

Cuyahoga County
Citizens Advisory Council on Equity Minutes
08/11/2020 Meeting

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Clerk Nailah Byrd.

II. Roll Call

Attending

- Clerk Nailah K. Byrd
- Executive Armond Budish
- Assistant Law Director Awatef Assad
- Phyllis Harris
- Victor Ruiz
- Habeebah Rasheed Grimes
- Marsha Mockabee
- Dr. Heidi Gullett
- Jenice Contreras
- Rabbi Josh Caruso
- Yanela Sims
- Levine Ross
- Stephen Caviness
- Randy McShepard
- Reverend Ken Chalker
- India Pierce Lee
- Danielle Sydnor
- Eddie Taylor
- Sheila Wright

Members Absent

- Cordell Stokes – The Department of Regional Collaboration who makes the board appointments did not properly input the correct contact information for Mr. Stokes and as a result he was unable to join the Zoom call. We apologize and have corrected the information.

III. Moment of Silence and Reflection

The tragic killing of George Floyd and the hard hit of the coronavirus fatalities have highlighted systematic inequalities. A moment of silence was held.

IV. Public Comment

No public comment submitted to equity@cuyahogacounty.us

V. Message from County Executive

Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish spoke to the Council regarding the importance of their work. He asked the Council to consider and present additional initiatives to alleviate the impacts of racism. He further charged the Council to both: present the County government with initiatives to advance efforts to attack the symptoms of racism and try to address the causes of racism.

VI. New Business

a. Welcome and Introductions

Clerk Byrd asked the Council members to introduce themselves by name and organization along with explaining why they believe the Council's work is important.

- Yanela Sims (Ohio State Director of Service Employees International Union). Local 1 Union which represents mostly low-wage workers, often people of color and women who are most greatly affected by income inequality and racism on the job.
- Levine Ross (Cuyahoga County Council Policy Advisor and Social Work Instructor at Cleveland State University). Child welfare and disproportionality of African American children in County care is a major concern.
- Jenice Contreras (Executive Director of Northeast Ohio Hispanic Center for Economic Development). Forty-four percent of Cuyahoga County residents are low income. It is not just a "Cleveland" issue. Black residents are two times less likely to get a mortgage than their White counterparts.
- Rabbi Josh Caruso (Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple). Explore obstacles of those who do not have easy access to public transportation.
- Victor Ruiz (Executive Director of Esperanza, Inc.). Hispanic lives cannot thrive until Black lives thrive. This is his life's work.
- Habeebah Rasheed Grimes (CEO of Positive Education Program). Would like to focus on the cross-system impacts of racism on the lives of young people. This impact creates the conditions of suffering for the predominantly black male youth her program serves.
- Dr. Heidi Gullett (Medical Director for the Cuyahoga County Board of Health). Wants to catalyze systematic change to target and transform the system in order to tackle healthcare and public health systems and the structural racism perpetuated.
- Phyllis Harris (Executive Director for the LGBTQ Community Center of Greater Cleveland). Interested in looking at leadership development across the systems and how that manifests into more oppression and lack of growth, expansion, opportunities, and access for Black and Brown people.
- Steve Caviness (Director of Project Management for Team NEO). Spoke to how often minority and female entrepreneurs have barriers to achieve growth and have access to resources.
- India Pierce Lee (Senior VP at The Cleveland Foundation). We must deal with the systems that are keeping our citizens from breaking through structurally racist ecosystems.

- Randy McShepard (VP of Public Affairs and Chief Talent Officer for RPM International and co-founder of Policy Bridge). This work should address public policy to look at the systems, structures, and ways to inform governmental entities on how to mitigate and address challenges.
- Marsha Mockabee (President and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Cleveland). The Council is going to have to call for action and commitment from institutions to hold up mirrors to their organizations for internal reflection on things like public policy and hiring practices.
- Eddie Taylor (Owner Taylor Oswald LLC; Chair of University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center; Chairman of President's Council). There is a need to correct the social determinants of health. Highlighted that there are 20,000+ vendors' licenses in the area for African Americans but only about 800 of those business have more than one employee. How we live and thrive from an entrepreneurial and economic standpoint is important.
- Danielle Sydnor (President of Cleveland Branch NAACP and CEO of We Win Strategies Group). The work should not just be ceremonial but lead to change.
- Reverend Ken Chalker (former pastor at University Circle United Methodist Church). Wants to create a climate where there is no "those" people but "we" the people, where we join together instead of fearing each other. Wants to change the outlook of how people view inner city residents. Highlighted that there are over 3,000 children in the juvenile justice system and 97% are non-white. The inequalities of services are overwhelming.

b. Governance Discussion

Introduction of Awatef Assad, Assistant Law Director, who will act as the Council's legal counsel. She advised the Council they may want to consider an executive committee framework that includes a chair, possibly a co-chair, a vice chair, and subcommittees for areas including education, housing, employment, transportation, and healthcare. She will draft bylaws consistent with the executive committee format.

Eddie Taylor asked Executive Budish what he hopes the Council will accomplish. Executive Budish advised the legislation calls for a report to be submitted to the Administration by the Council at the end of the year. He calls for urgency. A discussion is had on the mandate to create a semi-annual report and a status report no later than December 31st of every year.

Eddie Taylor stated there should be a structure in the Council and someone to serve as the linchpin to the conversations. He would like to see subcommittees to divide the work. Jenice Contreras stated that the Council needs to create a process to identify categories of short-term and long-term priority for the subcommittees; she would like to see targeted focus. A discussion ensued regarding the structure of the Council. Eddie Taylor volunteered to chair, and all other members agree. He requested a co-chair.

c. Scope of Work and Priorities and d. Goals, Strategies, and Action Plan

Clerk Byrd reminded the group the ordinance establishing the Council, and the resolution declaring racism a public health crisis, charge the Council with reviewing, focusing on, and providing recommendations to reduce disparities between Black and White citizens in regards to healthcare, child welfare, suicide rates and life expectancy, the criminal justice system, access to healthy foods, safe and affordable housing, well-paying jobs and economic opportunities, quality transportation, educational opportunities, and safe places to be active. The Council members identified their top five areas of priority as economic equity, healthcare, juvenile and adult justice systems, county policy, and procurement.

Dr. Gullett would like the group to spend time together to determine what a “systems model” or map of what structural racism looks like in the County. She recommended speaking with Dr. Peter Hovmand (from St. Louis), who is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to assist with this project of systems mapping. The group agreed to have a subcommittee of Eddie Taylor, Jenice Contreras, Dr. Heidi Gullett, and Phyllis Harris meet with Dr. Hovmand and report back to the group at the next meeting.

Reverend Chalker advised the Council should look at reports or materials already created. He referenced a document called “The Church in the City” that focused on the neighborhood and its needs. Clerk Byrd advised she would forward the document to the group for review. Reverend Chalker further advised the Diversity Center may be a good resource, to which Eddie Taylor agreed. Executive Budish spoke to the group regarding the Council not reinventing the wheel. He advised he spoke with the Director of the Diversity Center who expressed strong interest in providing whatever help is needed.

e. Coordination with County Equity Commission and Commission on Human Rights

Clerk Byrd asked the group to keep in mind the Council is also charged in Ordinance O2012-0014 with acting as a resource and providing advice to the internal Equity Commission as well as the Human Rights Commission. The Council should provide an action-oriented recommendation as to the ways the County can change policies, practices, and procedures as well as attitudes on race and equity.

f. Communication Plan

Clerk Byrd advised the Council they must provide regular updates to the County Executive and Council. The group decided to meet with Council quarterly and would like each member to have an opportunity to speak directly to Council. The Advisory Council will meet monthly, with the subcommittee meetings taking place more regularly. The group will meet again at the end of August/early September after the meeting with Dr. Hovmand.

Clerk Byrd asked the group if there are other ways, aside from the equity@cuyahogacounty.us email address, they would like to reach out to the public. Eddie Taylor asked for advice from Executive Budish and other members regarding their experience being on the panel at the City Club. Jenice Contreras advised an issue brought up on the panel was to make sure to represent communities that may not be represented and figure out how to reach those voices (ex: youth, other communities of color, seniors). Executive Budish recommended townhalls, emails, or church outreach to reach communities outside of the City Club.

The group and Clerk Byrd then discussed various outreach platforms, including surveys, Facebook, Twitter, and radio. Executive Budish offered the County Communications Department as a resource to assist with outreach. Clerk Byrd offered to help facilitate a meeting with County Communications Director, Eliza Wing, and a smaller subcommittee consisting of Victor Ruiz, Levine Ross, Habeebah Grimes, and Phyllis Harris.

VII. Next Meeting

The group will schedule the next meeting after the subcommittee speaks with Peter Hovmand.

VIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05pm.