

Franklin Township Human

Relations Commission Meeting

Minutes of July 24th, 2024

Present: Gary Rosenthal, John Tibbs, Linda Montgomery-Williams, Councilman Alex

Kharazi, Nora Q. Catiis, Shubendu Singh, Elangkathir Elamaran

Excused: Pete Clark, Rohan Kalidas , Sam Velu

Absent: Edna Arguello Hitchner, E Poustchi, Stan Rozario, KJ Sharma, John

Samba

Police Officer: Absent

Minutes of April 24 and June 26th were approved.

Guest: Megeen Dolan Laska (Meg), Associate VP of Mission Advancement

Guest Report: Meg Laska representative from the Greater Somerset County YMCA.

has been part of the YMCA for the last 12 years. She is a part of their fund-raising

team. One of her goals is to provide opportunities to provide service in communities

where they are currently not serving, One of such communities is Franklin Township.

Greater Somerset County YMCA has 5 locations in Somerset County. They do

programs in Plainfield and Franklin Township, but do not have facilities in these

locations. The YMCA has 3 pillars; youth development (making sure that all children

have the opportunity to reach their full potential), healthy living (looking at ways to

improve the health and well being of the community), and social community (offering

services in order to help the community and remove barriers so that everyone has the

resources and support that they need in order to thrive). In 2020, the YMCA partnered

with the Board Of Education. They have offered water safety/swim lessons, worked with the Franklin Township food bank, worked with the recreation department, and offered senior wellness programs. Since 2020, the YMCA has run the school age childcare program. During 2020, when schools were closed due to COVID, they started a remote learning center for children who needed to learn in a safe environment when their parents had to work. They started with 15 students in 2020 to nearly 500 students this year. They are now in all 7 elementary schools. They ensure that they incorporate Social and Emotional Learning into their curriculum. The YMCA has noticed the tragic drownings that occurred in our communities. As a result, they aimed to give the school-age childcare program children an opportunity to take water safety lessons at their Hillsborough swim facility. This has been a huge success. The

YMCA has also started a new summer camp at Colonial Park for children who qualify for free and reduced meal programs. They would bus the children from underprivileged communities to Colonial park for a full day of camp. They provided meals free of charge. Children got the opportunity to interact with each other and develop in a safe, caring environment. In the first year, they had 120 children in camp and in the second year they had 260 children in camp. They are now offering financial assistance through the YMCA in order for children to continue to be a part of this program. They also incorporated their water safety and swim lessons in this program as well. The YMCA places a big emphasis on water safety and ensuring that the life skill of swimming is developed. Last year alone, in the YMCA's school age childcare program, they gave out over \$225,000 in scholarships. One of the great things about

this program is the YMCA's ability to offer financial assistance to families who cannot

afford this service. Parents are able to go to work knowing that their children are in a

safe environment. 1 in 6 students in the childcare program received financial

assistance, and 1 in 5 children in the water safety program received financial

assistance. Last year, the YMCA gave out over \$35,000 for children. Alex asked what

is the age cap for the YMCA programs? Laska responded that the childcare program

is open for kids entering kindergarten up until 5th grade. She also stated that the

water safety program is open to both children and adults alike. John T asks if the

YMCA still offers free housing for young men who need financial assistance. He stated

that all the programs that the YMCA offers are very beneficial. Laska responded that

her goal is to bring YMCA to Franklin Township. She stated that mayor Phil Kramer

and other Township officials are very eager in making this happen. She states that there are many YMCAs around the country, and Newark is one of them that offers young men housing. She says that one of the YMCA's goals is to offer services based on what each community needs. She states that even though the YMCA started out by targeting young men, the YMCA has evolved to include everyone and aims to exemplify the diversity of each community that it serves. She states that the YMCA is very determined and strategic in implementing a YMCA in Franklin Township.

Shubhendu brought up the fact that the township had allocated some land to construct a YMCA a few years ago; he asked if this is still in the works. Meg responded that the township has designated said property for a YMCA. The issue is that there was no fundraising for this campaign to happen. The YMCA has also not

been actively looking for funds for this plan; they have been doing planning and research regarding if a YMCA would be beneficial in the community before raising funds for construction. Laska stated that beyond individual philanthropy, the YMCA will be looking for other funding options as well. The YMCA has an office at the BOE building. They do not have any physical building yet, despite the fact that they have many programs for elementary school age children taking part at the schools (childcare program, camp, before and after school programs, rec department programs, etc.). She says that she wants construction for the YMCA to progress within the next 5 years. Councilman Kharazi reinforced the fact that a YMCA would be very beneficial to Franklin Township. Linda reminisced on positive memories regarding

the YMCA. Laska concluded on future prospects regarding the YMCA and how she

hopes that implementation of the YMCA in Franklin Township progresses soon.

Police Report: None

Other Business:

Councilman Kharazi reminded all of the bias and civil rights training which is being

held on July 31st in the Senior Center. The HRC is a co-sponsor He stated that many

residents of Franklin Township do not have adequate knowledge regarding their civil

rights. As a result, homeland security will be giving the training. He also emphasized

the mental health effect of discrimination and bias. He encouraged the

Commissioners to come as it will be very beneficial. NAACP will also be a sponsor. He

also encouraged middle school and high school children to come. The Chairman

announced the zoning Board meeting regarding the K-mart shopping center will

continue next Thursday August 1st.

Meeting adjourned at 7:44

The next meeting will be on 8/28/2024

Respectfully submitted,

Junior Commissioner Elangkathir Elamaran