



HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
STUDY MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, July 14 – 7:00 PM
Via Zoom

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair R. Glover calls the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Present are:

Chair R. Glover
Secretary K. Aoun
Don Jordan
Haitham Fakhouri
Rachel Zuckerman
Wafa Dinero
Carmen Kennedy-Rogers

Josh Sabo

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Commission unanimously approves the agenda.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Commission unanimously approves the meetings of the July 7 meeting with some amendment.

IV. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

- i. Welcoming guests and City officials
 1. Chair Glover asks J. Sabo to identify and welcome those City officials on this evening's Zoom, which includes City Clerk Susan Nash, City Treasurer Lynda Scheel, County Commissioner Terry Marecki and City Councilmember Brandon McCullough. Also present is former HRC member and Schoolcraft College Trustee Dillon Breen.
- ii. Tonight's agenda and public comment



1. Chair Glover outlines the meeting's agenda and schedule: public comment will be held at the conclusion of the meeting and anyone on the Zoom can have up to three minutes to speak.

V. OLD BUSINESS

- a. Guest: Delisha Upshaw, Livonia Citizens Caring about Black Lives

Delisha Upshaw from the Livonia Citizens Caring about Black Lives (LCCABL) group speaks on the invitation of the Chair. She talks about the background of the group that worked to organize the 2,000 person protest/march in Livonia. For her, the march showed that the City was ready to have a set of conversations it was not always willing to have.

LCCABL has three areas of focus: public engagement and education, public safety for all, and community building and inclusion.

Ms. Upshaw shares that the public safety for all work has certainly been their most visible effort, which she says focuses on transparency and accountability. She admits that the other areas of focus are not as developed. She shares that many people are involved in the group, doing tasks from organizing, research and requesting data through working with legal counsel on FOIA requests. Other people, she notes, have contributed financially.

Ms. Upshaw notes that the billboard the LCCABL group sponsored is a tough message for some people to swallow, but from many people's perspectives, she believes, the message was an important way to start a conversation about race-based traffic stops in Livonia. She feels that the only way to address this issue is for the conversation to be public, which was the point of the billboard. She says it is unfortunate that a lot of the conversation has dwelled on the billboard itself rather than the message or the toll that traffic stops have taken on the community. She notes that a number of business owners have reached out to LCCABL to share that they have had to have tough conversations with employees regarding this issue.

She shares that she has been excited about the Mayor's stance, particularly in her words that the data will inform future policy. But she has concerns about the data, too, and she claims that the Livonia Police Department is not collecting all of the data it is supposed to be. She is surprised, for instance, that the Department does not keep records of LEIN (law enforcement information network) requests.

The group has been in contact with the Livonia Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion. She says that transparency is the first step and then we can dig into solutions.

She concludes by saying she is curious what the Human Relations Commission is doing now and what its goals are. It is not acceptable to her that many people have been silent, and it is easy to be unified in silence. She notes that on the fundraising website you can see a number of donors include their reason for donating as a comment. With that, she welcomes questions from the Commission.

C. Kennedy-Rogers asks Ms. Upshaw about the data and sources of data that the group is trying to have access to.

Ms. Upshaw notes that the group has done a lot of FOIA requests. They had initially focused on the LPD's use of force policies. She says that they want to make sure Livonia is not the next place where there's an excessive use of force incident. She shares that one of their members had a discussion with a Lieutenant in the Police Department who thought the LPD did two of the eight "8CantWait" policies. She notes that the following day, the City and the LPD released a document which she says claims the LPD does all eight policies. The one she is particularly concerned with, as an example, is the policy on chokeholds, which she claims is only in LPD policy such that chokeholds cannot be used in the collection of evidence.

Ms. Upshaw hopes that we can avoid smoke and mirrors and actually dig into the realities of policies and fix them. Their FOIA requests have been based on these things and on Campaign Zero's 9 areas of focus that research says reduce the likelihood of violence in civilians interactions with police. Avoid smoke and mirrors, this isn't a PR stunt, we can fix those policies

As it relates to the practice of race-based traffic stops, Ms. Upshaw notes that the group hopes to receive information on who is being stopped, what the initial reason for the stop was, and what the outcome of the stop was. She shares that so far the group has received data on citations, which she says shows some disparities. She notes that some people suggested it looked like the court system was being funded by policing the poor. She adds that the missing elements are still the reasons for stops that do not end in citations. Many of the stories her group has heard focus on people who are pulled over constantly but are not ticketed.

Ms. Upshaw shares that others in her group are doing research about Livonia's history, identifying the residual issues of racism that may exist in the City. They are also requesting budget information, trying to understand how exactly the Police Department uses its funding.

Ms. Upshaw notes that she understands the Livonia Police Department does have hiring difficulties and links that to the lack of a pensions for officers. She hopes to do more comparisons between Livonia and neighboring Departments to see if Livonia can do more to make it attractive to work in LPD. She wants to avoid officers being overworked and undercompensated.

W. Dinaro asks about the collection of stories that the LCCABL group is doing, asking if the information is being tracked or put into some kind of database.

Ms. Upshaw responds that the data is being collected and can be shared with the Commission. They have also collected all of the FOIA responses in one google drive and are also collecting screenshots of Facebook and NextDoor comments from Livonia residents, highlighting examples of racism and prejudice in the community.

R. Zuckerman asks about what reactions to the release of data from the LPD have been among the members of the group.

Ms. Upshaw responds that they have been sharing all the data and information as it is released. She notes that some people felt like they wanted more information or that what was released doesn't feel right or make sense. A lot of people feel like this was a good start, as some data is better than none. Other residents she has observed felt like the data validated their views in that "black people are more criminal, so it is obvious they must be doing most of the crime here." For Ms. Upshaw, it is concerning to hear people say that.

Ms. Upshaw also notes that some people were surprised by what they saw in the data, while for other sit confirmed their experience that low level offenses often lead to interactions with the police. The group is planning a charity event where drivers can come have their taillights replaced, etc., so that there is a chance to avoid some of these interactions.

Ms. Upshaw shares that there has been some skepticism of the data on the website. Some of that was the result of the male data being published first, but to others, there is concern that because some City officials have been dismissive of the problem, the data is not being made as transparent as possible.

Overall, people were happy that this was a step in the right direction, but still have concerns. She points out that Chief Caid knows there's a perception issue. It is important that the Department start to report the data that is being talked about.

Ms. Upshaw argues that good faith means that we would start recording the data at the heart of the issue. Her group is looking at what other departments are reporting, how much it costs them, how they do that, and, the pros and cons of doing that. She would like to see the department create some kind of scorecard that is regularly tracked and updated relative to its goals, and that the Department should ensure it has the type of systems that it can use to record everything.

D. Jordan says that he attended the march in June and was inspired to be a part of that event. He says that the HRC is in this position of collecting data and identifying its priorities. He asks Ms. Upshaw what stories from qualitative standpoint continue to rise to the surface, whether that be interactions with businesses or the police or what have you.

Ms. Upshaw responds that one of the common themes that she hears is that the Police Department have become “everything” to the community, meaning that they are the agency responding to so many of the community’s problems – from cats in trees to fireworks to mental health issues.

Another theme has been people just not knowing a lot about African American history and culture, she highlights the Juneteenth event the LCCABL held, for instance. The group is looking more into developing resources or providing resources to schools that help encourage students to be critical thinkers. Another thing often heard, as reported by Ms. Upshaw, are questions of general access for those who are hearing impaired.

Ms. Upshaw shares that some of the comments and thought processes shared on social media are concerning, too. They want to do more to prepare teachers to be able to address situations with students in particular.

H. Fakhouri asks about the future of the LCCABL group, particularly if there are plans for it to become an official group. He also notes that there has seemingly been a spike in tension since the billboard has been put up. He wonders if Ms. Upshaw thinks the billboard is ultimately going to help the community or if there has been a rift created that cannot be repaired.

Ms. Upshaw responds that there has not been a willingness to admit that racism is here in Livonia, which has left a lot of people out of the conversation. She has heard about businesses that do not have a place to go to seek guidance on these issues.

She reports there has been some discussion of forming a 501(c)3 organization, but there are no plans to do so yet. Regarding the billboard, she says that some people have said that it has created racism. She disagrees, saying that instead it has exposed racism that already existed. She feels that too many Livonia residents were united in their willingness to be silent, and that isn’t real unity at all. The division we see now was already there.

Chair Glover shares a story that exemplifies the point about tension growing in the City. He notes that he often jogs by an intersection where a pair of young people typically gather to wave an American flag and wear “Make America Great Again” hats. He noted recently that they have changed over to a “Blues Lives Matter” flag. He observed that some drivers were honking their horns in support as they drove by, while others gave them the finger.

Chair Glover then gave Ms. Upshaw the opportunity to ask any questions that she might have. She first asked the group about what the community can expect from the Human Relations Commission.

Chair Glover shares that the group works to be the eyes and the ears of the mayor and also a thought partner. There’s a broader purview for the group, but they are focused on this issue right now. W. Dinero notes that the group works to facilitate conversations in the community and between the community and the Livonia Police Department. H. Fakhouri points out that many of the members are new. R. Zuckerman adds that the group has been asked for particular recommendations and priorities. J. Sabo adds that the group has started to do some work beyond just the Police Department. He also corrects something that Ms. Upshaw said earlier regarding the Police not collecting data that they say

they do. He notes that from his understanding the Department collects all of the information that it says it collects.

D. Jordan asks Ms. Upshaw, given what she has heard tonight, how does she think that the Commission can best serve the community? Ms. Upshaw responds that we really seem to be missing the space for these conversations, in town halls or in other places.

H. Fakhouri reads a message in the Zoom chat from Commissioner Terry Marecki, who notes that there was space created for conversation at the recent “Partnerships for Progress” event, sponsored by the Conference of Western Wayne and Western Wayne NAACP in Livonia.

Ms. Upshaw responds that while that was certainly a start, it was clear that there is a real diversity problem in our cities’ leadership. She observed that it seemed like some municipalities were doing better than Livonia in some places, while Livonia did better in others.

She knows that some people felt like it was a token initiative and that the officials did not really have an interest in what people were saying. According to Ms. Upshaw, many felt that the officials onstage were unwilling to acknowledge that there were problems.

Ms. Upshaw felt the value of the event was that it was powerful to hear people tell their stories, even though it was nerve-wracking to do for many of them in front of City officials and police officers. She felt that Mayor Brosnan was humble about the difficulty of the conversation. Ms. Upshaw feels we’ve avoided that conversation for too long.

C. Kennedy-Rogers asks about the LCCABL group’s work relative to education, asking What thought does your group have about working more closely with LPS? What level of youth involvement or voice is there in the group?

Ms. Upshaw responds that many of the group’s members have observed social segregation in Livonia Public Schools and have heard stories about teachers being unable to deal with hearing racial slurs appropriately when students say them to other students. She says this was a driving force in organizing the group. She says that the LCCABL group has put together a survey to try to better understand what people are experiencing in our schools.

i. Follow up on Chief Caid Letter

J. Sabo confirms to R. Zuckerman that Chief Caid and Mayor Brosnan are in receipt of the Commission's letter.

ii. Follow up on HRC Survey

K. Aoun asks if any Commission members have any requested edits or changes on the HRC survey. W. Dinaro asks that the survey change the term "Middle Eastern" to "Arab/Chaldean."

R. Zuckerman wants to ensure that every Commissioner has an opportunity to review the survey before it is released.

Chair Glover suggests that a small group of the Commission come together to make final edits to the survey. Chair Glover, K. Aoun, and R. Zuckerman to be part of working group.

K. Aoun notes that it is important that this survey get out to a broad group of people. H. Fakhouri wonders what happens if someone submits their form a lot of times – is there any statistical analysis we want to do? R. Zuckerman says that this is not designed as a scientific study, so no such analysis would be worthwhile.

iii. HRC Website Updates

J. Sabo provides the Commission with a list of updates that have been done on the Commission's website. The Commission hopes that people will be able to contact the Commission through the website and J. Sabo will follow up to ensure that that happens.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

i. Racial justice forum—Livonia

W. Dinaro says she will take the lead on beginning to sketch out what potential events for the HRC will look like.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT

Anna Cragel - Ms. Cragel shares that she went to LPS and has lived in Livonia her whole life. She notes that there are racial disparities in Livonia Public Schools. She has previously met with Chair Glover, and the HRC helped fund an event with FreedomHouse Detroit and Amnesty International previously. She is involved in the LCCABL group by collecting screenshots of racism observed on social media that is voiced by Livonia residents.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The Commission was adjourned at 8:49 p.m..

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION IS JULY 21 VIA ZOOM.

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