

Agenda Minutes

of January 27, 2021

1. Call to Order by Chair, Patti Lawrence at 6:00 p.m.

2. Roll call

Patti Lawrence, Evelyn Meeks, Sue Berogan, Jill Berogan, Sharon Ranieri, Dr. Morris, Dr. Flanagan, Kris Arduino, Dyonna Johnson, Andrea Sweet, Brad Sweet, Jennifer Curless, Denise Campbell, Nick Stange, Kyra Newnan, Megan Hembrough, Dr. Bois, Emily Bjork, Kaitlyn Hardy.

3. Approval of Minutes: November 18, 2020

Motion to approve November 18, 2020 Minutes

1st Brad Sweet 2nd Sue Berogan

All voted aye, Motion carried

4. Comments from the Community: none

5. Speaker: Tommy Meeks

He spoke of racial equity and social justice as follows: We have had a racial problem in this country for 400 years and asked why is it now coming to the forefront. Because people are realizing that things have not been fair. Many people do not want to talk about race. He grew up on 23rd Avenue, with his brothers and parents attending P.A. Peterson School. There was something about his brothers and himself that seemed different. They became a target at school because they were different. His family moved away from the area and to the west side of Rockford. We moved in the Johnston Street area, the first African American family to live there until Mayor Box and his family moved in. Micky Goral also lived in the area but left. He didn't know why he was moving but it was because Meeks had moved in. Mostly everyone around the Meeks house were white and lived there until they died. They were decent white people and they did not have a problem with me or my family. There were grocery stores, banks, gas stations, and restaurants but as soon as more blacks kept moving in, all of these places that were owned by white people, moved out.

Racism also occurred in the North. How many black businesses are owned by a black family where they can pay for the basics and go on vacation – Ponds Funeral Home is one but there are very few businesses. In the 40s, 50s and 60s blacks were not included. There was no equity for African Americans in their area or America.

How can we fix this?

Last year when President Trump said he was going to Tulsa, OK, he was going there because of Juneteenth. Tommy and Evelyn have promoted Juneteenth for years. Trump made people aware of Juneteenth. The slaves were in slavery from 1619 to 1865 or for 246 years. In 1865 they got

their freedom, after the Civil War in April of 1865 people were still slaves. General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas and let the slaves know they were free. Many of them didn't know they were free or what to do.

In 2021 we are still talking about equity issues. Then came the reconstruction era. They learned in 246 years how to do all of the work, building, fixing, cropping, but poor white people were losing big time as slaves were working for free so those jobs could not be filled by white people when slaves were doing the work for nothing. For ten years this lasted and then was the start of blacks becoming Senators, Congressman, and Interim Governor of Louisiana. White people saw how good they were at making things work and then came discrimination. Poor white people feared blacks being in the market so President Hayes worked things out and the KKK was allowed to come in the South. After the reconstruction period ends and in 1964 there was so much discrimination. The white people were working the jobs and in government, even in sports. Eventually things became fair and the sports field allowed in blacks in.

Blacks were left in nowhere land. African Americans became a part of this country in the 1960's. Blacks were not on tv but occasionally when they were it was a huge source of pride. Lately there is a lot of equity but people don't seem to be prepared for it. In 1978 he wanted to teach school and he went to every junior high and high school as the number one substitute in Rockford on reserve. Principals did the hiring and he could not get a teaching job. This bothered him for a long time, but now equity wise we need more minority teachers to open doors to teach students.

Equity at Harlem. Julie was on his tv show and she talked about diversity. She knew it was something that needed to be talked about. She also did a Park District presentation.

The black people got started on the wrong foot and we don't have to blame anyone we just need to come up with solutions. How can we spread equity out around the county and schools. You have to create awareness and acknowledge that there is a problem. Tommy noted how much he admires Harlem for the hard work they have done with equity.

Some people don't realize they have racial problems. The Wake-Up Group is a 13-week program for African American males as they know nothing about their history. He was helping them find jobs. A white friend called him and told him he hired one of his guys at his warehouse. He was a white guy that was hired by his son not a black guy. The white guy stole from him. His friend called him to tell him the man that he hired stole from him and he was going to let him go and he was very disappointed in Tommy's program, but he gave it a change – but when this man found out he was white not black he said not to call him as he would not fire him but wanted to help him. Tommy had a problem with this but has never told him. Some things you just have to let go. I think he learned from how he looked about “helping your people” and then finding out when he was white, the guy worked there for another six weeks until he found a better job.

How do we get more equity in the employment area, if they hired one felon from probation and parole we could cut back on crime in the area. A lot of people come down from Machesney Park and we need to help people in many circumstances. He noted that the former Mayor John

McNamara called him up after watching his show and he wanted to talk about racial issues as well as a minister from Our Savior Lutheran and psychiatrists talking about racial issues.

Questions:

Julie: As a Superintendent are there any suggestions. Harlem is doing a great job with principals and assistant principals. Julie would like to continue opening our hearts, minds and thoughts and to have the conversations, learn the history and understand it and how it has been part of the racism in the country. You need to set aside the blame, it happened and racism is deep within the fabric of the country but we need to listen to each other no matter what the point is. Try to listen to others and have discussion.

After slavery was over and we started to do well after the reconstruction, if we could have stuck to fairness our country would be so much further ahead. If a free person (black) did not have a job he was arrested. Blacks would be fired in a day or so, people were fired as they walked the street due to the law that stated you have to have a job and if not, you are arrested and fined.

Equity is something that is fair but things are not always fair. He listened to Rush Limbaugh every day and a guy called in and Russ said two of the worse words in the English language is fair and share. People called in irate about this. It is not just African Americans, Hispanics have also had difficult times. Hispanics are now doing well but they were not at the same place as blacks in the 40s, 50s, and 60s.

Go to the U Tube Channel. Martin Luther King had many speeches and you can find them there. Pull up some of his speeches and there will be some backlash pretty soon. Dr. King realized after we had civil rights and voting rights, that didn't cost this country one penny to give blacks those rights. He started talking about money, who should have it, who we should help and he was killed shortly thereafter. The things that happened at the capitol in January is a form of backlash. We don't want violence we want people to come into the fold in fairness.

Many people talked about President Trump being racist but when I think about Woodrow Wilson and how he had the KKK in the Whitehouse. We have had worse than Trump in our history.

All the problems are not white people, African Americans...Look at Deon Sanders, went to coach at a Jackson State, a black college, he could not get a job in the NFL, he said he would make Jackson State a premier college with young black athletes. It isn't just for black athletes there is going to be a shift in the future based on talent and schools need to be on the same levels.

There are a lot of problems in Rockford. The guy that did the bus shooting was very mentally ill. He talked to his lawyer and told him he was nuts. He shot and killed three people for nothing.

Dr. Flanagan noted what is important is that we do not just say it and we need to model that as a district. IF we don't we will force another generation into the place we are at right now. If we continue to look at problems from a divided lens and not united lens we will not succeed. We have to change some policies and discipline and we can't be afraid to make those changes. We have to understand what we don't know and have the courage to have those conversations.

He thanked Tommy for coming to speak to us about race and justice.

Nick Stange noted he appreciated hearing about the history. You need to know your history and we need to know American history, all of it. If we don't do this and look back, you don't have your history but someone else's and you will be manipulated on untruths. We saw a lot of people at the capitol as a result of someone else's history.

Tommy noted that he worked for fed ex for 25 years retiring in 2009. A friend worked at UPS and they were big buddies, white and black. He saw him two years later. He said he hated black people. He asked him if he hated his brothers. He said yes because he knows me but he doesn't know my brothers so he hates them. Two guys he used to coach with are the biggest racists but they like Tommy because they know him. Is it true, he doesn't know, but the key thing is that they are some good guys. Tommy always treats people the way they treat him. How we treat each other is where to start fixing things.

Update on Progress of Student Input – Dr. Bois

Dr. Bois thanked Tommy Meeks and introduced student, Kaitlyn Hardy.

Dr. Bois noted that the timeline is roughly the same and the event should happen after spring break, but we have changed as students took the lead and instead of painting something on the ground they want to paint a banner and display it on the west side of the building. We also planted a tree there in honor of a student who was very much for social justice. The event banner will be designed by students and will have banners printed for each of the elementary schools and high school students will present to students at each elementary school.

Dr. Bois explained that there is also a video aspect that will be about experiences at the elementary and across the District. Kaitlyn, student leader, addressed the committee. She noted that text and artwork will appear on the banner and we want to be inclusive with solidarity with all groups in this space as we believe there is space and diversity. There will be a quote about justice.

Artwork – closed fist in multiple skin colors with a rainbow fist for LGBTQ and transgender colors of light blue, pink and white. On the border we would have student artwork. At the next meeting we hope to present this to you.

Kaitlyn noted that personally the project is very important to her as she has attended the district her whole life and has have never seen anything like this being done.

Motion to Adjourn

1st Morris 2nd B. Sweet

All voted aye, Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kris Arduino, Recording Secretary