

Franklin Township Human Relations Commission
Minutes of the June 23, 2008 Meeting
Historic Conference Room, Public Library

Commissioners Present: Gary Rosenthal, Chairman; Ike Agudosi; Marilyn Altman; Willie Goods; Nora Q. Catiis, Edna Arguello-Hitchner; Alvin Levine; Bob Stone; Mylo Thompson; John Tibbs; Detective Patrick Lilavois, FTPD Liaison

Ex-Officio Junior Commissioners: Naphtali Brooks; Sheena Ranade

Absent: Murray Rothblatt (excused); Rebecca White Johnson (excused); Councilman Rajiv Prasad, Liaison

Chairman Gary Rosenthal called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Copies of the Minutes of the April 28, 2008 meeting, which were distributed by mail, were approved.

Gary and everyone present welcomed the newly appointed ex-officio Junior Commissioners Brooks and Ranade, both of whom are Franklin High School students. This was followed by everyone's self-introductions.

Gary advised that he, Nora and Alvin represented HRC at the June 18 FYI (Franklin Youth Initiative) meeting.

Nora commented that among those who attended the meeting was Khristi Adams, a youth director at the First Baptist Church and co-director of the play "*Yesterday I Died*," a youth-inspired theatrical anti-violence play that was staged last February 1 in the First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens, Somerset. The play was written and staged in the wake of the July 2007 murder of two Franklin Township young males. Nora said that Khristi Adams expressed interest in staging the play again this summer 2008. In this regard, Gary and Nora suggested the possibility of HRC's sponsoring the staging of the play instead of a "movie night" as previously agreed to be HRC's participation in the Week of the People, on Wednesday, August 6.

John Tibbs made the motion to make this change and this was seconded by Alvin Levine and agreed by everyone.

Gary advised that he would advise the Week of the People committee of this change.

Bob Stone spoke about the New York Times article of March 23, 2008 (copied below) on the "First Suburbs Network". This concept of "first suburbs" is gaining interest nationwide, with a number of community leaders in older communities attempting to draw public and government attention to the problem of "first suburbs". Built during or before the 1950s, most "first suburbs" are now fully developed, tax-stressed, and old infrastructure in need of new roads, sewers and housing. School systems are often financially strained. They are experiencing rapid racial change, are increasingly home to the growing number of seniors as well as foreign-born residents.

After exchanging ideas, everyone (with the exception of Ike Agudosi) recommended that Bob Stone invite Barbara Heisler Williams, a municipal advocate of the "First Suburbs Network", Maplewood to attend one of our future HRC meetings so that she can give us further information on this issue. Gary advised that he would also advise Councilman Prasad in this regard.

Marilyn Altman mentioned her involvement in a Franklin Township ad-hoc committee. She briefly discussed the “Edible Schoolyard” project in a middle school in Berkeley, California, where, on an acre of urban land at Martin Luther King Middle School, students learn to cultivate and cook their own produce. This project is founded on the notion that children and teens will learn to love healthy food if they have a hand in growing and preparing it. As such, the “Edible Schoolyard” is emulated as a national model and Marilyn wanted to explore this as a possible project in Franklin Township schools. She noted the historical growth of the town where farmland remains a vital asset to be protected, preserved and developed. Everyone agreed that while the project is worth exploring, it is more appropriately in line with the FYI’s Educational Committee rather than the HRC. In this regard, Marilyn was strongly encouraged to attend the next FYI meeting.

Detective Lilavois gave brief updates on the Police Department. Mention was made about the upcoming opening of the new New Brunswick High School on Route 27 bordering Franklin Township. He advised that as a means of safeguarding township security and addressing the changing security requirements of the community, the Police Department is continuously assessing its police force complement, providing increased training as well as forming crime suppression teams.

John Tibbs distributed a Home News Tribune article (copy attached) on the problem of low-income residents’ inability to afford monthly rent of \$1,000 or more, such as in Parkside. He expressed disappointment in what he perceived were problems with HUD’s administration of the apartments as well as inaction by the Rent Leveling Board to address the problem. John advised that as a community activist, he would pursue this matter but asked HRC to help in bringing this matter to the attention of the Town Council.

Gary advised that by means of these Minutes (and news article noted), each councilperson would be made aware of this issue.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m. The next meeting will be at the same place, Monday, July 28 at 7 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nora Q. Catiis, Secretary