

A meeting of the **Civil Rights Task Force** for April 2022 was held tonight via web conference. Members in attendance were: Commissioner Brockington, Liza Meiris, Will Pillsbury and Wendy Blutstein. Staff present: John Slavin, Acting Chief of Police; Township Manager Bob Zienkowski, and Human Resources Director, Heather Samuels.

1. Mr. Brockington called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.
2. The Meeting Minutes for March 1, 2022 were accepted.
3. Introduction of the New Human Resources Director, Heather Samuels:

Mr. Brockington introduced Heather Samuels. Ms. Samuels discussed her background in Human Resources. Ms. Meiris asked Ms. Samuels to share how her background and initiatives from a human resources standpoint align with those of the Civil Rights Task Force. Ms. Samuels shared that she has done a lot of work with diversity programs, including with the diversity committee at her previous employer and was working with a team on an inclusion project that would allow visitors who came into the hospital to scan a QR code to select their language and be able to get a map of the hospital and information about the hospital in their language, as well as be connected to someone who speaks their language. Mr. Brockington asked what her thoughts were on our website being available in other languages and she shared that, while there are apps that will instantly translate websites on your phone, that there are ways to add language translation right on our page. Mr. Brockington also asked Ms. Samuels her thoughts on our website being ADA compliant. Ms. Samuels shared that the website should be compliant for those that have visual impairment. Mr. Zienkowski stated that the Township is already working with the website contractor to make the Township website ADA compliant.

4. Follow up on the direction of the Human Relations Commission:

Mr. Zienkowski shared that currently, the local commission is on hold and complaints should be referred to the Pennsylvania State Human Relations Commission. However, having our local Human Relations Commission needs to be reviewed with the Board for next steps and budgeting. We also need to really review if we actually need to have a commission within the Township or if the state commission is sufficient enough. As far as budgeting, if we do have a commission within the Township, there would need to be training for the commission and Mr. Zienkowski stated he will look into what the costs for that would be, as well as any legal costs. Mr. Brockington shared that there is also a membership issue, as it is unclear whose term is expired and if new members are needed. Ms. Meiris shared that her understanding is that the state can cover some things on behalf of the Township, but that the state expects local Townships to address most issues, so training will be needed for our own local commission and there is already an understanding that there will be a cost. She expressed that other Townships have more structure when it comes to their Human Relations Commission and that we need to have a clear mission of ours. Mr. Brockington requested that a meeting needs to happen with our current Human Relations Commission members to iron out the next steps. Ms. Meiris stated that it would also be a good idea to ask our current commission members if they want to join the Civil Rights Task Force Committee or if they want to be part of the revived Human Relations Commission. She also mentioned that she believes that the state requested some minor rewording in our ordinance. Mr. Pillsbury shared that there actually has not been any communication from the existing commission since July 2000 and clarified that the rewording issue is that we don't have the best practice for some of our language and that needs to be addressed. Ms. Lupino shared that a lot of people are unclear on the difference between the Human Relations Committee and the Human Relations Commission. Mr. Brockington suggested that we reach out to the existing commission members and see if they wish to continue on the commission as well as clearly define what the commission is.

5. Springfield Township use of "Blue Lives Matter":

Ms. Meiris explained that Springfield formed a Police Benevolence Association in fall 2020 to raise money for the legal fees for police officers and organize Back-the-Blue rallies, which has created an issue in their community. She shared that on the day that it was announced that there would be no charges in the Breonna Taylor case; this association announced a Back-the-Blue rally. She shared that

they have the Blue Lives Matter flag posted in the police station in Springfield, as well as on mailers to all of the residents. She shared that since the flag was co-opted by white supremacist groups, it has created a contentious environment and that some of their residents have asked them to stop using it and are going to the Board of Commissioners to ask them to have them stop using the Blue Lives Matter flag. Ms. Blutstein asked for clarification on what Ms. Meiris meant by saying the Blue Lives Matter flag being co-opted by White Supremacy groups. Ms. Meiris said that white supremacist groups will have Blue Lives Matter flags at rallies, but that not everyone who uses it is a white supremacist. She said that it does have a white supremacy history from Andrew Jacob, who was upset about Black Lives Matter movement and that is when the thin blue line on the American flag was designed by him. Ms. Meiris shared that Blue Lives Matter is used as a counter argument to Black Lives Matter and that she feels it gives an understanding that they don't care that Black people are being killed by officers without meeting justice. Chief Slavin shared that to him and to law enforcement officers, that it is a sign of honor and courage to him as a police officer for 35 years as well as for those officers that have been killed in the line of duty. He shared that he appreciates other views, even if they don't agree. He agreed that the symbol has been high jacked by groups that he can't do anything about, but it doesn't mean to him what it means to those groups. He wants to make sure there is awareness that there is another side to this and that the blue line represents honor, courage, and sacrifice for those who lost their life in the line of duty. The police want no part of the high jacked meaning and they do not condone that at all and he asked that their department be judged by what they do daily and how they treat people. Ms. Meiris stated that since the flag means different things to different people, that they should find a symbol that can honor police that means the same thing to everyone, so that we can all honor police in a way that doesn't strike fear in some people. Mr. Brockington stated that Blue Lives Matter was made as a result to Black Lives Matter and makes it seem like Black people don't care about police officers when they say Black Lives Matter, but that's not the case. He said Black Lives Matter is not said out of disrespect to police, but that this was a matter that touched them, similarly to being touched by a specific type of cancer and that supporting awareness for a specific type of cancer is not meant to minimize other cancers, but to say that is what touched their life and that it is the same concept for Black Lives Matter.

6. La Mott Community Center:

Ms. Meiris shared that she didn't have anything to discuss at this time, as she discussed this topic at Mr. Brockington's Ward 7 Town Hall Meeting last evening.

7. Website Content:

Ms. Meiris is still working on this and requested this topic be added to next month's agenda. She will send her edits to Mr. Brockington and Mr. Zienkowski when complete.

8. Old Business – None.

9. New Business – None.

10. Open Discussion – None.

11. Mr. Brockington adjourned the meeting at 8:24 p.m.



Robert Zienkowski
Township Manager

Per Heather Samuels