

Franklin Township Human Relations Commission Meeting

Minutes of September 25th, 2024

Present: Gary Rosenthal, Rohan Kalidas, Elangkathir Elamaran, Nora Catiis, Pete Clark, Edna Arguello Hitchner, Sam Velu, Ron Poustchi, Kamla J. Sharma

Excused: Linda Montgomery-Williams, Councilman Alex Kharazi

Absent: John Tibbs, Shubhendu Singh, John Samba

Police Officer: Officer Malcolm Belvin

Guest: Rev. Sonya Redd, Chair Franklin Township Interfaith Council

Meeting called to order at 7:02 PM.

Minutes of August 28, 2024 Approved

Guest Report: Rev. Redd, handed out a mission statement for the Interfaith Council. She stated that the vision of the council is to be strengthened by its diversity, faith, and culture. The core vision of the council is to envision a community strengthened by its diversity, where people of all faiths and cultures are welcomed and appreciated and together build a better community for all. The mission statement speaks to who they are and it is to advance understanding and cooperation across diverse faith traditions and cultures in our township, promote activities that foster socialization among diverse groups, conduct community service projects to support values that are common among these groups, and to act as a coordinator for houses of worship at times of National or local emergencies. A new project that they are working on is a community conversation town hall. Due to the conflict in the Middle East, the community has expressed concerns for both sides of the war. The Jewish community and Muslim community are hurting in the area. This conversation would be a good opportunity for both sides and others from diverse communities to feel each other's empathy. This is not for a political discussion but rather for togetherness to be an essential value. There will most definitely be faith leaders, psychologists, and therapists in attendance. Despite what is happening in a foreign land, peace is the utmost important value. She hopes the HRC can help

sponsor such a program. Rabbi Eli Garfinkel is part of the program (vice president). In the future, the council hopes to have a religious and cultural literacy workshop. Rev. Redd feels that bigotry comes from the misunderstanding of one another's culture. She feels that if this information is shared, then everyone can benefit and learn about one another. Being different is what makes a community beautiful. She states that having a workshop where people are able to learn about each other's cultures is a good thing. Another suggestion she has is to have an interfaith and intercultural day. During this day, people will be able to learn about each other and each other's traditions. Another idea is to have an intercultural concert. This will bring the community together. A statement that was brought up at a previous meeting is that despite the community's diversity, it is still segregated. Interacting with one another will help integrate our community and help it become a better and more inclusive place to live. One question is whether it would be possible to bring together different cultural groups under one umbrella, to host multiple cultural events. November would be too soon for the community conversation because the hope is that various groups and people from different backgrounds will be able to sit with one another. In the past, there were conversations held similar to the one the interfaith council is planning. Members of the HRC declared support for the program. One of the programs that was very successful was when there were interfaith dialogues focused on one theme. One of them that comes to mind is forgiveness, which is a common belief in many faiths. Each faith was discussed and asked what they thought about forgiveness. These talks were effective in bringing people together and having one centralized topic helps maintain focus. Other topics could be compassion, kindness, service, and unity. All of these virtues would bring the community together. These would take the form of round tables where different professionals and members of the community can discuss. This, however, requires some time to attract as many people as possible and plan further. The interfaith council is having its first committee meeting regarding this on October 9th. Rev. Redd requests an HRC member to be at the meeting. Mr. Rosenthal agreed that we would like to be part of such a movement and cause. It's overwhelming with all the different cultural groups for the HRC to attend many of these events. Usually, cultural events are held within themselves and often are not large enough to send a large message of unity. In addition, many of these events are on weekends which makes them hard to attend. The schools also hold a diversity night, where people of different cultures can interact and share traditions. This is organized by the school district. Religion also comes in at certain points. Social media is a very useful way to advertise these events throughout the community. These events have been held in the past and the HRC agrees that we would like to get it started in the future. Multicultural presentations could be held at large community events such as Franklin day to spread the message of unity. These types of events grow every year so it is great to hold cultural presentations. Conerly Road School had an organization of students called Peacemakers. They were recognized by the

township for their work in unifying students despite any cultural barriers and spreading peace. Mr. Rosenthal recommended that the interfaith council remain in contact with the HRC. The HRC would like to have a representative at the interfaith council meeting on October 9th. If the town hall discussion can be set in December, this would be very valuable due to the tension and situation the people of our township are in. 2025 would be a great year to hold these events and discussions. The National Day of Prayer is very successful. Faith leaders from various days of the community come together and discuss. The HRC feels that these events should be common to help spread positive virtues. Rev. Redd states that she is looking forward to the partnership with the HRC. Pete Clark will be assisting the proposed Town Hall

Police Report: Officer Belvin reported: There is a citizens academy outside of the building in the parking lot. This Saturday, Annual Franklin Day will occur. The Police department will be represented with multiple vehicles and items to give to the people of the community. On October 2nd there will be a food distribution at a new location, not the old location on Hamilton Street. This will take place on October 2nd, the first Wednesday of each month. It will take place at 11 AM but they start serving as early as 10 AM. Officer Belvin stated that the weather is starting to get cooler, so the habit of keeping cars safe as they are idling. He emphasized making sure that people's cars are locked.

Other Business: Chairman stated that there is an opening in the HRC now, due to Stan Rozario resigning. The openings should be listed on the website so they are known to everyone. Regarding the K-mart shopping center, the meeting with the zoning board will now be on Thursday, October 17th. The flags for veterans project is still in the works under Edna. She has spoken with our Council Liaison Alex and a meeting will be set up with the Township Manager Vornlocker. After Council approval, the HRC will be reaching out to the township about the issue. This Saturday is Annual Franklin Day. There will be a large crowd. It will be held at Colonial Park and should be easier than National Night Out. This is due to heavy parking. There will not be transportation but there will be a small quad with a backseat for handicapped individuals to take. There will be many pedestrians in the park. The chairman will be forming a subcommittee that will work on a revised HRC pamphlet to express our Mission and goals. There is a new camera system to record meetings in the conference room which has been installed with help from the township. This is a new system. The Robotics Club is doing a skit on the cultural stage on Franklin Day this Saturday.

Meeting adjourned at 7:36

The next meeting will be on **October 23rd, 2024**

Respectfully submitted,

Junior Commissioners Kathir Elamaran and Rohan Kalidas