

Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission
January 9, 2024

A meeting of the Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission was held on this date beginning at 5:00 p.m. over a video conference call.

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

Present: Co-Chair Jerome Harris, Co-Chair Stephen Bowden (left at 5:57 p.m.), Alvin Johnson, Carol Jackson, Tom Orth, Bonnie Cleaveland, Brandon Fish, and Bob Simons.

Staff: Adrian Swinton, Katie Dahlhiem, and Jasmine O'Neal recording.

1. Moment of Silence

The meeting was opened with a moment of silence led by Co-Chair Harris.

2. Approval of Minutes of 12/12/2024 Meeting

On a motion of Commissioner Jackson, seconded by Commissioner Simons, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the December 12, 2024 minutes as amended.

On a motion of Co-Chair Bowden, seconded by Commissioner Fish, the Commission unanimously voted to switch Items 3 and 4 on the agenda.

3. Manager's Updates

Ms. Swinton said most of her updates pertained to HARCC's annual report, which she would present to the City Council on January 28th. She sent the draft to the Commissioners for them to give feedback and said the deadline for the final draft was January 21st.

She said there was a Dr. King's Business Breakfast event on January 16th and asked the Commissioners if they would like to attend so she could get tickets.

Co-Chair Harris asked about progress with the South Carolina Human Affairs Commission (SCHAC). Ms. Swinton said HARCC needed to decide whether they would be a Community Relations Council or an Advisory Council. SCHAC would also need to know how HARCC established its general operating model. Co-Chair Harris said they could discuss it in-depth in February after Ms. Swinton finished the report.

Co-Chair Harris suggested the HARCC Work Group work on the relationship with SCHAC. Commissioner Cleaveland said they would need another member if they were to tackle that. Commissioner Johnson volunteered to join.

4. Chairperson Comments

Co-Chair Bowden said North Carolina joined a federal lawsuit that included a very large and local property owner. There was potentially some collusion between major apartment owners. He said HARCC should think about how they could become a part of the solution to the housing crises and watch the Bloomberg presentation from the last Community Development Committee meeting.

Co-Chair Harris said the Council was looking for specific recommendations from HARCC so talking to them about the Bloomberg report and lowline would be good. Co-Chair Bowden said they should be more proactive by advocating for a better public transit system for Charleston.

Co-Chair Harris said the recommendations they made between January and May were important because they would lay the foundation for the future of the Commission. All their terms ended on May 10th of that year.

Commissioner Jackson said they should get involved or become aware of City projects in the early stages so they could ensure that it was in alignment with the City's Master Plan and through an equity lens before it was too late. Projects such as potential affordable housing opportunities. Co-Chair Harris asked if she thought they should have a subcommittee whose focus was affordable housing. Commissioner Jackson said they used to have one and revisiting it would be a good idea.

Co-Chair Bowden said for housing they should pick specific topics like the fee in lieu system to discuss for the time being to avoid overwhelming themselves. He said the man leading the Union Pier project was a good person to reach out to and work with.

Commissioner Orth said homelessness was also an issue they should discuss. Co-Chair Bowden said the Hope Center's lease was extended. He said it wasn't a strong commitment to fixing the issue, but it was a start.

Co-Chair Harris said a lot of the conversation around housing was about the Housing Authority's implementation of RAD. Commissioner Jackson said a few projects were working on that. There was also a proposal she said HARCC could entertain about trying to avoid the displacement of people whilst developing affordable housing. She offered to be the liaison between HARCC and the Housing Authority.

Co-Chair Harris said the Minority Business Expo was in April and it had good support. He said while the support was nice, they should see how the expo was translating into opportunities for local businesses. Commissioner Johnson said many people learned about events like the expo when it was too late to apply so the City needed to ensure that there's engagement prior to the event.

Co-Chair Bowden said the Metro Chamber of Commerce had an event the night before with bigger business owners. He said if they could help foster a relationship between the small businesses at the expo and members of the Metro Chamber, many would welcome those opportunities or bring forth new ones.

Co-Chair Harris said he brought this conversation forth because between now and May HARCC needed to work on projects that were sustainable. They wanted prosperity, growth, restitution, and restoration.

5. Open Discussion

Co-Chair Harris said he circulated Nick Butler's Emancipation Day Parade piece about Charleston's history. There were several important holidays and months approaching such as Martin Luther King Day and Women's History month. He said there should be more done to promote such holidays to showcase to citizens what unified them.

The International African American Museum was hosting the National Association of African American Museums in July.

Co-Chair Harris said a recommendation for their next steps with the Human Affairs Commission should be ready to be discussed at the next meeting.

Commissioner Jackson said the City contributed money to Neighbors Together, which was an organization that worked with landlords who were willing to take a subsidy and allow Neighbors Together to vet clients and not scrutinize anyone based on their credit history or background checks.

Commissioner Fish said the Jewish Federation was marching in the parade and if anyone didn't have a group to march with, they could join them. He also said the Charleston Interreligious Council would be at the City Council meeting on the 28th for the Interfaith Harmony Month proclamation.

Co-Chair Harris said they should think about whether HARCC could expand its reach outside of City limits, especially if they became a council. He said there were several Human Affairs Councils that were countywide.

Commissioner Simons acknowledged that it was the National Day of Remembrance for former president Jimmy Carter. He said there were many important things Carter was able to accomplish both during and after his term as president. Few former presidents accomplished as much as Carter did post-presidency.

6. Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the Commission adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Jasmine O'Neal
Clerk of Council's Office