

**Franklin Township Human  
Relations Commission Meeting  
Minutes of January 24th, 2024**

**Present:** Gary Rosenthal, Quinlan Paris, K.J. Sharma, Councilman Alex Kharazi, Edna Arguello Hitchner, Johnny Tibbs, Rohan Kalidas, Joseph Pete Clark, Ron Poutschi, Stan Rozario, Linda Montgomery Williams

**Excused:** Shubhindu Singh, Nora Catiis, John Samba

**Guest :** Michelle Petersen

**Absent:** None

**Police Officer:** Officer Mathew Russo

**Guest Speaker:** Ed Potosnak, Deputy Mayor

Meeting called to order at 7:03 PM

Minutes of December 13th respectfully approved

**Police Report:** Officer Russo reported that 5 new officers were brought onto the force, with the police academy for those 55 or older going on to teach the community about what is going on in the police force. There should be an opportunity for civilians in the Spring. They are both around 10-12 weeks long and last from 1-3. They are to teach what patrol and traffic stops are like. They

will teach about internal affairs and more information on the police department. The 55 and older one has started already. Candus connections is the name of an art program run by the youth academy every Tuesday. There is also a chess program that will start on March 6th. There is a cooking with cops program at the highschool and it will be held at the stage house. Finally, there is a cadet program and Officer Russo is the liaison for this. It is specifically for highschoolers and can provide a cop-like experience. 732-873-2300 is the tipline for reporting of any suspicious activity in regards to public safety.

The Public Safety Director has reported there have been an unusual rash of burglaries and suggested that residents leave lights on all the time. The ARRIVE Together program is an alternative response to reduce violence and escalation. There are numerous complaints about speeding, and Sergeant Raics should be notified.

**Guest Report:** Our new deputy mayor Ed Potosnak. He is here to tell us how the HRC can help him. He says Franklin's diversity is something that needs to be supported and is critical. He brought up how people in a mental health crisis should not be greeted violently by police officers but rather in a more appropriate and de-escalating manner. It is a good thing that Franklin Township embraces this aspect and we all need to work together to push it forward. He says there would be a lot of moments for all of us where we have witnessed someone in crisis. Before he was on council, he was on the Board of Education as President and he worked to bring the BOE and the township closer together. A partnership with Zuffel medical center will help create

exam rooms, dental, and vision centers near school campuses to be open to the students and in the future- the community. It is an unacceptable issue that there are people who die from tooth infections and this is a big step forward. Folks need to get opportunities and they cannot because of access. The Middlebush school would be a great place to be renovated and made a good place for 3-4 year olds. No additions would not need to be made. There is also a forty percent monetary increase in cost to the township's healthcare, and had to be cut across the township to make up for the increase. Our tax dollars are going to be going towards a good cause as education and health are vital. When Ed was a teacher, he was asked if universal pre-k was important and he was appalled by the question. He feels strongly for this and that pre-k should be made accessible to everyone. The new proposed YMCA, a portion was carved out in order to make a new part of the YMCA to institute, and it is not cheap so there need to be solutions to help alleviate the cost. The new annex to our library opened a southern branch by the Franklin Park School and the BOE sold that land to the library. A traffic study is being done in the Business and Industry zone, with the amount of traffic particularly of trucks and warehousing and how it affects the community. In ward 1, a section of Franklin township, you are more likely to live longer than if you were in ward 4 or ward 5. This is due to multiple issues relating to healthcare accessibility. Transportation is also an issue and almost 6% of people who live in town do not have cars. A micro-mobility study will be done to see what can be done to solve this problem. If it is successful, some people may even drop their cars and take advantage of the new

system. The township wants the YMCA to be accessible to everyone which is why the topic of transportation came up. As we have developed more on Hamilton street, a large problem is parking. The amount of parking we have is not enough in that area and the parking issue makes it dangerous to drive in the area. Ed feels it is important to stay true to having retail on the bottom of multi-purpose buildings. We have to keep pushing this but it is complicated to get businesses to settle in this manner. There are a lot of opportunities for businesses and most that have started end up succeeding.

**Other business:**Chairman introduced New Human Relations Commissioner, K.J. Sharma was introduced to the committee.

John Tibbs reported. There was a massive erection of buildings in the 4th ward area which was considered gentrification. He also brought up how no graduates from college can afford to live in their own home town. He believes this is unacceptable and no one should be living paycheck to paycheck.

Mr. Kharazi brought up a health study which will identify two to three items that will help improve the community. The ARRIVE Together program started two years ago and was so successful that it has now been given a ten million dollar budget by the government to stretch across the state.

Edna asked if the medical centers mentioned earlier would focus primarily on more serious health issues. There is also mention of a partnership with Raritan Valley Community College.

A motion was made and unanimously approved to reappoint Gary as Chairman and Edna as Vice Chairman for 2024 .

The Chairman reported that the application for new apartments in the Kmart shopping center will once again be presented shortly to the Zoning Board. There will be comments of displeasure expected by residents again.

Flags and Other Towns project was which was proposed at the last meetings by Edna, was again discussed .It is now called Hometown Heroes. There is a you tube video able to be previewed, and the costs are being investigated. This project is to represent people who have served in the military. The question comes up of where we would want to put these flags up. The Hamilton Street corridor is being considered. Mr. Kharazi suggested asking a nonprofit organization to take action on it. Mrs. Edna also brought up a way of paying homage to those who settled here before we did. Mr. Clark suggested naming streets after veterans in regards to Mrs. Hitchner's idea.

It was reported that the governor has assigned January as Muslim heritage month and progression such as this is vital to the community. Linda stated the Poll workers are now needed desperately.

Next meeting on February 28th, 2024. The new Board of Education President will be the guest

Meeting adjourned at 8:15

Respectfully submitted,

Junior commissioners Rohan Kalidas and Quinlan Paris