

**Franklin Township Human**

**Relations Commission Meeting**

**Minutes of April 24th, 2024**

**Present:** Gary Rosenthal, John Samba, John Tibbs, Quinlan Paris, Rohan Kalidas, E.Poustchi,

Shubhendu Singh, Pete Clark, Nora Catiis, KJ Sharma, Edna Arguello Hitchner, Linda

Montgomery Williams, Sam Velu

**Excused:** Councilman Alex Kharazi, Stan Rozario

**Absent:** None

**Police Officer:** Malcolm Belvin

**Guest:** Ardaman Singh, President Franklin Township Board of Education

**Guest Report:**

There was a media review in March and the first goal of education is the health and safety of

people within the community. By the middle of the year, we have run numerous programs such

as a food and security program. We have also applied for a food program at Pine Grove Manor Elementary school. A summer cross-read program is also being done for communication. A social emotional learning week activity was hosted in all schools. The school's rubric model is the Danielson model from 2022. This model is being reworked as with the passing of time, the models get outdated. We recently lost a special needs student due to a tragic accident from a seatbelt. This has started a training program for bus drivers and on bus safety. This audit was done for transportation as a whole. This has been done to ensure that whichever new bus company comes in, the safety of all kids will be a priority. This audit will be effective for the upcoming school year. The Franklin Township Board of Education owns one or two small vans for special needs students. The food bank came to the board of education saying they have run out of space. They want another hub at Pine Grove Manor and they have been granted the opportunity of a feasibility study to ensure they can establish a satellite building there. This building would be accessible to anyone around the area. This would help individuals facing struggles such as a lack of transportation. We have increased health care due to a partnership

with Zufall Health. They have serviced Franklin students who do not have health insurance. A Zufall Health Center will be constructed due to an ongoing partnership. There is also a sustainable health program going on which is looking into applying solar power around the township. There are general safety programs which have come with collaborations with places such as the YMCA. For example, students in the second grade are informed on water safety due to concerns and incidents in the past. A surveillance system upgrade, communications upgrade, and security upgrade is all in order for the entirety of the township. Mr. Tibbs asked to test the water in the fourth ward and the lead concentration in the water. This has been an ongoing request from the residents in this area. Ardaman Singh ensured that a note will be taken down for the request. The budget for the BOE has been cut and they are forced to tap into their reserves.

Chronic absenteeism has been a concern since the COVID-19 pandemic for students but also staff within schools and other areas. All students are ensured to have equal opportunities with a new ongoing program. CLR (Culturally Linguistic Responsibility) has been implemented into schools and classes such as a Race, Gender, and Equity class will be mandatory for students

effective 2025. Staffing is also a big goal. There will be more professional development within the staffing for schools. A problem is that students do not have teachers that look like them. This issue is being addressed with numerous programs regarding multi-subject teachers and more employees of color. The BOE is looking for people who are qualified but also those of color. The question of how the word of these actions are being spread due to apparent misconceptions from the public. The Board has published articles and newsletters on these topics. It is a struggle due to lack of funding for things such as fliers. There is a hope that parents stay more engaged with PTO meetings and other meetings that come up to keep members of the community informed.

Mr. Rosenthal mentioned that there is competition between public and Charter schools regarding funding. These issues have been addressed by the Mayor and other community leaders to share information. A director of communications is spoken upon as vital to spreading the word to the people. This is an issue since a full-time communications director is not allowed. It is apparent to the rest of Somerset county that Franklin is ahead of the other districts in education. It is due to a lack of communication about the actions being taken that the people of Franklin township do not

realize this. This is a vital issue that must be addressed since the tax-payers of Franklin township should have access to the knowledge of what the township is doing. Learning gaps, learning recovery, and learning acceleration programs are being looked at. Virtual high-impact tutoring programs, study time after school, and competitions regarding these issues have all been implemented. The aviation club has been expanded to a course. Green-initiatives are also a focus of the Board. Environmentally-sound programs are pushed and the second annual Green fair is scheduled for the high school in May. A local government energy audit is in action. Many new programs are in action to recognize those who are active in the community. The Middlebush building is being looked at to convert it into a pre-school building due to a lack of space. The township would get rent from the Board and more students would be able to obtain an education. The township newsletter is also being contributed to. The Franklin Township community groups such as the Youth center are also active parts of the community.

**Police Report:**

There was a major accident on Amwell Road which is why there was a detour and a massive amount of detectives and officers. The details were kept confidential. It is vital to be a safe driver. There have been a lot of career fairs across New Jersey where the police department has looked to recruit new officers. There are applications online for seventy-five dollars. This process only happens every two years which makes it a necessity for those interested to apply now. There will be a written exam and a PT assessment after applying and consideration. Last year fifteen recruits were taken in. There were two officers at Franklin High School to present this opportunity. Food distribution will be coming up soon on the first Wednesday of May. Linda brought up that there have been complaints from the fifth ward about cars parked on the wrong side of the street. This is a huge risk on busy roads. People out walking are at risk and are forced to move quickly when crossing the street. Officer Belvin ensured that the traffic division will be notified on this issue. Tibbs reflected that this puts the people in danger near the area. He suggested that speed bumps be put down in areas where speeding is observed. The signs are simply not enough to stop these offenders. Officer Belvin spoke on the process of putting up

speed bumps. First speed will be observed in an area (specifically near the senior center), and then further action will be taken if numerous offenses are seen. There is a new development near the Shell gas station where there are no signs or information spread on the area. Officer Belvin confirmed that these are houses.

**Other Business:**

The K-mart shopping center application will continue until May 9th. Pete Clark asks people to attend diversity night at the Franklin Middle School (Hamilton Street Campus). This event will be on the night of May 3rd from 6-8 and HRC will have a table. Edna spoke on the hometown heroes program. There is a website where people can speak to someone who is with the organization. She also reached out to Bound Brook since they organized a similar undertaking but has not heard back. Today, she spoke to the Chamber of Commerce president who invited her to come and showcase the idea at their next meeting. She has observed that the cost of the flag has been pushed onto the families who the flags are being put up for. There are also instances where non-profit organizations have helped to fund the process. The council and

other partners would be needed to help organize this. Pete commended the idea and says he will help with the process. This process is estimated to take months and around November, there is hope that the flags will be up for Veterans day. Councilman Kharazi via Council should be asked about the project. The street where these flags would go is brought up. Hamilton street and the newer campus are brought up. A lot of towns have them throughout the township or in their designated downtown.

Meeting adjourned at 8:01 PM

The next meeting will be on June 26th. No Meeting in May due to Memorial Day.

Respectfully submitted,

Junior Commissioner Rohan Kalidas and Secretary Quinlan Paris