

MINUTES

Meeting of the
Mayor's Equity Advisory Council Via Zoom
Monday May 10, 2021 6:00 pm

Attendance

Council members: Steve Allard, Mayor Gayle Brill Mittler, Kevin Dougherty, Councilwoman Elsie Foster, Pastor Antoinette Gaboton-Moss, Hayden Hsiung, Nathalie Levine, Franklin More, Carolyn Timmons, Norma Vargas, and Jeff Vardaro.

Staff – Harry Glazer

Members of the public: Dan Battey and Joanna Kenty.

Roll Call

Jeff identified all members in attendance and thanked them for attending.

Approval of minutes of prior meeting

Jeff made a motion to approve the minutes of the prior meeting, held on April 12th. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Status report on filling vacancies

The Mayor reported that she is still seeking residents who are interested in serving on the MEAC and have skills or experience of use to the group. She is looking both for a teen/youth representative and another Human Relations Commission representative.

Working group reports

Policy & Procedures & Investigations Group - Kevin D.

The group received from Police Chief Abrams a full set of the policies open to the public so now the group can review them. They also received a list of policies that are being revised. One of particular interest to the group is the Policy on Incidents with Emotionally Disturbed Persons (EDPs). Jeff said that he would like to meet with the Chief to discuss this policy and offer input. The Mayor shared that there is a new approach to this matter in the County Prosecutors' office and she can see if MEAC can meet with her.

Councilwoman Foster said that there are a lot of group homes in Highland Park, which results in many calls regarding EDPs; she can gather information on this and share it with MEAC. She said that if there were a viable alternative, it would be preferable for the HPPD to not be the ones who deal with EDPs. The Mayor advised that the HPPD has asked Rutgers Behavioral Health to help with EDP calls they they (RBH) are seriously understaffed. She has advised the County Prosecutor of this need.

Budget Group - Steve A.

The group has communicated with the Chief and sent him a list of questions about prior years' budgets of the HPPD. They have not yet been able to schedule a meeting with him to receive his answers.

Communications & Community Outreach Group - Antoinette G-M

The group hopes to hold a public discussion at the end of July on the topic: "What is public safety to you?" Prior to the event, they hope to have talks with community stakeholders, to generate preliminary ideas. The group also seeks to hold a public event, led by MEAC, that elicits feedback on CCRBs.

CCRB Research Group - Franklin M.

The group met with ACLU members who are involved with the Newark CCRB. The Mayor suggested that they also speak with an aide to Newark Mayor Ray Baraka, named Shoshana, who can help us avoid the 'growing pains' of building a CCRB. The group also suggests a public meeting to discuss CCRBs.

A discussion ensued on whether or not MEAC is 'moving too fast,' with Carolyn suggesting that the MEAC first develop its own position on CCRBs before holding a public event on the topic and Steve and Jeff suggesting that public input would be helpful to MEAC forming its view. Kevin suggested that a carefully structured public forum could elicit helpful views without making an implicit promise that Highland Park will have a CCRB. Jeff concluded this discussion by asking the CCRB Research Group to create a Google doc and share it with MEAC members, so they can follow the deliberations of the group.

MEAC input on membership of Borough boards, committees, and commissions - Jeff

Jeff shared that the Mayor has asked if MEAC can become involved in helping enhance representation of different segments of the community on boards, committees, and commissions of the town. MEAC will not act on this now but plans to do so soon. Steve asked if MEAC could get a list of the different Borough groups and their membership; Harry said he should be able to get a report on this from Asst to the Borough Administrator Emma Missey when the list is completed.

Additions to MEAC Working Groups

Jeff moved that Hayden be added to the Communications Group and Norma be added to the CCRB Group. Carolyn made a point of order that no MEAC vote is needed on these appointments.

Public Comment

Dan Battey raised two issues. As he understands, of the HPPD's use of force each year, 25-30% is directed at EDPs. He also asked about the status of a resolution passed at the Human Relations Commission urging the Borough Council to support the bill in Trenton that will enable all towns and counties to establish CCRBs.

Norma reported that the HRC resolution was sent to the Health & Human Services Committee of the Borough and awaits action there. Franklin asked for more information

on the bill in Trenton (A4656) and its status, Norma offered to look into this and provide links to be posted on the Borough's MEAC webpage.

Next Meeting

Jeff said that the next meeting of the MEAC is set for Monday June 14th. He asked that each working group submit a brief status report in advance of the meeting, so they may be circulated to the MEAC members before the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 pm.

Minutes prepared

By Harry Glazer

Public Information Officer

June 16, 2021