

Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission
September 11, 2025

On this date, the Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission held a meeting via video conference call beginning at 5:11 p.m.

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

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

Staff: Adrian Swinton, 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 8/14/2025 Meeting

On a motion of Commissioner Jackson, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the August 14, 2025 meeting.

3. Presentation

Suzanne Young, Neighbors Together, Liz Ashley, One80 Place, Brandon Lilienthal, City of North Charleston Homeless Coordinator, LaTosha Jenkins-Fludd, Housing Development Director, Hope Center, City of Charleston, Anita Alston-Gore, Community Liaison and Homelessness Coordinator, Rev. Dr. Marion Platt, III, Executive Director, Star Gospel Mission, Craig Logan, Housing Strategist, Charleston Metro Chamber, Regional Housing Coalition

Co-Chair Harris said Commissioner Orth had been keeping up to date on the work being done for unhoused individuals. They had a panel of experts in the area, introduced by Commissioner Orth.

Ms. Jenkins-Fludd said she was the Executive Director of the HOPE Center. The HOPE Center was a homeless day resource center downtown that had been open since 2022. They offered a variety of services for unhoused individuals, from a hot breakfast to employment assistance. They were also in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health.

Dr. Platt said Star Gospel Mission was Charleston's oldest independent faith-based charity and served people experiencing homelessness. They focused on transitional housing and were opening more living spaces for women and children soon. They offered case management, recovery support, employment coaching, and more. Most of their guests stayed for 6 to 12 months. Each year, 100 men enter their pathways program, and more receive assistance through their emergency assistance arm, Grace Works.

Ms. Shelley Clark was the Outreach Director for One80 Place. They were the largest provider of homelessness services in the Low Country. They provided tools to people who needed housing

stability and served people at every stage of the spectrum. They did outreach to unhoused individuals to get them into emergency shelters with supportive services, with the goal of finding permanent supportive housing. Their current shelter housed 65 people. Over 2,000 people have engaged in their services.

Mr. Logan was the Housing Strategist for the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce. 3 years ago, they launched the Regional Housing Coalition to unify the region's efforts around housing. They approached it from the perspective of policy and legislation.

Ms. Alston-Gore was the Community Liaison Homelessness Coordinator for the City. She assisted unhoused people in getting employment. They helped them build resumes and got them in contact with employers.

Mr. Lilienthal was the Homelessness Coordinator with the City of North Charleston. They did a lot of outreach to unhoused people and people on the verge of homelessness to help them get connected to resources. They also helped individuals relocate to get connected with families or in shelters.

Ms. Young was with the Neighbors Together organization. They provided emergency services and recently launched Gateway to Housing. They had 6 landlords and 15 agencies working with them to help place their clients. She said that while this was very helpful and a powerful tool, the issue was getting worse.

Co-Chair Harris asked what 'worse' entailed for this issue. Mr. Lilienthal said affordability was a growing issue as rental rates grew tremendously. There was a growing number of seniors becoming homeless because they were on a fixed income. It was also becoming harder to qualify for apartments. Ms. Jenkins-Fludd said a demographic that was often left out of these conversations was young people transitioning out of foster care. They often struggled with working long-term jobs and finding housing. They also needed to consider how evictions affected someone's ability to find housing as they stayed on the person's record, and any remedies for that.

Mr. Logan said the North Charleston Housing Authority was looking into RAD programs and rent allocations. Seniors sometimes made too much or too little for many programs, and some reform was needed. The rapid growth Charleston was going through directly contributed to increased rental rates and home affordability.

Dr. Platt said a big contributor was also Airbnb and absentee landlords who were buying the potential affordable housing options to use as extra income. He said many people who went through their program had nowhere to settle except for outer cities like Monk's Corner, even though many worked downtown. Star Gospel Mission commissioned an assessment that showed that cities half the size of Charleston had twice as many resources for people experiencing homelessness. Out of all the municipalities he had worked for, Charleston was by far the most difficult to place someone who was experiencing homelessness.

Ms. Young said she was from Greenville, SC, and there was much more progress with their infrastructure. She said they should also analyze how to prevent people from becoming homeless.

That could include home repairs and eviction remedies. There was a bill to be reviewed by the State House in the fall that included the removal of certain eviction filings from public view and the sealing of eviction filings and records after 6 years. They should increase the eviction filing fee for property owners; South Carolina's was one of the lowest in the southeast.

Commissioner Orth said there had been funding cuts for HUD and other similar programs, and it would have a serious effect on homelessness. Ms. Young said they were already seeing the effects of having fewer resources, less funding, fewer programs, and more demand. She said it was up to grassroots organizations to collaborate to find solutions and share resources.

Commissioner Johnson asked if they had any private partners they worked with. Dr. Platt said Star Gospel Mission got a lot of support from other faith-based organizations and churches, synagogues, and the like. Mr. Logan said the Charleston Regional Development Alliance was about to launch a development fund. It was modeled after some private equity funds in Charlotte that were successful. Though it was hard to convince developers to work with them without something like tax credits to supplement the cost. It would be hard to achieve without legislation.

Commissioner Jackson said a few years ago, the City put together a model called Homeless to Hope that utilized private donors and big businesses, and established a fund to support the HOPE Center. She thought the funding would also go to semi-permanent transitional housing. She said private sector donors seemed more open to donating when there was an end goal. The City should help these organizations get in contact with private sector donors and businesses. Especially with the loss of funding from the federal government.

Commissioner Simons asked if people moving to Charleston who became homeless after moving here bolstered the numbers of the homeless population. Ms. Clark said they saw a mixture of both people who were from there and people who moved there, experiencing homelessness. There were people who moved here for jobs that fell through or to find work.

Commissioner Frye asked what they thought about the work the Mayor was doing to tackle the issue. Commissioner Johnson asked what they thought the Mayor should do in addition to that work. Ms. Jenkins-Fludd said Mayor Cogswell proposed the rapid shelter project, and it was a viable concept. When she asked unhoused individuals what they thought about the idea, they were supportive. However, it would likely need a regional approach as the City could not accomplish it on its own.

Ms. Young said the rapid shelter project needed to have a regional and comprehensive approach. It was a good start, but they needed to start planning what the next phase after rapid sheltering would be.

Commissioner Frye asked what they thought would be a good next step. Ms. Young said permanent housing would be the ideal next step. Also, not treating the program as a one-size-fits-all solution and being able to pivot and problem-solve case by case.

Commissioner Cleaveland asked about any demographic disparities when it came to serving unhoused individuals. Dr. Platt said unhoused mothers were often underserved because of the fear

of having their children taken away if they disclosed that they were unhoused. Therefore, they were often discreet and went to extreme measures to get shelter for their kids. Ms. Jenkins-Fludd said there were no racial disparities in her organization's work; however, the racial demographic experiencing homelessness the most were Black men and women. If a certain community was continuing to experience the same issues, addressing the systemic reasons why that was happening should be included in the service.

Co-Chair Harris asked how important it was that they collect data on the unhoused population. Ms. Young said it was very important because it was difficult to plan a strategy if you didn't know the scope of the problem you were trying to address. When trying to accomplish legislative change, it always helped to come with data and numbers to show the economic impact. Also, many grants required data.

Commissioner Jackson asked if their organizations shared data with each other. Dr. Platt said that because collaboration was a big part of the ecosystem of their work, they shared data often. He said recently, data and demographics were being questioned more than ever. Getting support to the groups that needed it most, like LGBTQ and people of color communities, has been made more difficult.

Commissioner Jackson asked about their collaboration with mental health services. Ms. Jenkins-Fludd said the Department of Mental Health offered services that the HOPE Center often used. They were also in talks with MUSC about them helping to assist clients who needed mental health services. There were also other organizations, like NAMI, that they worked with. She said the biggest issue they faced was funding. Ms. Clark said those organizations were also inundated with clients. It could take months before a client can be seen.

Co-Chair Harris asked if they had any requests as the Local and State governments go through their budget cycle. Ms. Jenkins-Fludd said they needed more funding for direct services, eviction prevention, emergency hotel stays, security deposits, utility assistance, and transportation desperately.

Mr. Logan said the State was at jeopardy of losing \$24 million in CBDG Homes funding and another \$15 million in funding that directly supports these organizations due to federal spending cuts. He said they needed to advocate at the State level for funding and start that work soon.

Commissioner Simons said while advocating they should mention that because people moving to Charleston were contributing to the homelessness population, Charleston was carrying more of the burden than they could handle and therefore should have more resources.

4. Manager's Update

Ms. Swinton said the City's Commission on History had requested a joint meeting. Their next meeting was on October 8th, and they extended an invitation for HARCC to join them.

She had sent the ordinance revisions for the Commissioners to review. She asked them to send any edits to her as the presentation in front of City Council was on September 18th.

Co-Chair Harris said the Community Development (CD) Committee would be discussing the ordinance. For the presentation, HARCC had a PowerPoint that they had been working on for a few months, which they were editing. It would display the background of HARCC and its priorities for 2024 and 2025. Co-Chair Bowden and Ms. Swinton would be presenting.

Commissioner Jackson asked what about the ordinance the CD Committee would be discussing. Co-Chair Harris said they would discuss the amendment of the ordinance. Recommendations regarding the status of the ordinance and reauthorization would go from CD to the City Council.

5. Old Business

a. Youth Initiatives

Co-Chair Harris said they had been curious about what the City was doing with their youth initiatives outside of the curfew. So far, they were discussing assembling another panel of professionals to speak on the topic at another meeting. They could also look at the agendas for the Mayor's Youth Council meetings.

b. Coming St. Commons Project

A memo released at the beginning of the month by the Protect and Respect the Bodies Coalition provided an update on where the project was moving. There was also a BVL document that went in-depth about the history of the site.

CofC submitted a permit to proceed with demolition, architectural excavation, and initial pile driving. The State Department of Environment Services, Bureau of Coastal Management, had to approve it. A public hearing would likely be held by the State Department. Mayor Cogswell and the President of CofC, President Hsu, released a joint letter that stated they were considering forming a community engagement committee for the project.

The Commission on History adopted a set of recommendations that listed out work to be done and commitments to be made. He said the Commissioners should review the recommendations and affirm them if they agreed.

On a motion of Commissioner Cleaveland, seconded by Commissioner Fish, the Commission voted unanimously to affirm the list of recommendations adopted by the Commission on History for the Coming St. Commons project.

6. Open Discussion

Commissioner Fish said a couple of weeks ago, there was a shooting in a Catholic school that killed 2 children. He said it highlighted that places of worship and religious institutions were becoming targets for people who want to commit acts of violence. The State did not have a nonprofit or faith-based institution security grant program, like other states did. So, those expenses were the responsibility of the community, and hiring off-duty police officers and security

professionals could cost \$50,000 a year. He said they should advocate for the State to contribute funding for those safety expenses.

Commissioner Fish said that in light of the recent deaths of political public figures, the work HARCC did to provide a safe space for people of opposing opinions to have constructive conversations was crucial.

7. 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