

Chairperson
Aaron Richman

Vice chairperson
Cara Berg Powers

Clerk
Lillie Williams



**City of Worcester
Human Rights Commission**

Members:

Shawna Curran
Kathleen Gervais
Robyn Kennedy
Shirley Konneh
Ike McBride

Meeting Summary for August 3, 2015
Main South Community Development Corporation
875 Main Street Worcester, MA 01610

Members Present: Aaron Richman, Cara Berg Powers, Lillie Williams, Shawna Curran, Robyn Kennedy, Kathleen Gervais, Ike McBride
Members Absent: Shirley Konneh
Staff: Jayna Turcek
Members of the Public: Jennifer Plante, Cheryl Pope- (former chair HRC), Susan Mc Laughlin, and Steve Forskett

1. **Call to Order:** A quorum was established and meeting called to order at 6:08 pm by Human Rights Commission Chair, Aaron Richman. The Chair welcomed the Commissioners and guests.

2. **Approval of July 6th, 2015 minutes:** Unanimously approved as written. Public comments worked in as we go along in the dialogue tonight.

3. **Old Business**

A. Review of shelter surveys

Chairperson explained surveys to the public

Robyn, Shawna, Shirley, Kathleen, and Cara all submitted their completed surveys.

Each Commissioner explained a little on the experience obtained and the services given through their assigned organization.

B. Review of Human Rights Commission Annual Report: Tabled at this time

C. Status report regarding policy development related to human trafficking/sexual exploitation

Robyn checked-in with the WAASE liaison. However, she is out on maternity leave. She will follow up with WAASE after their August 10th meeting.



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4. New Business

A. **Reflection on Worcester Dialogues on Race:**

This was a deep conversation as the Commissioners and guests reflected.

Ike- mixed feelings, although,” it was good to be at the table with different people of different backgrounds. He tried to keep conversation on Worcester not on what is happening nationally...Take away the Turtle Boy nonsense, and get down to the meat and potatoes. It was a positive thing to have around the city”.

Shawna-“The dialogues was good and to hear the stories. Some discussions were livelier than others were. On the other hand, this has happened before. I would like to see action and change. I was a little disappointed there were not more people of color. Some people chose not to come.”

Aaron- Started out by saying; he did not feel qualified to share and hope to understand better. It saddens him to know this is real. He is glad the city is trying to move forward. Aaron suggested the commissioners review the notes from the Dialogues online so that we can come up with an action list.

Lillie- “Race is a very hard topic. I am very glad all sides can sit and have a mature conversation, because we have to start somewhere”.

Robyn-“It required people to talk about race, especially white people. It still is very much at an overt level... Hopefully next steps will address institutional side of things, which requires system changes... We want media to play a responsible role.”

Kathleen- was not able to attend but she agrees with the rest of the commissioner’s; the concerns raised need to be addressed.

Cara- Echo what Robyn said. “It [racism] feels wide spread in Worcester, and it will take a long time for people to understand how race and class are different... We have a lot of work to do...Need to think about how to meet people with compassion who don’t understand racism exists...Racism not just about people but institutions... The next step is putting action steps in place”.

Public Comment:

Susan McLaughlin- Expressed concern that former guards from Guantanamo have been fast tracked to become community police officers in Massachusetts. “This is very troubling”. She also spoke on importance of needle exchange, a bill in the legislature on minimum sentences and bail reduction and Cambridge’s community bail fund.

Cheryl Pope (former chair HRC)- First, she was not aware of the Dialogues the city was having around race. Theses dialogues have gone on before. Did it cover media, housing and police? “Wish I could tell you what to do. The community and the police have to start to work together. We have to look at the school system. As for, poverty, jobs, and housing; this affects us all as a whole. Really it takes changing hearts and minds”.

- 5. Commissioner Report: Shawna and Kathleen-** attended ADA 25 Celebration at Union Station. **Lillie-** The panel for Recovery at St. Vincent Hospital and Out to Lunch behind City Hall.
- 6. Location of next meeting September 14, 2015:** The Boys and Girls Club, 65 Tainter Street.
- 7. Public Comment (3 minutes per individual):** (Incorporated into the discussion of the above agenda items)
- 8. Adjournment: 7:59PM**