

**Town of Hamden
Human Rights and Relations Commission
Notice of Regular Meeting
Thursday, November 12th, 2020
7:00 pm**

11/12/2020 - Minutes

1. Call To Order

Chairman Cardwell called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

2. Attendance

Attendance: Sean Cardwell, Chairman; Rabbi Herbert Brockman, Martha Walker, Weruche George, Michael Thompson, Tracy Bowens, Ganiyu Mimiko

Also in Attendance: Allison Batson, Reverend Robert Bergner, Liana Paglia, Commission Clerk

3. Approval Of Past Minutes

3.I. October 8th, 2020 Regular Meeting

Rabbi Brockman moved to accept the previous minutes. Mr. Bowens seconded and all were in favor.

4. Old Business

4.I. Covid-19: Update

During the previous meeting, the commissioners expressed interest in learning COVID related statistics. Chairman Cardwell shared his discovery of WWW.DATA.CT.GOV, which offers demographic based COVID statistics in CT. Rabbi Brockman asked Chairman Cardwell to share some examples. As of this meeting, Hamden has 1,673 confirmed cases and 145 confirmed deaths. There was some discussion about local schools and universities transitioning to remote learning until after the winter holidays. Mr. Bowens noted that Quinnipiac's recent uptick brings their total confirmed cases to 215. Chairman Cardwell ended by saying he would post the link to the website on the group's Facebook page.

4.II. Mask Donations: Prospects

Chairman Cardwell noted there are still 75 face masks ready to be donated and asked if the commissioners know of any place/organization in need. Ms. Walker suggested her church, which runs a soup kitchen. Between 50-60 people come every Sunday to partake, and the servers and/or diners could benefit from the masks.

4.III. Mental Wellness Information: Update

Chairman Cardwell previously e-mailed the revised write-up for the group's Facebook page and asked the commissioners if they wished to make any changes. Mr. Thompson suggested making the language more community centered. For example, instead of "you," using, "you or a loved one." Mr.

Thompson based his suggestion on similar language found under the FAQ on the National Institute of Mental Health website. Chairman Cardwell agreed to make the changes, and will wait until all commissioners read over the revised update, before posting to the group's Facebook page.

4.IV. Connecticut Human Rights Commission Forum: Update

Chairman Cardwell has reached out to commissions in Windsor, Bloomfield, and Guilford and is awaiting a response. Rabbi Brockman reached out to the West Hartford commission chair and she is highly interested in participating. Mr. Thompson is still trying to get in touch with West Haven and Hartford. Bridgeport, Danbury, Stamford, Milford and Fairfield may have similar commissions. Chairman Cardwell is hopeful that if the other commissions commit to the forum, this could be a big event. He thinks the HRRC should continue to reach out to other similar commissions in CT over the next month, with the goal of holding the forum in March or April of 2021. Chairman Cardwell questioned Mr. Bowens if CHRP would be useful in organizing the forum. Mr. Bowens offered to reach out to his contact at CHRP. Chairman Cardwell noted that a partnership between the commission and CHRP would be mutually beneficial.

Mr. Thompson requested a spreadsheet to keep track of which towns/commissions have already been contacted. Mr. Bowens noted that after the other commissions have committed to the forum, a subcommittee should be formed to create the agenda and devise the format of the forum.

Rabbi Brockman reminded the commission a resolution was passed in Hamden in July, declaring racism as a public health issue. This would open up the possibility of obtaining federal and state resources. He pointed out the importance of having data regarding the effect of COVID on different races. The possibility of a statewide resolution could potentially be a point of discussion at the forum.

4.V. Monthly Movie Series: November Selection

Chairman Cardwell questioned the other commissioners if the movie series is still something the group wants to pursue, even if not held monthly. Mr. Bowens suggested an easier format via YouTube or a Zoom webinar with a q&a function. Ms. George questioned when the first movie would air. Mr. Cardwell suggested hosting the first film series in January 2021, which would allow time to figure out the technological logistics. Ms. George suggested the first film be "He Named Me Malala" which covers the story of Malala Yousafzai. Mr. Bowens agreed this was a logical first choice, as her story is inspiring, especially to young people and Malala has global recognition. Rabbi Brockman suggested an accompanying Facebook post explaining the reasoning/purpose behind the movie choice.

4.VI. Guest Speakers: Ms. Allison Batson & Rev. Robert Bergner From Grace & St. Peters Episcopal Church (Dinner For A Dollar Program)

Chairman Cardwell exercised a motion to change the schedule to allow the discussion with the guest speakers to take place prior to discussing new business. All were in favor.

5. Discussion With Ms. Allison Batson & Rev. Robert Bergner From Grace & St.. Peters Episcopal Church (Dinner For A Dollar Program)

Chairman Cardwell listed some of the church's accolades including awards from United Way, Hamden Black History Committee, etc. Ms. Batson explained that the 'Dinner for a Dollar' Program has been nine years in the making and was born out of the economic downturn in the community. The congregation is centered around hospitality, so it was a natural solution to welcome and feed those in need. The program was first tested within the congregation, before it was opened to the public. The \$1 is a donation that allows you to receive a full dinner and dessert. Ms. Batson went on to say that the program started out slow, but gradually gained momentum, as it services a community that grew up on the importance of weekly dinners. Communal seating has helped foster a strong bond between both volunteers and patrons. Ms. Batson noted the relationships with other organizations in the community, such as volunteers from Quinnipiac and musical entertainment provided by the Hamden Hall choir.

COVID has altered the structure of the program. Many of the volunteers are elderly, and therefore ceased coming. Rather than a sit-down meal, the program switched to a takeout model. Patrons drive up and collect a packaged meal. They still try to encourage the social aspect of the program, and oftentimes have brief conversations with the patrons at their car windows. Typically, there is a special Thanksgiving meal in which the whole parish gets involved. Due to COVID, this sit-down meal has been cancelled, and Ms. Batson said they have to figure out how to still make it special for guests. Chairman Cardwell questioned if there was an uptick in patrons, since the onset of the pandemic. Ms. Batson explained that initially, the program catered to 50-60 diners, and throughout the pandemic, that number has increased to about 100 diners. At this point, the number of diners has plateaued at 70-80, in part, due to the time change. Mr. Bowens questioned if the uptick caused a strain on resources. Ms. Batson admitted there was a financial strain, but the congregation was very supportive in divvying up responsibilities. She said the program will succeed, because it has to. The Dinner for a Dollar program is also held at a second site (another church) on Saturdays, and a third site is in the works. Mr. Bowens asked what the commission can do to help. Ms. Batson explained that monetary donations can be made in person or online.

Reverend Robert Bergner went on to explain how people from all walks of life come to the weekly dinners. Because this community has grown up around family dinners, it has given the parish the opportunity to launch and continue this venture. The Hamden Food Security Task Force provided structure to the second site and will allow for future growth. He went on to say that projects like the Dinner for a Dollar program are catalysts for building community.

Reverend went on to explain that the task force is comprised of individuals from a variety of local organizations and churches. The task force meets monthly and breaks into subgroups to tackle hunger issues in Hamden. Chairman Cardwell expressed interest in working with the task force and Reverend Bergner agreed to get the HRRC on the task force's mailing list. Reverend Bergner agreed to add the HRRC to the task force's mailing list. Chairman Cardwell questioned the church's involvement with the gun buyback program. Reverend explained that after the guns are vetted, they are cut into pieces and forged into gardening tools, jewelry, and even instruments. These items are forged on church property and later sold or donated.

Questions and Comments: Ms. Walker thanked Reverend Bergner for contributing to the Hamden Black History Committee scholarship fund. Due to the partnership, more scholarships were given out this year than ever before. Reverend enjoyed the collaboration and was grateful for the opportunity to give back. Chairman Cardwell thanked both Ms. Batson and Reverend Bergner for the work they do. He intends to reach out to Ms. Batson in regards to volunteering opportunities.

6. New Business

6.I. Election Discussion

Chairman Cardwell congratulated Ms. George on her first political run. She was grateful for the support of her fellow commissioners and stressed the importance of challenging the status quo. Chairman Cardwell emphasized the success in utilizing mail in ballots. Mr. Bowens added that the goal of every local and federal election should be to make it easier and to get a large turnout. Rabbi Brockman emphasized that some leaders have a vested interest in keeping certain voter groups from voting and that this election's turnout should "shake things up" with current and future leaders.

6.I.i. Guest Speaker- December Selection

Chairman Cardwell suggested employees from the local Keefe Center. Mr. Bowens and Rabbi Brockman supported the choice.

7. Thoughts And Ideas

Ms. Walker suggested guest speakers should speak before the regular business is conducted. Chairman Cardwell questioned if it was possible to structure the meeting like that. Mr. Bowens explained that a motion would have to be made and approved each time there was a speaker.

8. Executive Session (If Required)

N/A

9. Adjournment

Chairman Cardwell entertained a motion to adjourn at 8:03 p.m. Ms. Walker moved to adjourn. Mr. Bowens seconded and all were in favor.

Submitted by Liana Paglia, Commission Clerk