

Minutes of 24 June 2020 meeting of the Northampton Human Rights Commission

Commissioners present: Karen Bellavance-Grace, Booker Bush, Laurie Loisel, Davina Miller, Nural Mohammed

Commissioner absent: Megan Paik

First meeting since February 2020

Meeting via Zoom

Meeting called to order at 5:34 pm

- **Statement of the Chair**

Four months ago we held our last HRC meeting and at that moment I feel confident in saying none of us had imagination enough to envision what our world and our community would look like today. We have run out of ways to say 'unprecedented.' We need new vocabulary, new ways of knowing, new leadership, and new sources of hope.

In the midst of a global pandemic, and national political polarization, we are confronted with yet another death of a Black man at the hands of a police officer. A movement that has been building and working and collaborating for years has claimed its place in the national consciousness as it never has before. Some people who have been in the struggle for decades, people who were my mentors long ago, are saying, "this feels different. Something different is happening." In my mind, I return to the image of George Floyd's daughter at one of the events calling out for justice, holding her arms and proclaiming, "Daddy changed the world!" And that may be so. And it will be so if each of us - wherever we are and whatever our role - take up the challenge of making sure we never return to what we accepted as normal four months ago. May we never again settle for that level of brokenness and inequity.

These days are both harrowing and yet still hope-infused. We return to our work tonight with a renewed mandate that George Floyd and his daughter and the hundreds of thousands - the millions - of Americans have delivered to our attention.

How will we in Northampton answer the calls to confront institutional racism? How will we in Northampton promote and protect the human rights of all of who we are? How will we in Northampton answer the calls to re-vision what we need, want, and deserve for public safety?

This is long haul work, and we do not turn away from it. It is good to be back and to take up our piece in shaping what will become the new normal.

- **New Business**

Nural Mohammed announced that she would be leaving Northampton in October to pursue a career opportunity out of state and will need to resign from the Commission by that time. She expressed gratitude for her experience serving on the Commission

- **Commission Discussion**

Guiding Questions:

- a. What information do we need to reflect relevant Human Rights concerns in Northampton and recommendations to support and advocate for?
- b. Who would we like to hear from directly?
- c. What additional questions do we have?
- d. Discussion of process and timeline for creating HRC response and recommendations.

Discussion followed regarding the Mayor's special commission which will be convened to consider re-visioning policing and public safety in Northampton following the recent decision to reduce the NPD budget by 10%. That commission will comprise 15 people, six of whom will be appointed by the Mayor (including one member of the HRC), and nine members appointed by the City Council (two include no more than two city councilors). The commission will do the majority of its work between September and December, 2020.

Questions raised in the HRC discussion included:

- Where is the money cut from the NPD budget being reallocated to?
- How do we understand the scope of the Human Rights Commission specifically in regards to this commission?
- What can we learn from / how can we amplify the Black Lives Matter platform?
- What meaning do we take from the NPD statistics posted on the website - including the NPD's reported Use of Force statistics (13 of 85 instances of Use of Force in 2018 involved Black persons; that is 13% of all instances, while Black people make up 2% of Northampton's population)
- Does the NPD track non-criminal interactions with civilians? Who are they stopping to talk to and is there a disproportion in that?
- Is the process for police accountability in Northampton adequate?
- Is NPD planning any future purchase of military equipment? Do we know what military equipment the NPD already possesses?
- Does Northampton already have a policy against choke holds? What do we as a community know about how our police officers get trained?
- Do trainings in 'cultural competence' actually impact behavior?
- Commissioners believe that our role on the special commission to explore some of these issues may especially to help frame the issue through a human rights lens and to be present at the table to ask related questions.

Commissioners considered who might be willing and able to serve on the special commission, and will seek more information from the Mayor and City Council before next month's meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50 pm