

COMMUNITY AND RACE RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
January 5, 2006

MINUTES

PRESENT: Ms. Betty Thomas, Chair
Mr. Shawn Lahey, Vice Chair
Mr. Larry Guphill
Mr. Wilf McEachern
Ms. Sylvia Parris
Ms. May Lui
Ms. Susanne Wise
Ms. Gail Wilson
Mr. Thomas Rissesco

**ABSENT WITH
REGRETS:** Mr. Juan Carlos Canales-Leyton
Councillor Krista Snow
Mr. David Khokar
Councillor Debbie Hum

STAFF: Ms. Jennifer Weagle, Legislative Assistant
Ms. Charla Williams, Coordinator, Diversity Program

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. in the Media Room, City Hall.

The Chair welcomed Mr. Michael Lightstone, of the Chronicle Herald, who was attending as an observer. Mr. Lightstone advised that he is the City Hall reporter for the Chronicle Herald and is interested in the review of the Community and Race Relations Policy appearing on tonight's agenda. Roundtable introductions were provided to Mr. Lightstone.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Mr. Larry Guptill, seconded by Ms. Sylvia Parris, that the minutes of December 1, 2005 be approved as circulated. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

The Chair thanked Mr. Shawn Lahey for chairing the last meeting.

3. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA, ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

MOVED by Mr. Thomas Rissesco, seconded by Ms. May Lui, that the agenda be approved as distributed. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES

4.1 Future Work Plans

The Chair invited the Committee to discuss funding and outreach options for their future work plans. It was noted that some of the Committee's goals could tie in with the implementation of the Cultural Policy. Ms. Williams encouraged members to focus on goals the Committee would like to accomplish.

Ms. Parris noted that the Committee has voiced an ongoing desire to host meetings in the community. The following comments were made by the Committee regarding this proposal:

- C These meetings would allow the Committee to obtain feedback on issues the community feels need to be addressed.
- C Funding for such a project (ie: location rental, etc.) is a struggle.
- C There are various community spaces around Halifax that would be appropriate locales for holding the meetings, such as the Black Cultural Centre, the Mic Mac Centre, and various ethnic community centres. Ms. Williams noted that there are municipally owned facilities throughout HRM that the Committee could use for no cost or a nominal fee.

Ms. Lui noted that the Committee could advertise in various newsletters distributed within HRM, to provide information on the Committee's mandate and contact information for the public to raise issues with the Committee.

Mr. McEachern indicated that section 3.2 of the Community and Race Relations Policy under Goals of the Policy - Education and Sensitization - allows the Committee to be

proactive within the Community. Mr. McEachern suggested that the Committee first needs to determine the purpose of the community meetings and how they would be structured; to educate the public or obtain input from the public.

Ms. Williams reminded the Committee to focus on issues that pertain specifically to HRM and avoid issues that don't fall within the mandate of the Committee.

Ms. Parris suggested looking at co-hosting meetings, and circulating information about the Committee beforehand. She further suggested obtaining funds to provide refreshments.

Ms. Williams raised the following suggestions with the Committee:

- C When the Committee was working to put together the Community and Race Relations Policy, letters were sent to various organizations and consultations were provided to organizations that responded. A similar venture could be undertaken again.
- C The Committee could prepare a survey to provide to the Councillors focussing on identifying issues that the Committee could address within the various districts of HRM.
- C She further indicated that Community Councils are another avenue for input and feedback.
- C These usggestions would require little or no cost to the Committee.
- C If the Committee wanted to request funds for a specific initiative, they would have to put together a business plan with justification for the requested funds.

Mr. Rissesco indicated that it has been a goal of the Committee for some time to increase awareness of the Committee within HRM's communities. Mr. Rissesco noted that the Committee could be publicized in the HRM News and with the Councillors.

The Committee discussed steps that are taken when a race or community issue is first raised. It was noted that these issues are normally first brought to the attention of the Human Rights Commission, a Councillor, an MLA, community leaders, or the Police, depending on the issue. Community and race issues specifically concerning HRM can be brought to the Committee for feedback and to keep the Committee informed. The Committee then has the option to make a presentation to Council on an issue that they feel Council should be aware of, with suggestions, if any, of how to remedy the issue.

Members discussed how the Committee should remain pro-active to head off issues, as opposed to reacting to situations as they arise. It was noted that patterns need to be identified in order to remain pro-active. Mr. McEachern noted that in order for the Committee to remain proactive, intimate contact with community leaders should be developed and encouraged members to continue to share issues from their various communities with the Committee.

The Committee discussed the proposed awareness initiative within HRM to inform citizens about the mandate of the Committee, how the Committee can help with various issues, and about the Community and Race Relations Policy. Ms. Williams proposed that the Committee may have outlived their mandate, indicating that since the Community and

Race Relations Policy has been developed, HRM has implemented further avenues for dealing with race and community issues, and has become more pro-active in dealing with these issues as an organization.

The Chair noted that the Committee has an advisory role to Council and if awareness of the Committee is addressed within HRM, the Committee can continue to keep Council informed of the issues concerning citizens of HRM. The Committee discussed the difference between problem resolution vs. advisory role.

The Committee inquired whether there is a system in place to ensure that the four goals of the Community and Race Relations Policy are being regularly implemented and to measure the success of the Policy. Ms. Williams advised that she sees the goals being implemented in many different ways, however, it would require extensive work to track all of the areas of implementation as training, education, and policy review are constantly ongoing. She noted that she has been hearing fewer complaints since the implementation of the Policy.

Ms. Williams encouraged the Committee to work with the Councillors to identify issues within their respective districts and to find where the Committee can add the most value within their mandate. It was noted that Community Councils could be a good avenue for creating awareness of the Committee and developing a relationship with the Councillors and the Community. It was further noted that perhaps the Councillors should have a measuring tool to determine if they are seeing results from the Policy implementation.

Ms. Lui suggested that the Committee encourage the three levels of government to work together with community groups to identify problem patterns. She further suggested that initiatives being developed in Toronto against the recent rise in gun violence could be monitored and implemented to some degree in HRM. Ms. Williams suggested that the Chief of Police could be invited to a meeting to discuss the Chief's Diversity Advisory Committee, what that committee is working on and if there is any opportunity for the two Committees to offer support to one another.

Mr. Lahey and the Chair will compile a proposed work plan and circulate it to Committee members for review and discussion.

4.2 Review of Community and Race Relations Policy (revised Draft as of Oct. 7/04)

- C The Community and Race Relations Policy (revised Draft as of Oct. 7/04), Community and Race Relations Policy (Aug. 19/97), and select minute extracts were before the Committee.

The Chair advised that the Committee has had several discussions recently regarding the Community and Race Relations Policy. The Committee agreed that there are not any substantive changes to be made to the Policy and the Committee will leave the Policy as is at this time. It was noted that the Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

5. NEW BUSINESS - none

6. ADDED ITEMS

The Chair read an email received by Juan Carlos Canales-Layton suggesting that the Committee recommend to Council that a representative of HRM attend the town hall meetings in Toronto on gun violence.

The Committee briefly discussed the recent rise in gun violence in Toronto.

Mr. Rissesco retired from the meeting at 6:25 p.m.

The Committee briefly discussed the incidence of racist graffiti in Dartmouth, which targeted the Lebanese community.

Ms. Williams advised she will speak with the Mayor's Office and/or HR Police to determine if the meetings in Toronto have taken place yet and if a representative from HRM will be attending the meetings.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee is scheduled for February 2, 2006.

8. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Jennifer Weagle
Legislative Assistant