

Onondaga County/Syracuse Commission on Human Rights

John H. Mulroy Civic Center
11th Floor East
421 Montgomery Street
Syracuse, NY 13202
(315) 435-3565

2020 Human Rights Commission Meeting Dates

Date	Location	Notes
January 22, 2020	South Side Innovation Center 2610 S. Salina St.	This was held as a board development session, NOT as a business meeting
February 26, 2020	South Side Innovation Center 2610 S. Salina St.	
March MEETING CANCELLED	South Side Innovation Center 2610 S. Salina St.	n/a
April 22, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	
May 20, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	
June 24, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	
July 22, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	
August 26, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	
Sept. 23, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	
October 21, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	
November 18, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	N/A
December 16, 2020	- VIRTUAL MEETING -	

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

February 26, 2020 Meeting

This initial draft was posted on the HRC Website.

This draft was APPROVED in the HRC Meeting on May 20, 2020.

Present: Sanjay Chhablani, Crystal Doody (by phone), Rabbi Dan Fellman, Chol Majok, Liban Mohamed, David Pasinski, John Rushing, Leonardo Sanchez, Tricia Wittowski, Rosalie Young

Excused: Mary Alice Smothers, Barbara Johnson, Ali Adan

Absent: Khadijo Abdulkadir, Suzette Melendez, Francis Parks, Shelley Skellington

Community Members Present: Mikiel Anderson

County Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter & Montanette Murphy (Diversity & Inclusion Dept.)

1. Meeting was called to order by Rabbi Dan Fellman at 5:42 pm
2. Sanjay Chhablani made a motion to accept the draft minutes of the November 2019 board meeting. This motion was seconded by David Pasinski. The motion was approved unanimously.
3. Highlights from Chair:
 - Rabbi Fellman stated that newly appointed Commissioner Migdalia Morales will begin attending board meetings in March.
 - Rabbi Fellman said that there are 7 open positions for which we are waiting appointments from the County Executive (4), Legislature (2) and Mayor (1). Fellman said that he was in touch with the County Executive's office earlier today and reiterated the need to fill those positions. He also asked that the County Executive speak to the Commission at a future date. Barrie stated that the Mayor has recently acted to fill open positions.
 - Sanjay Chhablani offered to set up a google doc to help board members track and schedule speakers for board meetings. The following board members are reaching out to the following potential speakers: Leo Sanchez: Syracuse Mayor, Dan Fellman: County Executive, Chol Majok: NAACP & NAF & RISE, Crystal Doody: Syracuse CRB, John Rushing: SPD Chief Buckner (2nd Time)
 - Rabbi asked board members to review documents related to a request from Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON) that will be on a future meeting agenda for discussion.
4. Highlights from the Executive Director:
 - Barrie described the transitions in staff roles and leadership in the new Diversity & Inclusion Dept., as well as a need for her and Montanette to focus on JCOC case documentation now and through the spring months. Barrie pointed out an article in board member packets describing the changes in federal government rules relating to the concept of "public charge" in consideration of visa applications. Sanjay Chhablani suggested that the Commission might be able to educate community members about the implication of this change.
5. Review of 2020 Committee Structure & Focus
 - Rabbi Fellman reviewed the two Committees formed as a result of the discussion of issues and goals in the Board Development Session in January. These will be a Criminal Justice Issues Committee

which will focus on the topics of Bail Reform & Police Community Relations, and a Voter & Civic Education Committee which will focus on voter education and civics literacy. All present expressed approval of these committees and topics.

6. Committee Discussions - Board Members then broke into the two committees to discuss new, potential, and/or ongoing projects.
 - Tricia Wittkowski, John Rushing, Leo Sanchez, Sanjay Chabblani and Chol Majok met as members of the Criminal Justice Issues Committee. Leo will reach out to a Camillus PD Lieutenant to continue planning for joint community presentations. Crystal & Sanjay will aim to make an initial presentation to the board about bail reform at the April or May meeting. Other opportunities for public education were discussed.
 - Rosalie Young, Liban Mohamed, and Dave Pasinski met as members of the Voter & Civics Education Committee. Liban will meet with Barrie to draft a presentation outline on voting to refugees about to become citizens. For presentation opportunities, Dave will reach out to Interfaith Works and Onondaga Votes (OV), Barrie will reach out to the Americanization League, and Liban will reach out to Catholic Charities. Barrie mentioned that Ali wanted to do workshops for students at RISE. Rabbi Fellman asked about reaching people held in the jail or Jamesville, or about to re-enter the community. Dave will contact Suzette & Ali about the committee's proposed projects.
7. The meeting was concluded as each Committee finished its respective discussions.

Respectfully submitted to the Commission,

Barrie Gewanter, Human Rights Director

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

April 22, 2020 VIRTUAL Meeting

This initial draft was posted on the HRC Website.

This draft was APPROVED in the HRC Meeting on May 20, 2020.

Present: Ali Adan, Rev. Roosevelt Baums, Sanjay Chhablani, Crystal Doody, Rabbi Dan Fellman, Suzette Melendez, Migdalia Morales, David Pasinski, John Rushing, Leonardo Sanchez, Rosalie Young

Excused: Mary Alice Smothers, Barbara Johnson, Tricia Wittowski

Absent: Khadijo Abdulkadir, Chol Majok, Liban Mohamed, Francis Parks, Shelley Skellington

Community Members Present: Peggy Chase & Mary Kuhn (County Legislators), Mikiel Anderson

County Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter & Montanette Murphy (Human Rights Dept.)

1. The meeting was called to order by Rabbi Dan Fellman at 5:38 pm as a ZOOM virtual meeting with Sanjay Chhablani & Barrie Gewanter as additional co-hosts. Recording of the meeting was initiated by Chhablani on the ZOOM platform. Community members listed were asked to introduce themselves and were then muted.
2. A motion was made to table discussion of the Dec. 2019 meeting minutes to allow board members to review them. This motion was seconded and approved. Approval of these as well as the Feb. 26, 2020 meeting minutes are expected for the May meeting.
3. Board members were each asked to offer a brief comment on how they and/or members of their community were doing during the pandemic restrictions.
4. Rabbi Fellman said that our municipal leaders seem to perceive COVID19 as a human issue. In the context of public comment, County Legislator Peggy Chase agreed with Fellman. Then Chase suggested that some refugee groups were not taking the virus dangers seriously, and that there were problems on the North Side of Syracuse. County Legislator Mary Kuhn said that All Saints Catholic Church has been working with one African refugee Community where there were issues with the need to stay inside and not to visit others even when someone is sick. The legislators mentioned that a member of this community in their 20's had become sick and died. The Commission asked Barrie to look into this. Rabbi Fellman also suggested that the Voter & Civic Education Committee should address the need for related education in this community.
5. Rabbi Fellman said that he has put calls into appointing authorities in the County about Commissioner vacancies, and will follow up after restrictions are over. He also suggested that guest speakers could participate in the meetings via Zoom.

The board discussed the cancellation, postponement and virtual versions of several community events where the board usually does outreach and tabling during the summer.

Commissioner Suzette Melendez asked if the head of the new Diversity & Inclusion Dept planned to reach out to diverse groups in the community, based on criteria such as race/ethnicity, LGBT, and disability. Barrie said that she was not aware of Monica's plans.

Leo Sanchez and Crystal Doody reported that the Criminal Justice Committee was focusing on bail reform at the moment, and that meetings with the Camillus PD were on hold right now.

Dave Paskinski & Rosalie Young reported that the Voter & Civic Education Committee met before the COVID19 restrictions. Barrie reported that she and Liban Mohamed had met to create a draft outline to educate New Americans about the voting and registration process.

Rabbi Fellman commented that one role the Commission plays is to reach out to under-represented groups. It was also suggested that the Commission utilize the close captioning capability in Zoom.

6. There was no specific Old or New Business on the Agenda.
7. The meeting was then adjourned to break into separate Zoom rooms for Committee discussions.
 - a. The following was discussed in the Criminal Justice Committee:
 - The Legal Services Director of Advocacy wrote SPD Chief Buckner in reference to potential calls to the police in reference to evictions that would be illegal in the current situation.
 - The need for a social media presence for the Commission & its power for public education. Crystal suggested the Commission pursue this again with County administration.
 - Legal Services has sued the Broome County jail about vulnerable inmates held there..
 - The Committee will ask for 15 minutes at the next Commission business meeting to provide Criminal Justice updates to the full board.
 - b. The following was discussed in the Voter and Civic Education Committee:
 - A need for education in some refugee communities about the need for social distancing, wearing masks, and not going to the homes of sick friends or family.
 - Ali Adan agreed to identify refugee community leaders.
 - Rosalie Young agreed to contact Patty Clark from SCSD
 - Dave Pasinski agreed to contact staff at Interfaith Works who work with refugees
 - Suzette Melendez agreed to send out a Zoom invitation for a meeting on May 4th at 2pm.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Commissioners,

Barrie Gewanter, Human Rights Director

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2020 VIRTUAL Meeting
This initial draft was posted on the HRC Website.
This draft was APPROVED in the HRC Meeting on June 24, 2020

Present: Ali Adan, Rev. Roosevelt Baums, Sanjay Chhablani, Crystal Doody, Rabbi Dan Fellman, Chol Majok, Suzette Melendez, Liban Mohamed, David Pasinski, John Rushing, Leonardo Sanchez, Rosalie Young

Excused: Mary Alice Smothers, Tricia Wittowski

Absent: Khadijo Abdulkadir, Barbara Johnson, Migdalia Morales, Francis Parks, Shelley Skellington

Invited Guest Speaker: Peter McCarthy, Chair of the City of Syracuse Citizen Review Board (CRB)

Community Members Present: Peggy Chase (County Legislators), Mikiel Anderson

County Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter & Montanette Murphy (Diversity & Inclusion Dept.)

1. The meeting was called to order by Rabbi Dan Fellman at 5:35 pm as a ZOOM virtual meeting with Sanjay Chhablani & Barrie Gewanter as additional co-hosts. Recording of the meeting was initiated by Chhablani on the ZOOM platform. Board members introduced themselves to the guest speaker. Community members listed were asked to introduce themselves and were then muted.
2. Invited Guest Speaker, Peter McCarthy addressed the board. He started by providing the following information:
 - He was appointed to the CRB in 2017 and was appointed chair in 2018.
 - The CRB was established in 1993 by city ordinance after 30 years of “citizen activism”
 - A Legislative Advisory Committee was established to propose revisions to the enabling legislation. Revisions related to timing and accountability were adopted in 2013.
 - The CRB’s Mission is to ensure an open citizen-controlled process to review complaints about the Syracuse Police Dept. The CRB has no jurisdiction with any other agency
 - The CRB has 11 members, 3 appointed by the mayor and 8 by members of the Common Council. There are two paid staff. The CRB can hire an investigator and medical
 - Complaints filed by the public are shared with the SPD Office of Professional Standards and vis versa. The CRB Director and OPS pursue parallel investigations of complaints.
 - Officers do not come to CRB hearings unless issued a subpoena, and then do not testify.
 - CRB recommendations related to officer conduct and discipline, as well as improvements in policy, procedure and training, are sent to the Chief of Police.
 - Since Chief Buckner was appointed, meetings have occurred with the CRB and its Director regularly, as well as a series of meetings with representatives of the Mayor, City Council and Corporation Counsel. Some progress has been made in communication since, including information the CRB asked for in relation to investigations, personnel and use of force. Chief committed to OPS providing more timely info to the CRB.
 - Most of the complaints the CRB’s receives allege officers did not treat community members with respect, did not listen, or that the community was treated like a war zone
 - Most complaints are not sustained. Fair number of complaints are dismissed as not valid
 - The CRB was able to make a presentation to the latest class of cadets.

- In response to a question about interaction with the DA, McCarthy said that they can refer cases to his office if the CRB feels legal action is indicated against an officer, and they have done so a few times since 2017, but that the CRB has generally disagreed with his subsequent decisions.
 - McCarthy indicated that the CRB is open to joint outreach, including to the refugee and immigrant community from which the CRB does not seem to get complaints.
3. A motion was made to approve the draft board minutes for Dec. 2019, February and April 2020. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. Dav
 4. Recognition of Visitors
 - In relation to filling open positions on the Commission, County Legislator Peggy Chase suggested that right now legislators are focused on issues relating to COVID-19. She said that she would raise the issue in her Caucus. Chase also stated her appreciation for the Commission's interest in COVID awareness in the refugee community. She stated that it can be a struggle to get people in some communities tested and the care they need. She suggested that this is in part because of the way that some communities perceive government and government actors. Rabbi Fellman suggested that the Commission could help to educate refugee communities that government can be helpful and respect their rights. Ali Adan said that he had connected with a man named Banabus in the Congolese community, and he is interested in follow up contact and assistance. A
 - Mikiel Anderson urged Commissioners to keep racial disparities in mind in relation to the pandemic, and said there are grassroots organizations doing related work that may not get recognition. He specifically mentioned 100 Black Men and the Pan African Community of CNY
 5. Chair's Report - Rabbi Fellman reviewed open positions. Chol Majok said he emailed the Mayor's office about the one open position for a Mayoral appointee. Rabbi Fellman said that the Mayor is scheduled to speak to the board at its July 22nd meeting.
 6. Director's Report – Barrie Gewanter reported that Human Rights staff are rotating between working in the office and working remotely. When in the office they field calls from members of the public seeking to register for COVID testing at county sponsored mobile testing sites. She reported that the local NAN Chapter has launched a program seeking donations to provide laptops and tablets to SCSD students who lack such devices. Gewanter also reported on plans for video versions of World Refugee Day and the ADA Anniversary Celebration.
 7. Committee Reports –

Voter & Civic Education Committee - Ali Adan will be a new co-chair, replacing Dave Pasinski. Ali described two factsheets about COVID 19 that the committee would like to distribute through local refugee organizations. These factsheets are available in several languages through the CDC, including Swahili and Arabic. One factsheet addresses COVID19 precautions and procedures for large households. He stated that local refugee households can include 6-10 people. Ali also thanked Sanjay Chhablani for finding the fliers. Sanjay stated that providing these factsheets in different languages was part of the Commission's multi-year commitment to building relationships with the refugee community. Rosalie Young also sought support for adding census factsheets to the distribution effort. She said that census participation is crucial for allocation of government funding as well as determining legislative representation. She said the deadline for response has been extended to Oct. 31 because of COVID19.

There was a clear consensus among Commissioners to move forward to print and distribute the COVID19 and Census factsheets.

Criminal Justice Committee – Crystal Doody said that the Commission should have a social media presence, and that it is harder to reach about to the community without the ability to participate in summer outreach events. Sanjay Chhablani then made a presentation and update on bail reform in NY State. He made the following points:

- The primary purpose for bail is to ensure that people charged with crimes come back to court for trial. In setting bail, courts can consider the nature of the crime and evidence of a person's character. However, many judges imposed bail amounts much higher than most defendants could not afford, even when they were charged with non-violent crimes.
- In recent reforms that became effective in January 2020 cash bail was eliminated for many crimes. Other options included being released on their own recognizance (ROR) and monitoring. There was an immediate backlash with the voices of DA's and police at a "high crescendo".
- Some of the reforms were rolled back in the Governor's April budget, but misdemeanors remain unaffected. Cash bail can again be imposed for felonies that were exempted in January.
- There is a continuing battle over whether judges should be allowed to consider the concept of "dangerousness" in the future. This is controversial as this may conflict with the constitution presumption of innocence. There is likely to be continuing lobbying about this.

Chol Majok asked about the argument that the bail reforms made the public more vulnerable to criminals. Sanjay commented that this is not clear in the 3 months of data available so far. Barrie Gewanter explained that the balance between public safety and individual right to equal protection under the law must be considered. She suggested that this can be difficult balance to reach, but that the bail system before the reforms could be seen to be out of balance because of the disparate impact on people without monetary resources.

8. There was no old business.
9. New Business – Rabbi Fellman asked board members if they wanted to hold a meeting in June because of the cancellation of the usual outreach events on each June weekend. The Commissioners decided to hold a meeting on June 24th. Chol Majok suggested that the leaders of the New Americans Forum (NAF) be asked to speak at the June meeting. He stated that NAF is a relatively young organization and includes the voices of refugee leaders from many nations. Chol and Barrie agreed to reach out to Jai Subedi and Tai Shaw.
10. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded and approved, and the meeting ended at 7:20pm.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Commissioners,
Barrie Gewanter, Human Rights Director

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

June 24, 2020 VIRTUAL Meeting

This initial draft was posted on the HRC Website.

This draft was APPROVED in the HRC Meeting on 7/22/2020

Present: Ali Adan, Rev. Roosevelt Baums, Sanjay Chhablani, Crystal Doody, Rabbi Dan Fellman, Chol Majok, Suzette Melendez, Liban Mohamed, David Pasinski, John Rushing, Leonardo Sanchez, Rosalie Young

Excused: Mary Alice Smothers, Tricia Wittowski, Barbara Johnson, John Rushing

Absent: Khadijo Abdulkadir, Migdalia Morales, Francis Parks, Shelley Skellington

Community Members Present: Vernon Williams (County Legislator), Mikiel Anderson

County Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter (Diversity & Inclusion Dept.)

1. The meeting was called to order by Rabbi Dan Fellman at 5:34 pm as a ZOOM virtual meeting with Sanjay Chhablani & Barrie Gewanter as additional co-hosts. Recording of the meeting was initiated by Chhablani on the ZOOM platform. Board members introduced themselves & community members listed were asked to introduce themselves and were then muted.
2. A motion was made to approve the draft board minutes for May 2020. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.
3. Recognition of Visitors proceeded later in the meeting
4. Meeting with Monica Williams, new Chief Diversity Officer
 - Sanjay Chhablani said that Williams was originally invited to the meeting, but emailed that she would not attend. He and Rabbi Fellman are trying to find a time for the Exec. Committee to meet with Monica to discuss the HRC's purpose and role & how it can contribute.
5. Updates:
 - Director Barrie Gewanter reviewed two recent discrimination complaints and coordinating follow up by board members in support of complainants. Suzette Melendez reiterated her willingness to accompany one complainant who identifies as Latinx.
 - Voter & Civic Education Committee Co-Chair Rosalie Young confirmed that Syracuse City Census Coordinator Tori Russo is willing to provide educational postcards about the importance of filling out the census for the HRC to distribute to refugee & immigrant groups, as it will soon with 2 COVID fliers in 5 languages. Sanjay Chhablani said he is still working on formatting the COVID fliers.
 - Leo Sanchez stated that he spoke to a representative from the Mayor's office about the Mayor speaking to the HRC board at the July meeting.
6. Full Commission Discussion
 - Rabbi Fellman stated that "the events of the last 6 weeks have changed our world" and suggested that this presented "an important moment for our society and for the HRC." He asked Commissioner to comment on what they were seeing and how the HRC can "help craft a world we want to see and a way forward."
 - Suzette Melendez expressed multiple emotions of frustration, exhaustion, hope and disappointment. She suggested that the work being done is "everybody's job." She suggested

the HRC try to support Black Lives Matter protestors in various ways including protest monitoring, advocacy, “making the powers that be accountable”, doing “the hard work required” and “keeping each other honest.”

- David Pasinski said he had taken part in police reform protests but he is not clear if the HRC would have a role with other groups. He suggested looking for groups engaging in dialogue and “greater demands we want to support.”

- Crystal Doody stated that there is not agreement among protestors on goals, asks, or way to get there, but that the HRC has not established itself in any way. She suggested that the HRC “follow the lead of the People of Color who have emerged as leaders and their expressed common ground. She said that she has been helping to coordinate legal observers and that the observer group is not open to new people right now.

- Leo Sanchez suggested that the HRC focus should remain local

- Sanjay Chhablani said that the HRC has been struggling with the dimensions of its role. He stated that according to the enabling legislation, the HRC focus should be in an education capacity and the “heart of our work is bridging differences and bringing people together.” He suggested that there has been “a shocking silence in the County in relation to police issues” and that the HRC could try to “get the Onondaga Legislature and Sheriff on board with police reforms.” He also suggested that “silent voices can manifest later in opposition” and a call to roll back reforms. Chhablani also mentioned a legislative mandate to submit a written report. He also recalled a suggestion to survey police departments and see how they respond.

- Rev. Baums suggested asking the Sheriff how his office is responding to calls for reform

- Legislator Vernon Williams agreed that the HRC could meet and engage with the Sheriff in relation to reforms, “push for passage” and “hold them accountable.” He also suggested that the HRC could collect people’s stories of interactions with the Sheriff’s office. He expressed willingness to work with the Commission.

- Crystal Doody suggested that these suggestions be discussed in the Criminal Justice Committee.

- Ali Adan suggested that the HRC’s role is to engage and educate. He also cautioned against the HRC taking on too much and not finishing what it started.

- Sanjay Chhablani suggested that the Columbus Day issue was very contentious. David Pasinski Agreed and pointed out that Interfaith Works has already conducted a series of dialogues to look at that issue in depth

- Rabbi Fellman suggested that the HRC has “enough pieces to wrestle with” and that it is important that the HRC act in a way that we “live up to what the people need of us”. Rabbi then read an email message from John Rushing, who was unable to attend the meeting.

7. Recognition of Visitors

- Legislator Vernon Williams said that this was the first HRC meeting he has attended, and that he looks forward to working with the board members.

- Mikiel Anderson said that it was important to take into consideration all that was said, but to also figure out how the HRC can move things forward in relation to police community relations. He also stated his support for pushing the Sheriff to put police reforms into effect.

8. A motion was made to adjourn into breakout groups for committee discussions the meeting. The motion was seconded and approved, and the full board meeting ended at 7:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Commissioners,

Barrie Gewanter, Human Rights Director

Human Rights Commission Minutes
July 22, 2020 Meeting

This draft was APPROVED in the HRC Meeting on August 26, 2020

Commissioners Present: Dan Fellman, Sanjay Chhablani, Dave Pasinski. John Rushing, Ali Adan, Liban Mohamed, Rev. Roosevelt Baums, Leo Sanchez, Suzette Melendez, Rosalie Young, Tricia Wittkowski (phone), Chol Majok

Commissioners Excused: Mary Alice Smothers, Crystal Doody, Barbara Johnson

Commissioners Absent: Migdalia Morales, Francis Parks

Community Members Present: Mikiel Anderson, Mayor Ben Walsh, Ruthnie Angrand

County Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter & Montanette Murphy

1. Meeting was called to order by Rabbi Dan Fellman. Welcome then extended to Honorable Ben Walsh, Mayor of Syracuse. Rabbi Fellman introduced himself and was followed by all members introducing themselves.

The Mayor was invited to make remarks based upon questions submitted. He acknowledged that he hadn't known much about the Human Rights Commission before he became Mayor, but he has learned more. He said that the role of the Commission was especially important right now when a bright light is being shined on the inequities in our community as a result of the pandemic and calls for reform in the criminal justice system.

He suggested that the Commission can highlight the voices of people who are not always heard, and that with the Commission's mission as a "honest broker" and "credible messenger" has never been more important. He said that the Commission can help us to bridge gaps with open and honest dialogue about human and civil rights issues we have dealt with for a long time. He talked about feeling an urgency to work on these challenges and seeing this time as a "window of opportunity." He affirmed our interest in conducting a public hearing about the divides exposed by the pandemic.

He stressed that "dialogue is part of the action" that some are calling for, but he also cited the value of "deep listening" to community concerns. He recalled a four hour meeting in July in which he and the police chief heard community concerns about police reforms. He said that he realized that that event was not a time for challenge or dialogue. However, he suggested that it would also be healthy and productive for there to be an opportunity to hear differing voices and opinions. In response to a follow up question, the Mayor said that he had responded positively to seven of the nine reform demands made by community members, and is in dialogue about the others. He referred Commissioners to a related document on the City website with the timelines for these items described in the document.

Rabbi Fellman described the two current Commission committees. The Mayor said that communication has been a challenge during the pandemic, and that the Commission could help disseminating information and sharing resources. Ruthnie Angrand added that the city relies on trusted messengers and community partners to augment digital communications which do not reach all members of the community. The Mayor also encouraged the Commission to promote everyday conversations about civic challenges like voting, the city budget, or the census, in order to "normalize" people talking about these types of things. Ms. Angrand also emphasized the importance of talking about such things at the grassroots community level, in smaller groups with "natural audiences" in order to "empower people to engage in larger conversations."

In response to questions from a Committee chair, Mayor Walsh suggested that the Commission may be helpful by playing a role in future dialogues related to police policy and practice, but stated that it is not yet clear what form such dialogue should take, or how to make such conversations purposeful and engage different constituencies. He also suggested that the Commission may be able to help expand such discussion beyond the boundaries of the city, and highlight the ways in which many “underlying systemic issues” such as the concentrated poverty in communities of color are the result of intentionally exclusionary laws and government practices over time. He suggested that the Commission may be in a unique position to include “County stakeholders” in such discussion to help “connect the dots” in regards to issues such as poverty, gun violence and housing instability, and to frame them as community-wide issues we all need to work to address.

There was some discussion of cooperative communications between the Commission and the Mayor’s office, as well as the challenges of the current municipal budget which has been adversely affected by the pandemic. Walsh also stated that the Commission could help by sharing information that comes out of the past and current organized dialogues about Columbus Circle, and that he would welcome separate and complimentary processes that might address the complexity of related issues and help to inform the City’s decision making.

Tricia asked about the possibility that mental health professionals could assist and/or replace police in some types of calls. The Mayor said he is open to conversations about that approach, and cited homeless outreach programs as a possible model. However he pointed to safety issues as a key concern in discussions about this. The mayor also said he wants to establish a new city department of Inclusion, Diversity , Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) led by Deputy Mayor, Sharon Owens, and suggested that the HRC may be asked to contribute to that.

All present thanked the Mayor for his openness and his time. He and Ms. Angrand left the meeting.

2. A motion was made by John Rushing to accept the draft June meeting minutes. This was seconded by Rosalie Young and passed by unanimous consent

3. Recognition of Visitors: Mikiel Anderson announced the Pan African Congress North American Delegation was having its virtual meeting on August 1, and that his father Charles Anderson was a part of this effort.

4. Chairs Report: Rabbi Fellman and Sanjay gave a report about a meeting between the Executive Committee and Monica Williams about the Commissions parameters and role. In general, it was seen as a positive meeting, and she seemed to be supportive of the Commission having a greater voice in the community. Sanjay suggested that she and the mayor seem to see the Commission as bridge builders rather than activists, and said that Monica encouraged the HRC to engage in listening sessions in the community. Monica seemed supportive of the Commission having a social media presence, but said that this would have to be clarified with County administrators. Barrie reported that the verdict from the County was that the HRC was not permitted to engage in social media.

5. Director's Report: Barrie reported on two cases involving bias allegations. In one, an allegation was made that a property manager made a derogatory statement to an African American tenant. Together the Commission and the NAACP wrote the property management company requesting a meeting to discuss this, but they denied the allegation and refused the meeting. We held a strategy session on Zoom with the tenant and the NAACP to plan next steps. This is complicated by the fact that there were no witnesses to the alleged statement. We have consulted with CNY Fair Housing, and also

advised the client of his rights to take his complaint to the New York State Division of Human Rights.

In the second case, a Woman of Color who identified as Latinx complained that she had been accused of stealing something at a big box store when she clearly had a receipt for the item, and was denied a complaint form by an assistant manager. After calling headquarters for the corporation, she was directed back to an Asset Protection Manager in the same store to obtain a form that would be sent to corporate headquarters. Barrie contacted the Asset Protection manager and obtained a form on which she could describe how she had been treated, and delivered it to her.

Barrie also reported that she assisted a leader of the group “Rebirth Syracuse” with a complaint from a community member who alleged police misconduct. She helped the person create a narrative summary of what he said had occurred. She then suggested discussing potential paths of redress with the criminal attorney he was assigned to address related criminal charges. The Rebirth Syracuse leader said that he also intends to request the Commission’s assistance in relation to voting rights issues.

Barrie also reported that she had assisted with a taping of a ADA 30th anniversary show on WCNY, and appeared to describe the legacy of Donna Reese before the presentation of an award in her honor.

6. Committee reports:

- Voter & Civic Education Committee - Ali and Rosalie reported on factsheets about COVID19 in five languages that Sanjay adapted from the CDC website, as well as census information cards in English, that they plan to distribute to leaders in refugee organizations & communities. Distribution plans were discussed.
- Criminal Justice Committee- Leo reported that he will be reaching out to the Sheriff and to suburban police chiefs to engage in discussion about their plans for policy redesign as per the Governor’s order. Committee membership was also clarified.

7. Discussions: Rabbi Fellman stated that the Commission is empowered to hold public forums and suggested that the Commission hold a public hearing to hear from representatives of community organizations about the disparate effects of the COVID19 pandemic, especially in regards to poor and other marginalized communities in regards to food, housing, and access to healthcare and education.

There was then discussion about gathering information about citizen encounters with suburban police and how to go about soliciting and tracking resulting reports. Commissioners also discussed whether to try to hold other discussions or dialogues about policing community members and/or law enforcement officers, and how such efforts could be pursued effectively or provide new information.

Sanjay urged Commissioners to avoid consideration of too many projects at once, and to choose fewer projects that were finite and doable. The board was polled about the proposal to hold a public forum in the fall about the disparate impacts of COVID19. There was clear consensus to approve this effort with details to be discussed at the next meeting.

8. Ali motioned for adjournment and Sanjay seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 8:05.

Respectfully submitted,
David Pasinski, Commissioner
with assistance from Barrie Gewanter, Director

Human Rights Commission Minutes

August 26, 2020 Meeting

This draft was APPROVED in the HRC Meeting on _____

Commissioners Present: Ali Adan, Rev. Roosevelt Baums, Sanjay Chhablani, Rabbi Dan Fellman, Barbara Johnson, Chol Majok, Dave Pasinski, John Rushing, Leonardo Sanchez, Tricia Wittkowski, Rosalie Young

Commissioners Excused: Mary Alice Smothers, Crystal Doody, Suzette Melendez

Commissioners Absent: Khadijo Abdulkadir, Liban Mohamed, Migdalia Morales, Al-amin Muhammad, Francis Parks

Community Members Present: Mikiel Anderson, Heather Bianchi, Mary Kuhn (Co.Legislator)

County Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter & Montanette Murphy

1. Meeting began at 5:35 PM with introduction of Commissioners & Guest Linda Brown Robinson President of the Onondaga County/Syracuse Branch of the NAACP. Linda discussed the history of the NAACP, duties and current projects/focus committees. Highlights of her talk included the following:

- The national organization was founded in 1909 and has 220 adult & youth chapters. It engages in non-partisan advocacy and litigation. It sometimes works behind the scenes, but takes a long term view. It may not always be visible during more short term responses.
- Local branches have rules and reporting requirements that they must follow. There are local branches in Auburn, Oneida County, Rome, Broome County and Rochester.
- The NAACP has 14 national standing committees, but all may not be represented in a local branch. These include: Armed Forces & Veterans, Communications/PR&Media/Education, Freedom Fund, Housing, Criminal Justice, Legal Redress, Membership, Political Action, Economic Development, Religious, Health, Women, Youth.
- Issues the local Branch is working on include: safe return to school, tracking COVID19 in jails, voter registration and civic engagement, economic development related to I-81, banking, transportation & trade unions. The most pressing areas of local racial discrimination and inequity are in housing, healthcare, and police reform. Robinson welcomes organizational partnerships and volunteers to work on these issues.
- The Freedom Fund Award Dinner was rescheduled to 10/24/2020 due to COVID and will be conducted jointly with the Rome and Auburn branches. Awards will be given to recognize individual achievement, and efforts of businesses, unions, non-profits, in the education and legal professions, for philanthropy and for diversity work.

2. Draft minutes from the July 29th, 2020 meeting were reviewed. Minutes were approved.

3. Mr. Anderson and Ms. Bianchi introduced themselves. Ms. Bianchi currently works for Cornell Cooperative Extension doing youth education in local schools and parks.

4. Chair Dan Fellman & Co-Chair Sanjay Chhablani led discussion about two significant upcoming projects:

a. Holding a public hearing to learn about disparate impacts of the pandemic, anticipated for October. Representatives of human services and community organizations will be asked to speak to the experiences of their clients, especially in relation to food, technology, and housing, to create a record and inform decision makers. Rev. Baum agreed to take a lead role on logistics and publicity, and to create questions to frame and

focus the event. Ali Adan will produce a flyer and Chol Majok will do outreach to organizations. Barrie Gewanter has started an outreach list. Dave Pasinski and Sanjay Chhablani are willing to assist as needed, but all Commissioners are expected to work on the event. There will be no speaker at the Sept. meeting to allow for more focus on this event.

b. Producing an Annual Report by the end of Dec. 2020. This will include information about intake, cases, outreach, the public hearing, speakers & collaborative efforts. The report will document what the HRC has done, alert constituents about what the HRC has learned about the state of human rights in the local community and make related recommendations. Tasks will be divided between Commission members, but Committee Chairs may be asked to take lead roles. Rev. Baums will coordinate the production of the annual report with Rosalie Young as Co-Chair. Chol Majok will help with distribution.

5. Commission Chair Dan Fellman reported that Barrie and Suzette Melendez successfully moderated a discussion with residents of the Town of Dewitt focused on the experiences of People of Color in the town. Another discussion in the Village of East Syracuse is slated for September 1, 2020 at 6:30 pm in a pavilion in Ellis Field Park. Ali Adan, Dave Pasinski and Barrie will moderate. Fellman also reported that the County Executive is asking that data be gathered on the attendance of Commission members. The Executive Committee will pursue outreach for attendance.

6. Human Rights Director Barrie Gewanter reported the following: In regards to the complaint from an apartment complex tenant, the HRC and NAACP will send written correspondence to the property company who refused to meet. The complainant accused of stealing from a big box store put in a compliant form to the corporate office, but a 3rd party reviewer dismissed it. The complainant wants to speak directly to management face to face in the store. Barrie assisted members of the Deaf community in logistics for a protest on behalf of Deaf New Americans who say they have been unable to get effective communication in hospital settings. Barrie also provided access to voter registration forms at a recent BLM rally outside Syracuse City Hall. Barrie met with Brian Schultz, the new CEO at CENTRO. Mr. Schultz is open to interaction and collaboration with the HRC. He will be placed on the speaker list. Barrie reported that Onondaga Votes will be holding a virtual zoom panel discussion focused on youth and voting.

7. Committee Updates:

- Rosalie Young and Ali Adan reported that the Voter & Civic Education Committee took factsheets in several languages about COVID19 and the Census to various organizations who work with refugees.
- Leo Sanchez and John Rushing reported that the Criminal Justice Committee will be reaching out to the Undersheriff to request a virtual meeting. They urged Committee members to read about the governor's request for police reforms and submit questions for the Sheriff's Office to Leo and John. This will be followed with requests to meet with suburban police chiefs to talk about their redesign plans. Leo will send out a brief synopsis of the Syracuse Mayor's reform proposals to the Committee.

8. Old Business: None. Under New Business, Barbara Johnson reported that the Onondaga Nation has had no COVID19 infections.

9. Meeting adjourned at 7:05 PM & Members moved into committee meetings until approx. 7:30pm

Respectfully submitted,
Tricia A. Wittkowski, Commission Secretary
with Assistance from Barrie Gewanter



County of Onondaga
Office of Diversity and Inclusion

John H. Mulroy Civic Center, 15th Floor
421 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, New York 13202

Phone: 315.435.3565
Human Rights: 315.435.3565
MWBE: 315.435.5065

www.ongov.net

J. Ryan McMahon, II
County Executive

Monica Williams
Chief Diversity Officer

Human Rights Commission Minutes
September 23, 2020 Meeting

This draft was APPROVED at the Oct. 21, 2020 HRC Meeting

Commissioners Present: Dan Fellman, Sanjay Chhablani, Dave Pasinski, John Rushing, Leo Sanchez, Suzette Melendez, Rosalie Young, Tricia Wittkowski (phone), Chol Majok

Commissioners Excused: Mary Alice Smothers

Commissioners Absent: Khadijo Abdulkhadir, Ali Adan, Rev. Roosevelt Baums, Barbara Johnson, Liban Mohamed, Migdalia Morales, Al-amin Muhammad, Francis Parks,

Community Members Present: Mikiel Anderson, Mary Kuhn, Peggy Chase

County Staff Present: Monica Williams & Montanette Murphy

- 1) Conversation with Chief Diversity Officer: The meeting began at 5:43 p.m. Chief Diversity Officer Monica Williams presented details on the new direction of the Human Rights Commission. Sanjay Chhablani, Rabbi Daniel Fellman, Suzette Melendez, Dave Pasinski, Rosalie Young, Chol Majok and John Rushing raised questions and offered their opinions about the information presented. Rabbi Dan stated the new direction was "contradictory to what we've done" based on guidance and approval from former County Executive Joanie Mahoney and other leaders. Monica Williams commented that bylaws put in place contradicted the HRC's Local Law and that returning to the Local Law will allow the commissioners to work collaboratively with community members and stakeholders. Commissioners expressed a myriad of concerns about the information presented, including the legality of the changes and committed to take further action. County Legislators Mary Kuhn and Peggy Chase offered their assistance to commissioners, stating that they would take a look into the changes. Rabbi Dan stated that the commission would continue to function as it always has until further notice from legal authorities.
- 2) August 2020 meeting minutes were approved.
- 3) Chair's report given by Rabbi Dan and Sanjay Chhablani.
- 4) Administrator's report: Commission won't be able to produce voter information cards for new Americans because of budget constraints within county departments.
- 5) Commissioners gave updates on the November 18th public hearing on the impact of Covid-19, Election 2020 and Police Reform initiatives. The commission also sought to obtain a more exhaustive list of community contacts and stakeholders in preparation for the public hearing. Commission is aware it must produce a 2020 annual report.
- 6) No new business.
- 7) No new announcements.
- 8) Chol motioned to end the meeting at 7:55. John Rushing seconded. Meeting ended at 7:55.



County of Onondaga
Office of Diversity and Inclusion

John H. Mulroy Civic Center, 15th Floor
421 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, New York 13202

Phone: 315.435.3565
Human Rights: 315.435.3565
MWBE: 315.435.5065

www.ongov.net

J. Ryan McMahon, II
County Executive

Monica Williams
Chief Diversity Officer

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MINUTES

October 21, 2020 VIRTUAL Human Rights Commission Meeting

This DRAFT was approved in the HRC Meeting on _____

Human Rights Commissioners Present: Rabbi Dan Fellman, Suzette Melendez, Leo Sanchez, Sanjay Chhablani, Al-amin Muhamad, Rev. Roosevelt Baums, Tricia Wittkowski, Rosalie Young, John Rushing, Dave Pasinski, Chol Majok, Mbonimpa Banabas

Commissioners absent: Crystal Doody, Barbara Johnson, Liban Mohammed

Community members present: Legislators Peggy Chase and Mary Kuhn

County staff present: Montanette Murphy

- 1) **Introduction and Welcome:** Introduced new Commissioner Mbonimpa Banabas.
- 2) **Minutes:** Approval of September 2020 minutes. Motioned. Seconded.
- 3) **Recognition of visitors:** Mary Kuhn, Peggy Chase, Mikiel Anderson
- 4) **Update on upcoming covid hearing** – Dave Pasinski, Rev. Baums, Leo Sanchez: each commissioner working on public hearing spoke about the details of the upcoming Nov. 19 Public hearing.
- 5) **Administrator's Report:** Montanette discussed the 2020 HRC Annual Report and information that should be included in it. Administrator will discuss HRC advocacy request and term updates at the December meeting.
- 6) **Meeting was adjourned:** Meeting ended at 7:40. Remaining commissioners decided to discuss annual report, Chair's Report, Updates from Rosalie Young, Leo Sanchez and John Rushing, and New/Old business and announcements at its December 2020 meeting.



County of Onondaga
Office of Diversity and Inclusion

John H. Mulroy Civic Center, 15th Floor
421 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, New York 13202

Phone: 315.435.3565
Human Rights: 315.435.3565
MWBE: 315.435.5065

www.ongov.net

J. Ryan McMahon, II
County Executive

Monica Williams
Chief Diversity Officer

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MINUTES

December 16, 2020 *VIRTUAL* Human Rights Commission Meeting

This *DRAFT* was approved in the HRC Meeting on _____

Human Rights Commissioners Present: Rabbi Dan Fellman, Suzette Melendez, Leo Sanchez, Rev. Roosevelt Baums, Tricia Wittkowski, Rosalie Young, John Rushing, Dave Pasinski, Barbara Johnson, Mia Wade (new) and Nodesia Hernandez (new)

Commissioners absent: Al-Amin Muhammed, Liban Mohammed, Mbonimpa Banabas

Community members present: Legislators Peggy Chase and Mary Kuhn and Mikiel Anderson

County staff present: Montanette Murphy and Chief Diversity Officer Monica Williams

- 1) **Attendance**
- 2) **Moment of silence:** Commissioners honored former Human Rights Commissioner Mary Alice Smothers.
- 3) **Introduction and Welcome:** Introduced new Commissioners Mia Wade and Nodesia Hernandez.
- 4) **Minutes:** Approved August and October 2020 minutes. Motioned. Seconded.
- 5) **Recognition of visitors:** Mary Kuhn, Peggy Chase, Mikiel Anderson
- 6) **Update/Follow up to November Covid-19 hearing** – Commissioners expressed disappointment with public hearing turnout but grateful for the community leaders who attended. Mary K. and commissioners wondered whether the lack of internet access for some might have been the reason for low attendance. Both Kuhn and commissioners would like to see local libraries open again. Commissioners also discussed topics for 2021 related to Covid, including reaching out to the disability community.
- 7) **Administrator's Report:** Montanette discussed items needed for the 2020 HRC annual report; advocacy for one community member; and term updates. Montanette thanked outgoing commissioners Suzette Melendez, Rosalie Young and Dave Pasinski for their involvement and time with the HRC. Commissioners went on to discuss items for the 2020 annual report.
- 8) **Meeting was adjourned:** Meeting ended _____.