. Hackett was thinking of framing such a recommendation. Mr. Hackett said as simply as possible. The Commission talks about diversity and inclusion and he believes that recommending a couple of African Americans be on there is not a rocket science; just say what we are asking for or what we are recommending. Ms. Aber asked if there would be a way to word it that we are looking for more diverse as opposed to just African American? She further added the recommendation could include Asian, women, etc. Mr. Hackett said he was just speaking specifically about this because the problem he has is with the phrase "people of color" is we could have an Asian woman or a Hispanic man and everyone but it excludes black people. He does not have a problem with his Asian brothers, his Hispanic brothers, any of that; but in this country the United States is all about black and white; whether we want to talk about it or not. Mr. Hackett believes his Asian brothers and his Hispanic brothers have had struggles but they have not been going the struggle as African Americans have been going through for over 400 years even to the present day. He further stated that even in the City of Newark with the diversity and inclusion it seems to exclude black or African American people; that is why every time we try to be pro black we get the same resistance why are we saying Black or African American why not Hispanic and why not Asian. He said he is not excluding he is saying they have not had the struggle that we have been having for 400 years; they have not been fighting but they have benefitted from the civil rights era and it is time that we stop trying to go around and gloss around it. He said he is not anti-anything he is pro black and he is not ashamed to say it. He believes it is time that the black population starts to represent as much as everyone else. He believes the more that is spoken on diversity; the more it excludes black folks and he believes it is time that black people be represented on the police force in the City of Newark.

Ms. Barrett said if there was only one African American person in a 70 person police force, then to say specifically we want at least two more African American makes sense to her. She does not believe that would not mean at some point they could say they want more Latinos or whatever. She believes that is a glaring disparity, if it is true. Ms. Aber asked if that is what we want or that would be the requirement? She definitely believes there needs to be more black officers on the force. But say one black person applies over the next year, are we trying to say wait? Mr. Hackett said if they apply or qualify and he believes they are having people qualifying in the area from all police forces. But he believes there are qualified black people and he would hope they would at least get them in if they qualify. Ms. Aber asked if there was anything in the Charter that says they need to hire a diverse workforce. Mr. Hackett said he does know this commission was designed strictly for these kinds of things. He said when looking over the history of the City of Newark he

believed there was very limited African Americans. You can hire the Hispanics and the Asians and all these other people but yet (unintelligible). He is not saying to hold those positions for them but if they are qualified they should be getting those positions.

Ms. Hardin said she believed it would be very beneficial to have the NPD attend. She noted that Corporal Will Smith is back on patrol and is not working his normal Monday-Friday schedule due to short staffing. She explained that may the reason why he has not reached out to Mr. Hackett. She mentioned that Lt. Andrew Rubin may be able to attend as he has taken over some of the recruiting for Will Smith. She reported the City was in the process of testing again and had received interest from several diverse applicants for every test she has been involved with. The problem is with the process as there are many pieces to the process. Unfortunately, she added, many potential candidates are getting lost in the background check step. She further noted it is a very competitive market with other agencies in the state. She noted the testing style have been changed. She reported the City had reached out to Guardian a company that assisted in revamping the process. She also added the City is working with a recruitment company and an RFP has been put together for enhance the process of getting more candidates.

Mr. Hackett thanked Ms. Hardin and understood it was a struggle. He said he has talked to one of the officers on the force and he said one of the problems is the African Americans cannot pass the psych test.

Mr. McCloskey believed it would be beneficial if the commission were able to get demographics of all of the applicants to compare to who is actually hired. He also suggested looking into what went wrong in the hiring process. He noted there are national averages and national recommendations. He further stated he is a firm believer that the police department should reflect their community; so, if Newark is 30 or 35% African American; that the recommendation should be that the police department should follow that. He does not believe it wrong to say that two of the three candidates that are hired in this group should be African American. Ms. Aber said she believes that is an excellent way to make a recommendation. But to also keep in mind that many agencies are having difficulty hiring. Ms. Ekbladh suggested that any recommendation include not only the police department but other groups.

Ms. Hardin said when she created the spreadsheet she did use a filter feature and noted on the top columns there are different categories. She stated that Ms. Garnett raised several good points about determining gaps in the processes. Ms. Hardin reported that after each test the data will be analyzed. Ms. Hardin reported during the last testing event there were 80 people signed up and 18 people showed up. She further added that not many potential candidates are lost during the psych evaluation; but added that each candidate is told to be very honest on their applications. She added that NPD has not sent anyone to the academy since April of last year.

7. DISCUSSION OF JUNETEENTH AS A POTENTIAL CITY HOLIDAY

- A.** Mr. Hackett said having these types of holidays are well needed and all for it; but he expressed concern about this holiday getting glossed over.

MOTION BY MR. HIGGINS, SECONDED BY MS. ABER: TO SUBMIT THE RECOMMENDATION TO MAKE JUNETEENTH A POTENTIAL CITY HOLIDAY

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 7 to 0.

Aye – Aber, Barrett, Eckbladh, Garnett, Hackett, Higgins, McCloskey.
Nay – 0.

Mr. McCloskey wanted to note that it is a federal holiday. Ms. Barrett mentioned there are a lot of

city's that recognize it as a holiday. Ms. Aber asked if the commission is asking for a special acknowledgement or to make it a paid holiday. Mr. Higgins reminded all the commission had discussions at the last meeting that the City would offer some sort of festivities.

Ms. Hardin added that there are unions involved in the City and the holidays that are scheduled off are part of their negotiated contracts. Additionally, this holiday has been brought up, specifically in the beginning of 2022 when the annual holiday calendar is distributed to employees. She noted there is considerable interest for the employees to have this as a paid holiday. She said she believed that Smyrna observes the holiday and some other local towns. Ms. Barrett asked if the state recommends it as a paid holiday. Ms. Gravell added that prior to last months meeting she did research to find out what municipalities in Delaware observe. She also compared with the County, State and Federal. She further noted that out of 12 entities the City of Newark is one of four that do not observe and give their staff off for the holiday. The State of Delaware does observe the holiday.

Mr. Higgins withdrew his previous motion.

MOTION BY MR. HIGGINS, SECONDED BY MS BARRETT: TO MAKE JUNETEENTH A PAID CITY HOLIDAY FOR THE CITY OF NEWARK.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 7 to 0.

Aye – Aber, Barrett, Eckbladh, Garnett, Hackett, Higgins, McCloskey.
Nay – 0.

B. Employee Demographics Discussion: There was no further discussion.

8. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, MARCH 29, 2022

Ms. Schiano mentioned that in person/hybrid meetings will start in March. She informed the commission that the fourth Tuesday on the month was unavailable for the commissions meeting. After discussion, the commission decided to meet Tuesday, March 29th at 7:00 pm with a hybrid option in place.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Tara Schiano
Director of Legislative Services/ City Secretary

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