



Durham Workers' Rights Commission October 28, 2025

Location: Durham City Hall

In Attendance: Chair Ballan, Commissioner Fenerty, Commissioner Martin, Commissioner Medelius, Secretary Morell, Vice Chair Reinstein, Commissioner Robertson, Commissioner Spates, Commissioner Taylor, Commissioner Wang, City Councilor Baker, UNC Students Lauren and Addy.

AGENDA ITEMS:

CALL TO ORDER: 6:09 PM

MINUTES/OLD BUSINESS:

6:09 minutes from last meeting approved.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Commissioner Martin presented the State of Work in Durham Report, aided by her students Lauren and Addy. The report takes a comprehensive view of the Labor Economy in Durham. The DWRC plans to present this report to the Durham City Council as well as disseminate the report and some key takeaways to local unions, activists, and workers to further goals.
 - a. The final report will be a single sheet of information as well as a more comprehensive PDF document that goes into deeper detail.
 - b. The DWRC discussed strategizing for a social media plan to roll out this report.

- c. Commissioner Martin emphasized the importance in making the process that went into creating this report replicable by future iterations of the DWRC. (Methodologies are clear and documented so that future research projects and annual reports may follow this format.)
- d. Addy presented some key facts, including Durham's very low unionization rate: 1.2%. This unionization rate is lower than state and federal rates. Addy also painted a picture of the nexus between race, access to education, and access to high-paying jobs. Racialized groups in Durham (Black and Latinx Durhamites, in particular) are experiencing the most depressed wages. Blue collar industries are not keeping up with the rising cost of living.
- e. Lauren presented information on the state of housing in Durham, where the vast majority of workers are not able to afford median housing costs.
- f. Commissioner Martin asked the DWRC for questions and comments.
- g. Commissioner Medelius asked if this information could be made available to other Commissions, Working Groups, and Task Forces and Chair Ballan introduced the idea of giving presentations in order to educate and spread the State of Work in Durham Report's findings. Commissioner Martin agreed that this is a great idea and that we should also do a public statement and possibly host an educational event for the public. More specifically, there is some reference data and documentation in excel sheets, data in R Studio, and they have used Q GIS to map the data this year.
- h. Commissioner Morell asked if the DWRC should establish a narrative point or hypothesis before data collection in years to come so that we have a mandate or direction of work to focus on. Commissioner Martin said that her vision is that for the next iteration, we would definitely have a new focal point (e.g. immigration status and its implication on wage/access to housing). She also suggested that the DWRC could also include an update on previous years' reports as an addendum to future reports.
- i. Councilman Baker asked if we could get a better picture of what unions exist in Durham, for future reports. Having data on membership numbers, industry sector, etc. would be very useful in understanding where future work needs to be done. In a similar vein, it would be good to get a fuller picture of the economic polarization in Durham (1st and 5th quintiles). All of this would be good information for any future Economic Development Plan that the Durham City Council might create
- j. Commissioner Martin pointed out that in years to come, we should also look to specific cases of successful worker organizing *within cities that face state preemption* like we do in Durham. It would be useful to focus on how those cities that have protected their workers and how they have helped provide for housing for low-wage workers. Looking to cities that also face preemption will help inform creative solutions.
- k. Chair Ballan noted that it would be valuable to explore which large employers in our city have been involved in union busting. She also noted that in order to inform future work around occupational safety, we could also do some further research into the health outcomes of workers within different sectors.

- I. Commissioner Taylor brought the idea of looking into the migration pattern of different industry workers in Durham. Understanding who relocates has major implications for economic development. We can look at USPS's data on address changes for this.
 - m. Commissioner Wang suggests that we look into which companies have made commitments to workers.
 2. Commissioner Medellius gave the commission an update on his housing ordinance that the City Council passed.
 - a. He worked with the NC Tenants Union (along with help from other allies, like Riverside Highschool Housing Club) to create this ordinance, which establishes the collection of rent from unsafe housing as a misdemeanor. They looked to Charlotte and Pittsborough, when drafting the ordinance, as both cities have similar ordinances.
 - b. DRWC then discussed state preemption being tested on a constitutional level, and the importance of being creative, brave, and audacious with what we put in front of Durham City Council.
 3. Vice Chair Reinstein updated the commission on the history that she and her fellow teacher organizers made: Durham Association of Educators had their first Meet and Confer! They packed the room to talk to Durham Public School's superintendent, focusing on 2 of their 8 priorities. They talked about protecting students from ICE raids, increasing bullying training, and establishing a \$25.55 hourly wage for classified workers. The second Meet and Confer will be at the Staff Development Center on November 19th.
 4. Commissioner Medelius and Chair Ballan asked for any final input (regarding our interboard/commission resources) for the upcoming City Staff roundtable discussion. The DWRC reiterated our set of material requests (space to meet once a month, a website, and an email address for each commission/working group/task force). DWRC planed to also ask for a hybrid option.
 5. The commission discussed the time and meeting type for the November and December meetings and decided on virtual for both.

5. Nov and Dec meetings virtual (Nov Tues 25 and Dec take a poll)

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Councilman Baker announced that Democracy at Work Institute signed a contract with the City and that this will be announced more broadly in about 6 months.
- Chair Ballan asked for support for the Workers of the Durham Food Hall

- Commissioner Medellius asked for support at the upcoming Durham Amazon Campaign on November 3rd RDU5
- Commissioner Taylor reminded everyone to vote in the general election

Meeting Adjourned at 7:13 pm

Next meeting: Online, November 25th

Respectfully Submitted by: DWC Commissioner Morell

Recorded by: Ashlee M Adams, Assistant City Clerk