

Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission
April 10, 2025

On this date, the Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission held a meeting via video conference call beginning at 5:00 p.m.

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

Present: Co-Chair Jerome Harris, Co-Chair Stephen Bowden (virtual), Alvin Johnson, Carol Jackson, Carroll Frye, Tom Orth, Bonnie Cleaveland (virtual), Brandon Fish, and Bob Simons.

Staff: Adrian Swinton, Melissa Cruthirds, Katie Dahlheim, 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 3/13/2025 Meeting

On a motion of Co-Chair Bowden, seconded by Commissioner Jackson, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the March 13, 2025 minutes as amended.

3. Chairperson Comments

Co-Chair Bowden said on April 2nd City Council and the Mayor traveled to Columbia to establish better relationships with their partners in the State House and discuss issues that affected the City. Issues like affordable housing and how they could use certain tax funds for it. He said there was a lot of receptivity on the topic.

He said the House debated the DEI Bill whilst they were visiting. The Bill had been re-written to limit the harshest impacts, and they changed the definition of diversity, equity, and inclusion to actions that would violate anti-discrimination laws.

He said the CPD was ending the Citizens Police Advisory Council (CPAC) and forming a liaison group that they think would work better with the Department. They hoped the group would promote transparency and a closer connection with the community.

Commissioner Jackson asked if they were asking the State to allow them to expand the uses of the sales tax. Co-Chair Bowden said they sought the ability to use those taxes for affordable housing only. The Mayor also asked about the expansion of uses for the potential 2026 sales tax referendum. Co-Chair Bowden said he believed the legislator would act on it.

Co-Chair Harris said the guidelines City Council adopted for CPAC were to allow them to have advice and review operational policies and complaints. He said the liaison group would not have any oversight.

He said the City Council approved the contract to move the Lowline Project forward. There was a request for the City to help fund recreation programs since the Board of Education had indicated they would not. Co-Chair Bowden said the requestor was also looking for private sponsors so the Commissioners should look for people and businesses who might be interested.

Co-Chair Harris recognized Commissioner Johnson for being appointed to the Charleston Housing Authority. Commissioner Johnson said he looked forward to starting his work in that organization and that they were open to making a presentation about current projects.

4. Manager's Report

Co-Chair Harris said Ms. Swinton was still in the process of writing and editing HARCC's report to be presented to City Council. There was also a Community Development survey being conducted as a requirement by HUD.

He and Ms. Swinton spoke about the Office of Policy and noted that some Items would go from the Office of Policy to a City Council agenda without going through any Committees. He said that using their relationship with the Office of Policy to report through instead of having to go through City Council could be beneficial.

He sent an email to the Commissioners that contained a draft of the set of initiatives Ms. Swinton had made. The Co-Chairs discussed moving their report and reauthorization. He met with Mayor Cogswell, and the Mayor indicated that he was interested in discussing the future of HARCC if an anti-DEI Bill was passed. Co-Chair Harris, Co-Chair Bowden, and Commissioners Cleaveland and Fish were scheduled to meet with the Mayor in 2 weeks.

Commissioner Jackson asked if they needed a new letter from the General Counsel's Office since the original Bill changed. Co-Chair Bowden said they would. Co-Chair Harris said they wanted to file something that indicated that HARCC met and complied with the new requirements. They also wanted to meet with the Mayor before deciding what they published in a report.

Co-Chair Bowden was looking into having some developers from the Union Pier project come present at a HARCC meeting. The Charleston Housing Authority was interested in doing a presentation on their work with the RAD program.

Commissioner Fish said the Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee had a community engagement leadership team that would like to connect more with the City and HARCC. The Charleston Interreligious Council could also be interested in presenting. Commissioner Orth and Commissioner Jackson said it had been a while since HARCC had spoken to SCASID and the homelessness issue in the City had only gotten worse in that time. A presentation from them could be productive.

Commissioner Jackson said she spoke to one of the planners from a company working on the Union Pier project. She asked when it would be appropriate to go to the Planning group with ideas of establishing an ongoing commerce district and the planner said he hadn't thought about that.

Co-Chair Harris said they should reconnect with the people working on the project to effectively communicate their desired goal.

5. Open Discussion

Commissioner Simons said there had been progress on the Lowcountry Rapid Transit project and while he hadn't spoken to the people working on it, he was cautiously optimistic about it. Co-Chair Bowden said the County Council confirmed that they would be including a bike lane in their Main Street project, which was great news because it would be connecting many bike paths that just run out otherwise.

Commissioner Fish said the annual Yom HaShoah Holocaust Commemoration event was being held on the 23rd at Caper's Hall in the Citadel. On the 28th they would be holding their annual Food and Faith program between Muslim and Jewish communities at Arnold Hall on the College of Charleston campus.

Co-Chair Harris said there were discussions about rebooting the Hate Crime Bill before the end of the session. Commissioner Jackson said the League of Women Voters was hosting an Advocacy for the Hate Crime forum via Zoom on the 24th. Commissioner Fish said the State House was trying to gather votes so they could recall the Bill to the floor by unanimous consent.

Co-Chair Harris said on May 4th an event for the African American burial grounds would be held.

6. Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the Commission adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

Jasmine O'Neal
Clerk of Council's Office