

Franklin Township Human

Relations Commission Meeting

Minutes of February 28th, 2024

Present: John Tibbs, Gary Rosenthal, Rohan Kalidas, Councilman Alex Kharazi, Nora Catiis,

John Samba, Quinlan Paris, Ron Poutschi, Edna Hitchner Arguello, Sam Velu, Pete Clark, Linda

Montgomery Williams, KJ Sharma

Excused: Shubhendu Singh

Absent: Stan Rozario

Police Officer: Michael Russo

Guest: Quovella Maeweather , Public Safety (Police Director)

Meeting called to order by Chairman Gary Rosenthal at 7:00 PM

The newest commissioner Sam Velu was introduced to the Commission.

Police Report:

The Chess with Cops program that is run out of the Youth Center is going to be on the 6th, with 15 people signed up so far. The Citizen's academy is going to start on the 27th for every week for 14 weeks to learn about how the cops are going to work. There is going to be a meeting at the Community Relations Bureau every Tuesday. The police test that is going out soon in March that Director Mayweather mentioned, and the physical and written tests will go out soon as well. There is going to be a food bank donated and distributed on 11 AM at 945 Hamilton Street. There is also going to be a law enforcement meeting and exhibition at Kean University on March 13th. There will be all sorts of displays of careers and options for becoming police officers. Edna mentioned that solicitors were a Community problem, and it was mentioned how difficult that it would be to get rid of such solicitors. Telemarketers are also a prevalent issue. The police educative program under the CRB starts March 27th and goes for 12-13 weeks starting at 6:30 and goes for 2-3 hours

Guest Report:

Director Quovella Maeweather spoke on the Arrive Together program where mental health is addressed. Police officers are planned to be trained on such topics by 2025. It is a tough process because the class sizes are limited and it requires forty hours of classes. So far, around ten to twenty percent of officers are trained on addressing mental health calls. Since December, this program has received around 200 calls which is a drastic increase from previous years. In bad cases, some people spoke about mental illnesses with mental issues need to be arrested in response to bodily injuries. Somerset county is the first to take action with this program. Director further spoke about a young man who was stealing from a Stop and Shop who claimed it was his store, in this case he had to be arrested. On March first, this Friday, there will be another police test where they will be screened to be on the force in the Arrive Together program. There is some injustice with how police officers are chosen in Franklin. Specifically, they are required to have a college degree if they are from here while we hire those without degrees from outside the county. Mr. Velu addresses how the requirement for people in corporate positions do not need to have a college degree. Maeweather says our best candidates are those who have been working. People

who have consistent and good jobs would be great candidates for the department. Preferential treatment has been given to officers who would like to work closer to home. Mr. Tibbs asked more on the mental health program regarding how in the fourth ward, there is a lack of training and mentorship for young individuals who may have mental issues. Maeweather responds that the juvenile problems in the community have grown miniscule. The Arrive Together program also helps young and older people alike. She says that the township of Franklin has gotten a large settlement on drug settlement money regarding opioids, and has noted caution around spending it. She expresses that there is very little to no insurance in place in anti drug and rehabilitation programs for young people. Preventing young adults from drug abuse is the most important aspect. Quinlan Paris also regards a decline in vape use in school. Mr. Kharazi spoke on burglaries happening in town and asks the Director to shed light on this topic. These crimes are at the top of the department's list and are a serious concern. It is vital to have alarm systems and lighting around your home. She is also working on achieving a discount with alarm Companies. Safety is important for everyone to think about and should be at the top of everyone's mind. It is

brought up how even though precautions may be taken, there are still risks. She spoke on how this burglary problem has migrated from New York to New Jersey. Due to this, Maeweather requested specific tools and gadgets which would help our police department. In the department, younger cops are making much less than senior cops. This is an issue as almost a third of the department are young adults. It is another issue how those who commit burglaries are continuing to commit crime.

Other Business:

The Application for the apartment complex in the K-Mart in the shopping center will come to the zoning board on April 4th. The HRC was asked again to be a co-sponsor with the Interfaith Council. The Ramadan lighting ceremony will be on Sunday March 3rd at 3:00 PM in the community senior center, Councilman Mr. Kharazi says that there will be food sponsorships with one hundred families of three for a month. The plan is to raise ten thousand dollars for the Muslim community in the spirit of Ramadan. Edna reached out to the Bound Brook councilman

regarding flags but no one has gotten back to her electronically. Councilman Kharazi said that soon, there will be a bench where information about alternatives to opioids will be presented.

This will be in place for one month. There was also a very successful meeting regarding mental health. In Franklin Township, there are around seventy miles of trails and work is being done to map these areas out. More green and trail areas will also be added to the community. This work is all to encourage people --specifically the elderly-- to utilize these trails. The Advisory Board of Health will be having a meeting on March 7th where two members of our township will be sharing results of a survey conducted regarding health disparities within the community. More solutions (along with the trails) will be brought up to solve these health issues. Ward four is a major issue in the health sector and will be primarily focused on to increase opportunities for individuals to appreciate and experience nature. Last Sunday, there was a Black History Month event where many highschoolers performed. The Ukrainian Church also organized an event calling for peace and a ceasefire. Both of these events were moving. Mr. Rosenthal reports that

since Sam Velu was appointed, the commission is full. Quinlan Paris will be leaving the commission soon when he graduates high school.

Meeting adjourned at 7:57

The next meeting will be on March 27th

Respectfully submitted,

Junior Commissioners Rohan Kalidas and Quinlan Paris