

Regular Meeting

Thursday, December 10, 2020, 5:30 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

Present: Chair, Eric Olson; Vice-Chair Franco Webb; Secretary Semone Pemberton; Commissioner Milette Harris; Commissioner Eileen Hatch; Commissioner Mark Kendrick; Commissioner Dwight Palmer; Commissioner Donna Pelham; Commissioner J. Vernon Peterson; Commissioner Myahtaeyarra Warren; and Commissioner Jeffrey Wire

Absent: Commissioner William “Bill” J. Milton, II; Commissioner Peter Pappas; and Commissioner Tammy Six

Guests: Cameron Williams and Theodore Trainor, III (via telephone)

Staff Present: Dr. Anthony Wade, Director; Yamile Nazar, Manager; and Janet Beaudry, Office Assistant II.

The meeting was called to order at ­­­­5:37 p.m. by Chair Eric Olson, followed by a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Olson reminded everyone how time accelerates and that Christmas is actually two weeks from tomorrow, and, today begins the first day of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah. Commissioners were directed to the Directors’ report submitted by Dr. Wade.

Motion to approve agenda was made by Commissioner Kendrick, seconded by Commissioner Wire; vote was unanimous.

Motion to approve the November 12, 2020, Zoom meeting minutes was made by Commissioner Webb, seconded by Commissioner Wire; vote was unanimous.

Chair Olson turned the mic over to Commissioner Jeff Wire, who reported that his time in the military has ended; it is time to hang up his uniform and proceed to a new and second adventure. He will be relocating to Idaho after Christmas. Commissioner Wire said it has been a great experience working on the Commission. “Thank You.” Chair Olson expressed how much Commissioner Wire will be missed, sharing the excitement for the new chapter in Commissioner Wire’s life. When asked about the COVID-19 rate in Idaho, Commissioner Wire replied that there are quite a few people that do not believe COVID is real, and we’re seeing some spike in numbers. North Carolina has put Idaho on the quarantine list; anyone leaving there has a two-week quarantine. Commissioner Wire reported that they were seeing a lot of issues with Hispanic immigrants in Idaho, and, he’s looking forward to meeting with the City Council there to implement a Human Relations Commission if one is not already in place.

Committee Reports:

1. Crisis Management, no report.
2. Marketing, no report.

Chair Olson reported that Governor Cooper has reinstated the curfew starting at 10:00 p.m. until 5:00 a.m.; it applies to all restaurants, and businesses with alcohol sales ending at 9:00 p.m. for the foreseeable future (at least through the New Year holiday); reassessing in January.

Ms. Nazar informed Chair Olson that former Commissioner Trainor (listening on cell phone) wants to know if we have a number for the City as it relates to COVID since Thanksgiving. Dr. Wade replied, “This is a separate question that should be addressed offline, because we need to get with Scott Bullard in MS to get those figures if they exist.”

Chair Olson proceeded to discuss an old business topic that is also included in the director’s report. The Dining & Dialogue was a great virtual event for the Human Relations Commission, with the youth route this time. He commended the Youth Council for a powerful event. He thanked all that were involved and opened the floor for comments from other participants, regarding their experience with the Youth Council. Dr. Wade acknowledged and thanked the facilitators, Crystal Glover, Deborah Effon, Ms. Nazar, and everyone who contributed for doing an excellent job, stating, “It was a team effort, and it was a team success.”

Chair Olson moved on to new business. The next big, upcoming “virtual” event on Tuesday, December 15, 2020, is the North Carolina State Human Relations Commission meeting. It’s an open invite, scheduled to start at 9:45 a.m. Commissioner Pelham stated that she did not see the invite. Chair Olson said he would send the invite out to the whole group, immediately after the meeting.

Before moving on to the director’s report, Chair Olson commented on what is happening in Fort Hood, Texas right now in terms of human relations; climate, behavior responsiveness, humanity, and that this is an example of how not to handle human relations issues. He asked Commissioner Harris or Wire to expand on how the leadership and Chain of Command at Fort Hood handled the case of the young specialist who was raped and left for dead. Commissioner Harris reported that findings revealed there was a toxic environment throughout the leadership and no one was doing anything about it. Of the numerous allegations, not all were reported because people felt it would not be handled properly. Commissioner Harris, in agreement with Chair Olson, stated that when it comes to these Commission boards, they are very important. The investigation is ongoing. Commissioner Wire added what is called “barriers to reporting.” The delay in reporting left the Chain of Command blindsided when they began their investigation. As Commissioner Harris stated, many do not report due to lack of trust. Chair Olson stated that he’s addressing this issue now because it all comes back to dignity and respect. There is no trust, no dignity, no respect, no open lines of communication, or follow-up; all of those things that we as a Commission exist for.

Not to tie these two together, but, we recently had a double homicide on Fort Bragg where senior officers were involved. All of this has to do with human relations. Ms. Nazar informed the group that the double homicide made the local paper. Dr. Wade stated that these are indicators of situations happening in communities across the board, and there will always be a need for the important work from you as individuals, Human Relations Commissioner and Fair Housing Board Members.

Dr. Wade commended the Commission for their participation in the Dining & Dialogue event; announced that Assistant City Manager Wright-Linear will become the Assistant County Manager in about two weeks; and wished both her and Commissioner Wire the best in their future endeavors. He reminded the Commission of its 2021 community engagements, specifically regarding the future of the Market House and race relations. There will be a presentation by ETC Institute at the next City Council meeting on December 14th. ETC Institute created the Social Capital Survey for Greater Fayetteville United. With the Council’s approval they will create the GEO coded survey for residents, allowing us to get feedback from residents on race relations and thoughts about the future of the Market House. Information derived from that survey will serve as guidance for the Commission in order to determine the most appropriate method of engaging the community in dialogue.

Chair Olson opened the meeting to the group. Ms. Nazar informed the Commission that Karen Waldermo was offered a permanent position and another temporary worker would be coming in tomorrow until the permanent replacement is hired. She stated that she began interviewing today, and hopefully someone would be verified by next week. Ms. Nazar also said that, during the LGBTQ Webinar yesterday, it was heartbreaking to see how the system refused to address the transgender population by their correct pronouns, acknowledging that our system is still broken. Dr. Wade added that the City Manager had asked him to join the executive team meeting where this particular subject was addressed. He shared that the opportunity is here now, as we have a heightened sensitivity and awareness about diversity, equity, and inclusion. It was recommended that we revisit the conversation that the Commission started two years ago about the inclusion of orientation, identity and the language of the HRC ordinances. So again, this Commission is “leading the way then; and leading the way now.”

Ms. Nazar reported that she and Crystal Glover were having an ongoing conversation about 2021 and another dialogue with the Youth Council. She suggested Ms. Glover ask her executive board to provide one of the “ism” topics they would like to discuss next. Once a date is confirmed, the information will be shared so that Commissioners can volunteer to deliver meals and facilitate the event. Dr. Wade added that he has received an invitation from Thomas Colclough, the new Director of the EEOC Charlotte District; to speak at a future leadership lecture series that will be directly related to the specific work of the Human Relations Commission.

Ms. Nazar informed the Commission that former Commissioner Trainor wanted to extend his appreciation and enjoyment during his time on the Commission. He has moved to Harnett County and will try to get a Commission established in Harnett County.

Chair Olson informed the Commission that the COVID vaccine is on its way, and, will be arriving at the loading dock at Womack Army Medical Center on Monday; by Wednesday staff will begin receiving the vaccination. It’s voluntary, but coming to a hospital near you is the approved vaccine. Commissioner Pelham added that she was fortunate enough to be in the trial, has received the vaccination, and, has developed antibodies. She stated that she is honored to accept an invitation from former Commissioner Brooks to come and speak about her experiences during the trial. In response, Commissioner Harris stated her concerns of the black and brown communities who are having a difficult time with this due to the past history of the Tuskegee Experiment and other things that have happened to minorities over the years. There are many who are against taking the vaccination. She cautioned Commissioner Pelham to expect some pushback, mentioning that if we understand where the pushback is coming from, it will be easier to address it when the time comes. Commissioner Pelham thanked Commissioner Harris for pointing out these concerns.

The next scheduled Commission meeting will be Thursday, January 14, 2021, at 5:30 p.m., via Zoom.

After a few concluding remarks, Chair Olson adjourned the meeting at 6:29 p.m.

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Semone Pemberton, Secretary