

Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission
August 14, 2025

On this date, the Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission held a meeting via video conference call beginning at 5:01 p.m.

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

Present: Co-Chair Jerome Harris, Co-Chair Stephen Bowden, Carroll Frye, Tom Orth (virtual and arrived at 5:13 p.m.), Bonnie Cleaveland, Brandon Fish, Alvin Johnson, Carol Jackson (arrived at 5:11 p.m.), and Bob Simons.

Staff: Adrian Swinton, Melissa Cruthirds, and Jasmine O'Neal recording.

1. Moment of Silence

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

2. Public Comment Period

Ms. Alexander said she was with the Preservation Society of Charleston and was a member of the Protect and Respect the Bodies Coalition. She was there to discuss the burial ground at 106 Coming Street. The College of Charleston (CofC) hosted a public meeting where the community expressed grave concern. At the last History Commission meeting, it was decided that they would partner with HARCC on advocacy efforts on the City's behalf to help determine next steps.

Mr. Njonjo was also a member of the Protect and Respect the Bodies Coalition. He said it was important to consider the City's role in the project and to make recommendations.

3. Approval of Minutes of 7/10/2025 Meeting

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

4. Special Commission on Equity, Inclusion, and Racial Conciliation: History and Culture

Dr. Felice Ferguson Knight, Director of Education, International African American Museum

RESCHEDULED.

5. Chairperson's Comments

Co-Chair Harris advised the Commissioner to watch the livestream of the last HARCC meeting.

Co-Chair Harris attended the last History Commission meeting, and it was agreed that the two Commissions would work together to make recommendations to the City about the issue of the

burial site on 106 Coming Street. The Chair of the History Commission, Harlan Greene, was there to speak.

Mr. Greene said the History Commission was created in the 1940s with legislation stating that it could comment on signage and, technically, allow it to advise the City on its historical assets. He said the only resolution they passed regarding the burial site issue was that they and HARCC should collaborate, and they should study it more. A good historical report about it had been put online by the Preservation Society.

Co-Chair Harris asked about the study done by the College of Charleston on the site. Mr. Greene said it was a thorough study that showed the title search of the property and predicted the demographics of the people who were buried there. The cemetery was likely filled with poor people, orphans, free people of color, and African people who didn't survive the trip from the continent.

Co-Chair Harris asked how Mr. Greene thought HARCC and the History Commission should proceed in collaborating. Mr. Greene said that passing joint resolutions could carry more weight than passing individual ones.

Commissioner Jackson asked what time frame they should aim for. Mr. Greene said the next History Commission meeting would be the first week of October.

Commissioner Fish asked when they found out 4,000 bodies were buried there and how similar situations were handled in the past. Mr. Greene said that in 1999 or 2000, a publication of all the graveyards in Charleston was published, and the site was included in it. With the Anson Street burial project, once the bodies were discovered, all construction stopped, DNA analysis started immediately, the City worked with the public, and the public seemed happy with how the City moved forward.

Commissioner Fish asked if the City sold the property to the CofC. Mr. Greene said they did not. The City sold the property to a developer in 1817. It went on sale in the early 2000s, and CofC bid on it but didn't win. 10 years later, the buyer sold it to CofC.

Co-Chair Bowden asked how long it took to build something on the site after it was sold. Mr. Greene said that by the mid-9th century, there were buildings on it. Commissioner Bowden asked if it was common practice for graveyards to be bought and developed, and whether it mattered if there were poor or rich people buried there. Mr. Greene said it only seemed to happen to public burial grounds.

6. HARCC Manager's Update

Ms. Swinton said she had a discussion in the City's Clerk's Office about HARCC potentially having a joint meeting with the History Commission.

She said the HARCC ordinance would go back in front of the Community Development (CD) Committee in September.

Commissioner Jackson asked what would be happening at the CD Committee meeting. Co-Chair Bowden said he guessed they would be receiving information at that meeting and taking action at the next one. Co-Chair Harris said he thinks they'll have the opportunity to respond to City staff comments on their recommendations and language.

7. Old Business

a. Unhoused/Rapid housing

Co-Chair Bowden said he was on the board at the Hope Center. He said when the Hope Center was formed, they expected it to be a building combined with affordable housing, but that didn't occur. The vision now was for the Hope Center to be beside the property used for the rapid shelter program. However, they needed other counties and municipalities to help fund it.

Commissioner Frye asked if there was any discussion about a potential mental health component. Co-Chair Bowden said it had been complicated, but what they were doing now was getting people connected with services. Though they needed to work on following up with those people.

b. Youth Initiatives

Co-Chair Bowden said they'll see what happens with the curfew ordinance. CPD planned to report back; there had been 12 incidents in the first month with 1 citation. He hoped it would cause less crowding.

Co-Chair Harris said the Recreation Department planned on revealing the range of activities they were offering. They should also monitor how much money from the budget goes towards those programs and other youth initiatives.

c. Affordable Housing

Co-Chair Bowden said the City and the County had been going back and forth about the purchasing of a large property on Morrison Drive and developing affordable housing there.

Commissioner Jackson said the Housing Authority was working on getting a property approved by the BAR. She said the Mayor would attend one of the Housing Authority's meetings to discuss the City's housing plan for increasing inventory.

8. Open Discussion

Commissioner Fish congratulated Ms. Swinton on winning an award for eliminating racism in the community from the YWCA.

Co-Chair Harris said they should think about if there are any organizations that dealt with youth mental health in the area. Commissioner Jackson said United Way representatives expressed

interest in being involved as an ongoing drop-in resource. Commissioner Fish said We Are Family provided direct services to LGBTQ youth.

9. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

Jasmine O'Neal
Clerk of Council's Office