

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

August 23, 2022

MEETING CONVENED: 7:11 p.m. Microsoft Teams

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tamesha Garnett (Presiding), Jacob Higgins, Sasha Aber, Marihelen Barrett

MEMBERS ABSENT: Blaine Hackett, Patrick McCloskey

STAFF: Tara Schiano, City Secretary
Devan Hardin, Chief Human Resources Officer

1. CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Garnett, at 7:11 pm.

2. MOMENT OF SILENCE:

The Chair offered a moment of silence.

3. ROLL CALL

In attendance were Marihelen Barrett, Jacob Higgins, Tamesha Garnett, and Sasha Aber.

4. APPROVAL OF JUNE 28, 2022 MINUTES

MOTION BY MR. HIGGINS, SECONDED BY MS. ABER: TO ACCEPT THE JUNE 28, 2022 MINUTES AS RECEIVED.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 4 to 0.

Aye – Aber, Barrett, Higgins, Garnett.

Nay – 0.

Absent – Hackett, McCloskey.

5. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION BY MR. HIGGINS, SECONDED BY MS. ABER: TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 23, 2022 AGENDA.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 4 to 0.

Aye – Aber, Barrett, Higgins, Garnett.

Nay – 0.

Absent – Hackett, McCloskey.

6. DELAWARE EDUCATION FUNDING FORMULA DISCUSSION

There was technical difficulty and Ms. Schiano used the chat function to ask the members if she

should invite the school district to attend a meeting. Mr. Higgins confirmed and reminded that he first introduced the proposal with the assumption the initiative would be led by the State. He was curious to learn the City's role in the process but welcomed any speakers or additional assistance. Ms. Garnett recalled the initial conversation but was unaware if any information had been provided to the Commission and confirmed the Commission's desire that a member of the school district attend to explain the City's role. Mr. Higgins read from the chat that Ms. Schiano stated that the City did not play a part in the process. Ms. Aber asked if Mr. Higgins still wanted a representative to attend. Mr. Higgins explained that his interest was to determine the City's role; his question was satisfied. Ms. Garnett recalled Mr. Higgins was also interested in how the funds were allocated as far as diversity and inclusion were concerned. Mr. Higgins wanted to the State to clarify how the funds were allocated since the City was not involved. Ms. Garnett asked that staff determine how the funds were distributed. Ms. Aber suggested the discussion could take place in October to allow the schools get through the first month of the semester.

7. POLICE RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Ms. Aber informed the Newark Police Department (NPD) hired a consultant team to recruit and advertise on the City's behalf. She noted that a few officers had been hired but seemingly lacked diversity; she pointed that more positions were upcoming on the force. She noticed Facebook advertising for the NPD had become more diversified but was unsure if any direct information was available regarding how hiring and recruitment was progressing.

Ms. Garnett read Ms. Schiano's comments from the chat confirming NPD hires. Ms. Aber recalled that two officers joined from other forces and hoped that the new hires brought experience and enjoyed the City. Ms. Garnett read further comments from Ms. Schiano that NPD's most recent hires were various ethnicities including African American, Hispanic, and bi-racial and confirmed Ms. Aber's statement that officers came from two different jurisdictions. Ms. Aber recalled that there were five new hires and was pleased with the additions. She noted NPD requested more money and incentives in order to be more competitive in the market because the City paid less than the County and State. Ms. Garnett informed that Ms. Hardin was also experiencing audio issues and had confirmed Ms. Aber's comment via the chat function.

Ms. Garnett asked if the officers had a 9-month or 1-year probationary period. Ms. Hardin explained that Certified Officers from another agency who passed all of the City's background checks and were ready for hire would participate in field training with the City's officers to become familiar with City policies. Non-certified officers hired from an academy would be subject to probation before becoming fully hired. Ms. Aber asked if the recruitment contractor had any hand in the new hires. Ms. Hardin informed that the contractors had not begun the recruiting initiative, but staff had been actively engaged in recruitment. She assumed the two new certified officers from Baltimore were receiving a pay increase as well as an improved quality of life in moving to the City. She believed the officers were looking forward to moving to the City and serving in a more community-based town. Ms. Aber asked if the officers were moving to Newark to become part of the community or if they would commute. Ms. Hardin assumed the commute from Baltimore would be too far and shared that NPD recruited many officers from New York. She revealed that cadets lived in the barracks at the academy which was similar to a military bootcamp; the cadets were at the academy for six months straight for training and tactical simulations. The six-month training allowed the cadets time to establish residences in the area; NPD did not have a residency requirement, but several officers lived in the community. Ms. Aber noted the Facebook posts for hiring were more diverse. Ms. Hardin shared that she sat in on the interview panels and confirmed that the panel was also diverse and included a female officer, a minority officer, and a senior level officer.

Ms. Garnett asked if there was a mechanism to measure the changes that were made in the recruitment process to determine effectiveness. Ms. Hardin would speak to Lieutenant Rubin or Deputy Chief Feeney regarding statistics. She shared that NPD recently participated in National Night Out and participated

in job fairs to recruit. Ms. Aber credited NPD for its efforts and Ms. Hardin confirmed that the current climate was difficult for many agencies as far as recruitment, and officers were a hot commodity, especially while trying to attract a diverse workforce in a competitive environment. She reiterated that two new hires were Certified Officers, and more were on the way; four interviews the week prior included two males, two females, and three were minorities.

8. DEFINING AND REFINING COMMISSION GOALS

Ms. Garnett asked if the Commissioners reviewed the information provided by staff. Ms. Hardin reminded that staff suggested various topics at the inception of the Commission a year prior and suggested the members review and reevaluate items into short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. Ms. Garnett referred to the initial expectations for the Commission and asked if the language encompassed the Commission's view of itself.

Ms. Aber pointed that the language was broad, and the Commission could only accomplish so much by meeting once a month. She felt the intent was positive but was unsure if categorization into goals would be beneficial and asked whether the Commission served more as a sounding board or information carrier. She felt that the goals were too vast for realistic accomplishment, and she did not know how to proceed. Ms. Garnett agreed and felt that the City assumed the Commission would solve all of its diversity problems. She continued that it became clear that achieving the goals in a timely fashion was unrealistic once the Commissioners learned more about the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and were restricted to meeting only once a month. She continued that many of the topics required continual discussion and could not be resolved quickly. She referred to the Commission's initial goals of recommending strategies to achieve the City's vision, to be inclusive, to recommend areas for investment where the needs were greatest, strategies for public engagement, and recruiting; she maintained the Commission had been discussing all of the issues but admitted the expectations were unclear. She asked how the Commission should prioritize into short- or long-term. Ms. Aber added that the Commission also functioned as a vetting mechanism for City Council and considered the Commission a sounding board with a political aspect.

Ms. Barrett suggested a longer, strategic planning session so the Commission could determine which goals were prioritized and create an action plan for manageable steps. She reminded that the first meetings indicated the Commission should focus on housing, but she was unsure if the topic was feasible given its complicated nature and the Commission's lack of resources. She suggested collecting more information from citizens on housing needs to share with the experts. She noted it was possible that the experts were receiving feedback through other avenues and the Commission needed to familiarize itself with existing information to avoid redundancy. She assumed the Commission would participate in community sessions to hear from the more marginalized communities with diminished resources. She had envisioned picnics or neighborhood block parties to solicit feedback through activities and maintained that the Commission had not heard enough from residents to determine with what goals the Commission should be tasked. She spoke with the previous-Mayor, prior to the Commission's formulation, on the need to create more diverse representation at the Council meetings because she witnessed that the majority of participants were white men with a few women and very few black people. She suggested the Commission could tackle attendance but emphasized the need to hear from the community to proceed.

Ms. Garnett agreed and explained that her initial perception was that the Commission would be in the field more because the public was not coming forward, so the Commission needed to go to the public; she was unsure how to initiate the process. She noted the Commission was recently invited to a function at UD and asked if anyone had attended because she did not realize the function was scheduled during the day. Ms. Hardin confirmed that she and Mr. Hackett attended the inaugural meeting and shared that Victoria Daniels did a wonderful job explaining UD's use of diverse suppliers when soliciting bids for jobs. She found the meeting to be extremely informative with excellent speakers and assumed Ms. Daniels wanted to make

the occasion an annual event.

Ms. Garnett read a comment from Ms. Schiano that Community Day was scheduled for Sunday, September 18th. She asked if the Commission could officially participate on its own or if it was required to seek Council approval. Ms. Hardin would speak with Parks & Recreation Director Joe Spadafino but instructed the Commission to inform the Parks & Recreation Department of the intent to participate. The Commission could then set up a table and provide information to the public; Ms. Hardin would ask other groups for their set up procedures. She confirmed the well-attended event provided a great opportunity for exposure and outreach.

Ms. Aber asked if the City provided the Commission with a budget for printing or posters. Ms. Hardin would reach out to Director of Communications Jayme Gravell for printing and informed that the City supplied tables and covers. Ms. Barrett suggested the Commission draft an interview script for feedback and Ms. Aber suggested the Commission have a board at the table for visitors to submit ideas on sticky notes and participate in conversations. Ms. Hardin suggested creating a QR Code for a survey to determine what the public wanted from the Commission. Ms. Garnett wondered if the Commission had enough time to organize before the event and asked if the group could discuss plans via email or if Ms. Schiano would serve as the representative to solicit information. She was concerned about any FOIA violations and asked if planning an event was allowable because she doubted the Commission could host a successful event if the meeting forum was its only chance for conversation. Ms. Schiano indicated she would facilitate the conversation. Ms. Garnett was enthusiastic to engage with the community and read Ms. Schiano's comments from the chat function that the Commission could communicate via email to plan the event and Ms. Schiano would serve as the facilitator and reach out to Parks & Recreation. Ms. Garnett asked if there were any scheduling conflicts for the September 18th event. Ms. Aber informed that she would not be involved in any event until her health improved but offered her personal tent and other supplies for the Commission's use. Ms. Barrett and Mr. Higgins confirmed that they could attend on the 18th and Ms. Garnett added the event to her calendar. Ms. Hardin offered to attend as well.

Ms. Garnett asked if the Commission should read through the topics and continue the discussion at the next meeting under Old Business. Ms. Aber confirmed. Ms. Garnett suggested beginning with more obtainable goals. Ms. Aber suggested using the feedback from Community Day as a basis for the discussion and Ms. Garnett agreed. Ms. Barrett agreed and suggested that the Commission review and prioritize the list individually for future discussion. She admitted that it was unclear how the Commission could make a difference in housing unless community voices could be presented to the bodies that were creating the programs. She wanted to refine the Commission's task list into smaller pieces and reiterated the need to individually prioritize the list to begin discussions on the top three initiatives to then create action steps. She suggested that prioritized lists be given to Ms. Schiano to tally. Ms. Garnett suggested sending an email to all of the members so the lists could be finished before the next meeting. Ms. Schiano confirmed that she would send the email to the members.

9. OLD BUSINESS

None.

10. NEW BUSINESS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Ms. Garnett reiterated that all members provide their prioritized lists for the Commission's goals. Ms. Aber added that staff should provide more information on police recruitment. Ms. Garnett asked that the school district be invited to the October meeting; Ms. Aber confirmed and emphasized the importance for Commission attendance. Ms. Garnett also wanted to discuss the outcome of Community Day.

11. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

12. DISCUSSION OF DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, September 27th at 7 pm.

13. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Garnett adjourned the meeting at 7:57 p.m.

Nichol Scheld
Deputy City Secretary

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