

**Human Rights Commission Meeting minutes**  
**January 21, 2021**

**Present:** Chair Ben Herrington, Vice Chair Petua Mukimba, Matthew Charity, Elizabeth Haygood, Sidonio Ferreira, Cedric Gonnet, Erika Loper, Deb Neubauer

**Staff liaison:** Jennifer Moyston

**Community Members Present:** Martha Hanner

- 1. Call to Order: Meeting called to order: by Chair Herrington at 6:37pm**
  - a. Chair Herrington invited public comment, no one offered comment
  - b. Chair Herrington invited comment from HR Commissioners:
    - i. Commissioner Ferreira gave info on housing trust: Looking at parcel on Rt. 9 to develop affordable housing. Second property near East St. school, waiting for Council to approve finances
    - ii. Praise to Jennifer for doing such a great job with the MLK celebration
  
- 2. Chair Herrington opened discussion as to HRC response to attempted coup on capitol:**
  - a. Chair invited comments on substantive Action Steps
  - b. Commissioner Ferreira stated he was glad the schools and town put out a statement, people are always asking why HRC doesn't do this?
    - i. Are there legalities associated with HRC putting out a statement? Does HRC have the independence to do this?
    - ii. Commissioner Neubauer seconded the desire for HRC to meet after these kinds of events and put out a statement
  - c. Chair Herrington invited consideration of HRC hosting a forum, or learning event
  - d. Commissioner Gonnet stated concern that kids are getting information from social media, which is an incomplete source, could HRC create a resource document?
  - e. Vice Chair Mukimba agreed with HRC hosting some type of educational engagement for all ages, to explore how the country got to the point of Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>? How can we learn to be better citizens of this town, country? Perhaps a workshop, summer event?
  - f. Chair Herrington stated 20% of those arrested so far are law enforcement or ex-military. Defund 413 made a direct demand that Amherst determine if any local police were involved and that there be consequences.
    - i. Staff Liaison Moyston encouraged Chair to reach out to the Chief of Police. Other Commissioners agreed HRC should follow up on this
  - g. Staff Liaison Moyston discussed confusion around what "Defund 413" is advocating for. Suggested inviting Defund to an HRC meeting to discuss what their platform is

- h. Community Safety Working Group (CSWG) has sent police a series of questions to answer. Police were trained this summer on de-escalation, and bias/racism. These trainings should happen regularly.
- i. Vice Chair Mukimba asked about Mental Health services in the town? Discussion over summer about this, money allotted, where has money gone?
  - i. Staff Liaison Moyston responded they were going to hire two police officers, but didn't. Will use money to do what the CSWG recommends. Approximately \$80 – 90K, will likely hire consultants to advise
- j. Question as to what Town Council has done on housing, education?
  - i. Town Council did do the resolution. Trying to move forward on making changes, trying to get buy in from community.
  - ii. Commissioner Ferreira stated Resolution is still theoretical, would like to see action.
- k. Staff Liaison Moyston suggested HRC & CSWG have a joint meeting
  - i. Moyston is also Co-Chair of the Core Equity Team, (CET) working on the town becoming more welcoming and inclusive.
  - ii. CET is working on a basic 101 DEI workshop, would start with town council and work toward all employees and volunteers
- l. Commissioner Loper stated that all High School Teachers & Para's went to a dismantling White Supremacy training over the summer, if there is money allotted, this was a good training.
- m. Further discussion on inviting CSWG, Rep from Town Council, Defund 413, Racial Equity Task force, to hear what they're working on since event at Capital, and since summer rallies
  - i. Commissioner Neubauer made motion to do as Commissioner Haygood suggested, Commissioner Loper Seconded that motion
  - ii. Staff Liaison Moyston asked for clarification about process
  - iii. Commissioner Haygood gave example of what school system did in response to summer events: School got grants, paid for a number of staff to go to training on dismantling white supremacy, created mandate to update all lesson plans, staff meetings, created a defending democracy group open to all, POCU has in-depth discussions about what happened, English curriculum has been revamped, science has changed their grading system to address inequity.
  - iv. HRC to bring speakers in, hold forum with deliverable of 5-6 action items, role of HRC is to facilitate that conversation.
  - v. Staff Liaison mentioned that LWV may be doing something similar, and Town Council & Police be invited separately
  - vi. Groups to be invited to HRC Meeting:  
School equity task force, Core Equity Working Group, Racial Equity Task Force, Defund 413, CSWG

- n. **Invitation to come from Chair and Vice Chair for February 18th HRC Meeting**
  - o. **March 4th HRC meeting Amherst PD & Town Council will be invited**
  - p. **Second HRC meeting on March 18th**
  - q. **Open Forum on March 20<sup>th</sup> at 2-4pm**
- 3. Planning for Black History Month & Lunar New Year**
- Raising of the flag, proclamation has already been approved**
- a. Theme for Black History Month is the Black Family:
  - b. Commissioner Haygood suggested inviting POCU students to read what they've already written about what family means to them
    - i. Staff Liaison requested Commissioners email description of a lesser known, and/or local African American in history, to be posted on town website, possibly also HRC Facebook Page, request to receive them by the 27<sup>th</sup> of January
    - ii. Second request for someone to connect with the Belchertown Library, to research Angeline Palmer
- 4. February 1 Black History Month Event: Flag raising always happens on the first, will be remote, and then air it at another time**
- a. **Black History Month Celebration will be Feb. 6, 2021**
- 5. Lunar New Year: Proclamation will be going before Town Council, will be working to form some kind of event, Feb. 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12**
- 6. HRC will postpone Retreat until can do in person**
- 7. Motion to Adjourn Meeting:**
- a. Commissioner Neubauer motioned to adjourn
  - b. Commissioner Loper seconded motion
  - c. Unanimous agreement to adjourn
  - d. Meeting adjourned at 8:13pm