

Franklin Township Human

Relations Commission Meeting

Minutes of December 13th, 2023

Present: John Tibbs, Gary Rosenthal, Rohan Kalidas, Quinlan Paris, Pete Clark, Nora Catiis,

Stan Rozario, Ron Poustchi, Alex Khazari

Excused: Edna Arguello Hitchner, John Samba, Linda Williams Montgomery, Shubhendu Singh.

Absent: Councilman Ram Anbarasam

Police Officer: Officer Malcolm Belvins

Guest Speaker: Michele Petersen and Steven Soprou

Meeting called to order at 7:03 PM

Minutes of October 25th approved

Police Report: At 9:35 on Saturday at Conerly Road Elementary school, there will be a toy drive. One toy per kid and one per adult. Household items for adults (cleaning supplies, bedroom sheets, cabinets for the bathroom, etc.). There was a food drive last Wednesday which continues to occur every first Wednesday of the month, regardless of weather conditions. On Saturday right across the street from KFC to donate toys to children. There were policemen and women like Malcolm who went with the children of families to go to Target on 'shopping sprees'. Officer Malcolm warns that if you start your car to warm it up, ensure to watch it because carjackers are at high-risk.

Guest Report: Michelle Peterson is active with the Seeing Eye foundation. Kenzy is the name of her puppy. The Seeing Eye provides puppies which help lead blind people around. Frank Morris and his mother were blind. He created the foundation. Children (in the ranges of 5-18) are tasked with training the puppies. These kids have to be members of the 4-H. The official building is on Milltown road, in Bridgewater. The kids are allowed to choose what breed, gender, and

color they want. What these puppy raisers do, after receiving the puppies at 6 weeks old, is attend 2 meetings per month and going to see the seeing-eye building in somerset county and there is a training circle in which they do various training activities like basic obedience (sit/stay/calm/lie down), puppy push-ups, “park time” which is going out for a walk to go to the bathroom. The dogs are rubbed down their back when using the bathroom to prepare them for the blind owner to be able to detect where their dog's feces is. One of the organization's major jobs is socialization. They are taken to the airport once a year and trained to be comfortable on an airplane and in a large crowd. They are also taken to various other places such as the church or the movie theater. The benefits of kids training puppies is learning life-skills. One individual who worked in the world trade center went to work every single day with their dog. In 2001, the dog saved the man's life because it knew something was wrong. The kids also get a scholarship from 4-H. The puppies return to Seeing Eye at around 14 months. They go to the country campus and the facilities are beautiful. As long as they pass their medicals, they can play with other dogs. They are then assigned to a trainer. The dogs are taught many things and are spectacular at

directing their owner. Intelligent disobedience is the coolest thing they are taught. This is when a command is given to the dog and it intelligently disobeys their owner if danger is seen ahead.

There is a 60% pass rate for the 4-H puppies. If they fail, they are put on a waiting list which takes around five years. Some of the dogs fail due to something as simple as going over surfaces.

The dogs also have zero aggression and do not bark or bite. They are not trained to protect their owner but rather help. This is only true for mainly the labs, however. These dogs are worth

around ninety thousand dollars. However, there is a \$50 application fee to get one of these pups.

The foundation pays for dog food and most other expenses. The ADA laws state that Seeing Eye

dogs are allowed to go wherever their owner goes. Nora asked if there were intruders, would

there be barking from the dogs? Michele responded absolutely not normally, and very rarely

owing to their lack of aggression.

Other Business: Chairman reported that Alex has been elected to the Township council and he

resigned as a HRC Commissioner and a round of applause was given to him. Gary told the

commission that he was aiming for Alex to become the liaison based on appointment by Council.

Alex gave a heartfelt message of working together on the council, and said it would be an honor to be a liaison. Alex informed that there is a food and security effort in town to bring different representations of different groups in the township. Alex reported at the last Council meeting a report was given about a health survey taken in the township. One major thing which was shared was that one of the wards had a life expectancy of 8-9 years less than another. This data was very useful and will help us improve the community. Alex also spoke on the mental health resources in the community. He wants the HRC to be aware of this. The HRC can play an important role in this bettering.

Gary reported that Edna, Nora, John Tibbs, and John Samba need to have their HRC seats renewed, and there will be openings as HRC Commissioners.

Mr. Clark announced that school representatives are getting ready for their diversity night. The next meeting will be in January. They are in the planning stages. This committee is made of people representing the Franklin school district.

A motion was made to approve the resolution reflecting the following HRC dates for 2024:

January 24th, February 28th, March 27th, April 24th, May no meeting ,June 26th, July 24th,

August 28th, September 25th, October 23rd, November, no meeting, December 18th . Motion

passed unanimously.

Edna announced that one of the things that is appreciated when going to other towns is the flags

with people who served in the military from that specific town. This ranges all the way from

WWII to people who recently served. It is proposed to apply this to our township. Many areas

have this. Mr. Rosenthal agrees it is a good idea and Edna will follow up as a possible HRC

project.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:04. Next meeting is January 24th.

Respectfully submitted,

Secretaries Quinlan Paris , Rohan Kalidas, Junior Commissioners