

Durham Racial Equity Commission Minutes, February 21, 2024

The following members of the Durham Racial Equity Commission met via Zoom on February 21, 2024, from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Attendees:

Atrayus Goode

Nisha Williams

Ernest Smith

Tiffany Foster

Delvin Davis

Jadda Richardson

Ramya Krishna

David Williams

Kendrick Lowery

Krista Kenney

DeDreana Freeman, City Council

Guests

Joyce Payne

Staff

Dr. Brent Lewis, Durham County

Ms. Sharon Williams, City of Durham

Absences

Del Ruff

Sheila Mullen

Olaitan Ajasa

Elena Snavelly

Brenda Howerton, County Commissioner

Meeting called to order and facilitated by Nisha Williams

1. Public Comment

- a. N/A

2. Other Comment(s)

- a. Delvin Davis acknowledged what was going on with DPS, schoolboard, and Commissioners (by extension). Would like to keep on the radar that a group like this can have some role about the healing of what's going on long term
- b. In response, Ernest Smith suggested there be a conversation within the group and be positioned to have a voice which requires the task force to gain the muscle to do that. Hoping we are heading to be in a place where we can speak truth, be a voice of the community, and making sure the school board recognized this is a place where they should have representation so their voice can be a part of what is happening in Durham
- c. Atayus Goode shared an article on [*3 Things to Know about this week's Leandro hearing in the NC Supreme Court*](#) from WUNC
- d. Ramya Krishna gave a brief update that there was an interim superintendent and the Education subcommittee discussed if anything could be done – Sheridan and Dr. Lewis provided some additional research information. Will convene and present to group what was found.

3. Request for excused absences

- a. Delvin and Sheila asked for excused absences as well as Kendrick (may be late or not make it but let us know ahead of time)
 - i. Tiffany Foster made the motion for commissioners to have an excused absence tonight – Ernest seconded
 - ii. No discussion's
 - iii. Motion in favor to carry

4. Recap of Retreat

- a. Dr. Lewis – retreat was helpful, bring pathways for us as group.
 - i. Gives direction for folks by breaking into subcommittees into doing some research
 - ii. Reminder
 1. March is Atreus and Ramya looking at mental health and environmental justice topics
 2. Jadda, David, and Ernest have April – focusing on poverty reduction and housing and wealth building
 3. Delvin and Nisha have May – focusing on the impact on the comm as it relates to racial equity and criminal justice
 - iii. Several documents uploaded into the February invite that recaps the retreat notes taken, and templates
- b. Nisha Williams – thought retreat was great and noted where achievable goals could be attained within the next 6 – 8 months
 - i. A lot of energy in the room -- we shouldn't lose the energy; especially in virtual spaces

- ii. If any tweaks you would like to make, please make sure Nisha, Dr. Lewis and/or Ms. Sharon know to ensure you all come to our meetings feeling like you can give some sort of dialogue
- c. Sharon Williams – This past Monday and Tuesday she was advised that the meeting needs to pivot
 - i. 48 hours before the meeting begins gives no time to pivot for future reference
 - ii. The request was asked by the education committee members due to being absent during the February meeting however, it's been 30 days since the retreat in January
 - iii. We want to know what was done between then and now
 - 1. Commitments were made on our part and the group's part
 - 2. One thing reiterated in retreat was that everyone was going to make and keep their respected commitments
 - iv. Commissioners and councilmembers are on this call – say what you need to them while here
 - v. We are contributing as much as we can with the resources given
 - vi. Request that everyone work on their commitments tonight to see how easy or difficult this is

5. Spreadsheet Review

- a. Ms. Sharon Williams suggested to split the group up in breakout rooms and assign each group a topic
- b. Ms. Sharon Williams, Dr. Lewis, and Ms. Nisha Williams reviewed the spreadsheet and made asterisks next to those recommended that is suggested to focus on. Ms. Sharon Williams shared the spreadsheet with the task force. Some items were not actionable, and some were not.
 - i. Agreement from the retreat was that you take 2-3 and focus on them
 - ii. Goal is to see how much information can be found through public domain
 - iii. Categories can be designated:
 - 1. Found in a good place
 - 2. not so good
 - 3. no action was made
 - 4. whatever was done isn't enough
 - iv. Council member Friedman commented there was an intention to make a request for funding to allocate to the commission to get the work done. Without any actionable request, the request could not be processed. The council members ask that the taskforce get moving again, given that racial equity has been a target. Her hope is that this group figures out how to get moving and is confident they will. The council member has offered her support and contact information if needed.

6. Spreadsheet Discussion and Breakout

- a. Ms. Sharon Williams shared her screen and reviewed 85A first as an example (under the education portion)
 - i. Read through the recommendations (column D) and answer the suggested questions in column E

1. Questions consisted of:
 - a. Is bias awareness training provided for all educators?
 - b. What are the secondary questions you would ask (if any)?
 - c. What are the restorative practices that are already happening in the schools?
 - ii. Every topic that has an asterisk also has suggested questions to get the search going. Participants used search engines to find the answers
 - iii. Testing this style of research to see if this helps the overall group
 - iv. Links were added into the chat of which were then placed in the spreadsheet
- b. Tiffany Foster has worked in title one office with Dr. Danner and team since 2017.
 - i. There should be a policy on implicit bias, and it is required for educators
 - ii. The Family academy falls under Dr. Danner's federal directors' office. There was an offering for a few years to roll out to schools for parents and volunteers
- c. Ms. Sharon Williams specified that the overall goal is to come together and analyze what the group has found, what is being done, and what is not being done. This can then go to city council commissioners to say, "this is what was found regarding 'awareness or bias training' (for example) within Duram public schools and here's a recommendation based on what we researched."
 - i. The research should always be fact based
 - ii. It is advised that the taskforce does not get stuck on what the thoughts were in putting together the recommendations but solely focus on the recommendation
- d. Atrayus Goode suggested beginning to analyze the data on things like training so that a baseline can be drawn to see where things are. For example,
 - i. When did the training happen?
 - ii. What were the attendance numbers?
- e. Ernest Smith suggested reaching out to personal contacts and sources such as Dr. William Jackson, Dr. Rhonda Taylor Bullock, and Dr. Kelvin Bullock

Ms. Nisha Williams called a break 7:40 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.

7. Recap

- a. Ms. Nisha Williams summarized the following for the group
 - i. We are picking 2-3 each section throughout the spreadsheet
 - ii. Google information
 - iii. If we know anyone or know someone personally
 - iv. If we don't, Ms. Sharon or Dr. Lewis may know someone
 - v. Finding out if there are additional questions then housing those
 - vi. We do not expect each group section to tackle ALL recommendation
 1. Cautioning you to not get stuck
 - vii. This exercise is what you all could do together before you reach out to Ms. Nisha Williams, Ms. Sharon Williams, or Dr. Brent Lewis
- b. Council member Freeman offered her availability to help group members get unstuck
- c. When seeking information, ask within the group first then submit a public records request if resource is not available

- d. Ms. Joyce Payne commented via chat: *I have been a Durham citizen for 16 years and have experienced a broad number of circumstances that I have written a book about that should be coming out soon. It deals with equity issues and more involving my experience with homelessness, DPS, citizen panel, church outreach, housing, shelters, rental regulations for housing, etc. I am expecting to contact some of these groups with my experience. I observed circumstances personally but evaluated them basis on knowledge of business, law, religion, citizen, etc. I am willing to share, my mic is not working.*

8. Breakouts

- a. Dr. Brent Lewis split the group into their respective teams and asks that each group identify what they were interested and do the following:
 - i. Think of questions that was asked
 - ii. Based on questions, can you find anything in the public domain
 - iii. Schedule meeting with each other to plan for the month you plan on sharing your information
- b. After the breakout sessions, Dr. Brent Lewis requested groups share dates with Ms. Sharon Williams and Dr. Brent Lewis. Groups to let them know if they are needed to attend and will only join if needed.
- c. Dr. Brent Lewis reminded the group that the March meeting will have an expectation that the education group and the mental health and environmental justice teams will come and present the work they have done.
- d. Ernest Smith shared that his group was in the process of narrowing it down and putting some things on the back burner i.e. training the data of where developers are buying homes but cannot do anything about that right now.
- e. Artayus Goode asked about the application process of the group and wondered how we create a space that people can contribute in a way that is meaningful. It was recommended that the discussion of the process be held until a later date

9. Closing

- a. Ms. Nisha Williams closed out the meeting with a few reminders
 - i. Do not expect board members to draft a thesis on their recommendations. The group can discuss how someone can draft up a final product
 - ii. Email Dr. Lewis, Ms. Sharon, and Ms. Nisha Williams the following:
 - 1. Time you all are meeting
 - 2. For the mental health and education group, reach out to them (ideally 2 weeks ahead of time) to ensure we have time to meet with you all and help with any requests or problem solving
 - iii. Meetings are the 3rd Wednesday of each month
- b. Ms. Nisha Williams shared contact information for members
- c. Meeting Adjourned at 8:30PM