

City of Morgantown
Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes for June 18, 2020

Present: Jacob Powers, Chair
 Kristen Cooper, Secretary
 Jan Derry
 Don Spencer (Program Associate)
 Dee Dee McIntosh (PFLAG Liaison)
 Ash Cutright (Morgantown Pride Liaison)

Meeting called to order by Jacob Powers, Chair, at 6:36 P.M. The meeting took place online due to pandemic restrictions.

The agenda was distributed, there were no changes to the agenda, and it was approved.

The commission recognized the resignations of two commissioners – Kate Levine-Freedman and Drew Bucy. The City Clerk is aware of the vacancies and is in the process of advertising them on their website. Since the commission is presently comprised of 5 members, it was agreed that the 3 members who are present tonight constituted a majority.

Public Session:

Several people from the public were In attendance including the following: Jerry Carr(President of the local NAACP), Robert Cohen (NAACP), Richard Burks (NAACP), Danielle Walker (WV State Delegate), Rebecca Sykes, and Zoey Vilasuso.

Danielle Walker expressed her concerns about Black Lives Matter in Morgantown. She needs the HRC to assist in making Juneteenth a holiday, bring recognition to the community outcry and letters that are going around Morgantown, and development of programs for training/awareness of police officers. She asked that the HRC be present in any meetings related to these initiatives. She brought up HB4563 – a bill which would form a police review board which needs the HRC’s support. Don Spencer mentioned that the new resolution being put before the City Council includes a review board, which may be a good start in the effort to pass state legislation for the same endeavor.

Jerry Carr discussed a letter that the Morgantown/Kingwood NAACP sent to the Chief of Police that listed 12 priorities to reform policing. The purpose of the letter was to start a dialogue with the police and find a way to make the necessary changes starting with the Morgantown Police Department and moving on to other police forces in the area. Jerry Carr made some comments about the HRC Police Resolution and asked that it include a civilian oversight board. He also asked that 1) the resolution have some teeth so that there are consequences when it is not followed, 2) everyone is equally represented,

and 3) there is transparency (with transparency being of the highest priority). Bob Cohen from the NAACP agreed that the police review board needed to have some clear authority. Ash Cutright also spoke in support of the need for repercussions/consequences to violations of the resolution. Don Spencer suggested that the commission put together guidelines for putting together a review board to make the process move along more expeditiously. Ash Cutright asked about the turnaround time to get the resolution to the City Council and Don Spencer told the group that it is slated to be presented on the last Tuesday of June.

Minutes:

The May 2020 minutes were reviewed. Jan Derry moved that the minutes be approved as written: Kristen Cooper seconded the motion. The minutes where approved unanimously.

Communications:

For commissioner updates – it was recommended that Jacob Powers check with the City Clerk to make sure the 2 commissioner vacancies are listed on the City's website. Jan Derry reported that she received some response to her anti-bullying letter. Ash Cutright is working on getting a Black Lives Matter crosswalk created in Greenmont (which will include a fundraiser) and asked that the HRC add their signature to the letter that will be going out about the project.

Regarding recent activity with the Commission's social media, email or phone line -- Jacob Powers reported that he is receiving any emails that are sent to the general HRC email address – and that a copy of those emails will also go directly to the City Attorney so he can be alerted to any complaints being filed.

Tim Hairston was not present to report the State HRC.

Priority Items:

A copy of the Community Policing Resolution was distributed and reviewed. Don Spencer read the 10 resolved improvements.

1. Reaffirm and augment the mission and operations of the police department. Establish an arrangement with a community agency that enables that agency to assist the police when needed for follow-up on crisis situations, de-escalations, behavioral and mental health problems, and intoxication with information/referral and other problem-solving.
2. Expand relationships with neighborhoods, commercial establishments, Monongalia County and West Virginia University and other constituents and partners for the purpose on making public safety more public and more effective;

3. Continue to protect the rights of protesters to exercise their First Amendment Rights nonviolently and to emphasize that violations of property are not to be equated with the violation of human life and that deadly force is not to be used on protesters.
4. Continue the use of body-worn cameras and other means of enhancing transparency, accountability and accessibility by uniformed police in providing public safety services;
5. Continue to require marked police vehicles to be equipped with dashboard cameras.
6. Continue to improve police personnel training by emphasizing implicit bias orientation and by stressing the use of preventive and de-escalation intervention skills as well as modes of intervention if they see another officer use excessive force;
7. Re-emphasize in training the use of deadly force only as a last resort when necessary to prevent death or serious bodily injury and establish a clear Morgantown Police prohibition on the use of the chokehold or other carotid artery holds in restraining or subduing a resistant individual or in bringing an unlawful situation under control;
8. Restrict participation in the Federal 1033 program which provides military equipment to local and state police and end participation in any military training for local police.
9. Establish race and LGBTQ liaisons to the Police department as resources to assist with plans for training and with the review of cases as needed.
10. Establish a diverse Community Police Review Board to investigate complaints about alleged police misconduct to assure that investigations have been judged to be fair and accurate and to assist the Police Chief, City Manager and City Council in evaluating the overall performance of the Police Department.

Jan Derry moved that the Commission adopt the Community Policing Resolution; Kristen Cooper seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Jacob Powers will request a status update from the City Attorney about the minority liaison coordinating council, the LGBTQ liaison to the City Manager, and the LGBTQ liaison to the Police Department. Jacob will contact the City Attorney to see what we can do to move that forward.

Don Spencer circulated a draft of a letter that recommended that the national NAACP institute a program similar to the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index (MEI). It was suggested that the letter be sent to the NAACP under the Commission's name.

Jan Derry asked for a copy of the NAACP letter that was mentioned earlier in the evening with the 12 points. Jacob emailed a copy to each commissioner.

The MEI report is due at the end of July, so the committee needs to meet and work on the various components. Don Spencer circulated a list showing the areas where Morgantown has been deficient in scoring in the past years. The committee agreed to meet on June 24th at 2 pm.

Progress Reports:

Fiscal year-end expenditures were reviewed. These included printing of displays, signs, and welcome statement cards. Don submitted a quote from a local printer. It was suggested that we also add extra brochures to the print order. Kristen Cooper will send Don Spencer the artwork for the brochures.

Jacob Powers reported that the City Attorney had a discussion with the national Open to All campaign to inquire about Morgantown starting our own, unique version of the program. Unfortunately, the national campaign owns the copyright to all of the names, images, and other intellectual property around the program. If Morgantown were to pursue its own program it would have to be drastically different than the existing Open to All campaign. After some discussion, it was decided to table further discussion of the Open to All program until a later date.

Jan Derry moved to approve an invoice for printing that Don Spencer incurred; Jacob Powers seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Time did not permit discussion on the other topics on the agenda. The commission will have a working meeting on July 1st at 9 am to cover the topics on the agenda.

Announcements:

The next meeting will take place on July 16, 2020 and will be via video conference.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:32 pm.

Submitted by Kristen Cooper