

# Franklin Township Human Relations Commission Meeting

## Minutes of December 18th, 2024

The Location of this meeting was amended to the Council Chambers from the Large Conference Room due to a Town Hall Meeting on Opioids where the meeting was combined with the Town Hall.

**Present:** Rohan Kalidas, Elangkathir Elamaran, Gary Rosenthal, Edna Arguello Hitchner, Nora Catiis, John Tibbs, Linda Williams Montgomery, Epoustchi, Kamla J. Sharma, Councilman Alex Kharazi, Samina Sattar

**Excused:** Shubhendu Singh, Pete Clark,

**Absent:** John Samba, Sam Velu

**Guest:** Public Safety and Police Director Quovella Maeweather  
Police: Officer Russo

### **Town Hall Meeting called to order at 7:06 pm**

**Guest Report:** Director Maeweather says we are here to talk about the Opioid Settlement Funds. For example in 1998, some one suffered a car accident where she was given a prescription. When she went to the pharmacy, she received a plethora of medicines with specified instructions to guarantee safety. At once, they would give too many opioids and pain medicines. Franklin Township attained a certain percentage of the money that New Jersey received but did not know what to do with this money. Director Maeweather was tasked with managing this money. There were many programs against drugs such as the NARCAN program and LEAD (Law Enforcement Against Drugs). After the first 20,000 the township was able to buy more NARCAN since the state stopped paying for it. She stopped after more money came in because she wanted to use this money wisely. She knew that this money could not be irresponsibly spent. Her vision, along with her departments, was to focus on youth. She knows the vitality of rehabilitation since it is one of the root causes of our

townships problems. She says that we can stop this drug abuse by starting with teenagers, as this age is when individuals are prone to getting introduced to drug use. She notes that she must be responsible with this money and come up with a sustainable plan. In the meantime, the money continues to grow and Franklin residents are commenting on it. Despite this, it is important to note that this is not infinite money and will come down in the future. It would not be possible to simply create and fund a program with this money; it is essential to be sustainable with it. She states that other townships have spent this money somewhat carelessly which she ensures that we will avoid. Many calls that the department received were mental health calls. One example is where a man was stealing from Stop and Shop, claiming to be the king of that specific Stop and Shop. He goes to the hospital and gets treated but an injured officer causes taxpayer money to be used. There haven't been any participants of the program injured, fortunately. LEAD is the cousin of the former DARE program. These are both programs focused on drug prevention in communities. Hopefully the funds allocated to the township through the opioid settlement funds would be used to fund this program. Maeweather states that the purpose of this meeting is to figure out a plan for the money we have received. Maeweather handed out a form for residents to suggest and propose a potential program/proposal. Various companies owe our township different amounts of money. While it is a nice amount of money, inflation, sustainable programming, and ensuring capital purchases, may drain this money. She would rather, however, use this money for something that would help the youth of Franklin Township in the long term. She notes that this program could target youth from 6th grade to college. She states that Franklin wants to be different, and display its innovation through the creation of a program. She urges residents and attendees to fill out this form with their proposal for a program. Mrs. Phyllis Beals commends Director Mayweather for her plentiful work. She says that she will share her own observations and recommendations (based on personal experiences and research). Following on the New Jersey funding report, she suggests that the township should follow up with a subcommittee with township leaders and active members looking to conduct a thorough needs assessment and create a strategic plan for the opioid settlement funds. As this is a big health matter, there should be a point person for the overdose fatality review team. She notes that multiple other townships have an overdose fatality review team, and they are funded by the New Jersey Department of Health. Communities and Connections, an

organization, offers pop-up peer review services. They will be coming to Franklin Township soon. This organization helps people seek the help they need and stay in recovery. Richard Hall, a community health center individual, has services for substance abuse in Franklin Township. In 2023, Richard Hall's Community Health Center gave services to 99 different individuals. This is not even 1% of the township. This shows that not everyone in the township has access to these services, despite this program being funded by tax-dollars. Note that 20 years ago, they brought a nurse practitioner who did prescriptions, but this lasted a little while. Another important topic of discussion is that the township should do more about starting a media campaign to discuss the importance and vitality of NARCAN when discussing drug use. "NARCAN saves lives" and other quotes such as this could be displayed to issue awareness on the topic. NARCAN alone is not the solution, access to recovery and treatment is vital as well. While fentanyl street drugs are the main driver for overdose deaths, the death rates are coming down for white people but are increasing for black and brown individuals. These are, however, unconfirmed as this data takes a few years to come out. Sadly, last year two overdose fatalities occurred in Franklin and this year we have had 7. She supports prevention and education for our youth but awareness needs to spread to ensure recovery and treatment. This can be done by communicating with current providers. Another resident of Franklin stated that he agrees with Phyllis. He states that the county mental health board will stand behind and support what the township decides to do with this money. He declares that this board is open to the public and invites the township to come by and spread awareness on the topic. He wants to support all the resources in the county and ensure that someone is found to allocate these resources in Franklin Township. He brings up transportation as another issue. Uber is being looked into as an alternative for medicare patients. However, this is a difficult process to forego. He commits on the part of the county mental health board services to help, but the township needs to take steps first. He notes that it is necessary to have an essential service provider list around the county. He thanks Phyllis for her speech and agrees with her. Another resident of Franklin named Linda Powell states that she is on the advisory board of Health and notes that she agrees with the issues with transportation and access throughout various parts of Franklin. She states that in college, some students started something called a "Blue Bus Clinic", in which a school bus was converted to a mobile clinic and provided services to various communities. In a time when rent is expensive,

this is a great way to bring services to communities and ensure that resources are properly allocated. Director Maeweather stated that she likes this idea. She even thought about some old EMS rigs being utilized for such services. It is widely agreed that transportation for seniors is a huge issue in Franklin. There is a lot of money yearly spent on transportation for seniors. Sustainability is very, very important and it is important to spend the money allocated wisely. The money being allocated is being decreased, and it is important to bear this in mind when proposing new programs. It is helpful to utilize the people and resources that we already possess. She is not against the idea of working with contractors but she wants to ensure that this is a reputable choice. She also declares that it is impossible to make people go to a certain place, and must be in their free will. Arrive Together is a program which allows individuals to have their pick on whether or not they go or not. However, she is not sure that this program will be funded in the future. She has numbers to prove that this program works and therefore states that Franklin Township may need to pay these physicians themselves. She stated that she doesn't want the Franklin Township police department to utilize deadly force, especially for mental health calls. She states that the township is already there with multiple resources, including body cameras and services such as Arrive Together. Director Maeweather stated that she was surprised when she learned that Franklin received 700,000 dollars from the settlement, and was even more surprised when more money started coming in. She then reinstates that it is important to be sustainable with this money, using the million dollar house analogy again. Dr. Kharazi asked if it would be possible to have an office of some sort, near a Food bank, which contains experts on mental health and substance abuse. This would be helpful as there are a lot of people in town that come to the food bank, so the impact of such services would be widespread. It is mentioned that the problem may not be geographic. This problem affects people on many social and geographic levels, and does not target any people based on their geographic location. So, it may be necessary to take a different approach to this issue and take ideas from members of the public, especially people who know others who are suffering from this issue. He asked the previous speakers if the board brought up has connections with catholic agencies. A speaker stated that the township needs to deal with the prevention side of this. He stated that the police and the Arrive Together program are mainly focusing on the issue after the crisis rather than stopping the crisis beforehand. He stated that wherever the traffic of issues is at, whether it be at religious institutions or schools, it

must be brought to attention there. The root cause must be fixed before working up the chain. He said that looking for space can be solved with the help of catholic charities. The goal of religious institutions is to help the community and he claims that they would be more than willing to help. The next speaker, Donaliese, chair of the Franklin township board of health council, commends the previous speakers and the township leaders for their words and their work in the community. She did want to address the issues regarding resources within the community. She stated that there will be an intake navigator with the Franklin Food bank to help those with substance use. This will start in January. In March of 2024, there was a bench outside the senior center which symbolized the options of alternatives to opioids. She also will advertise the board of health meeting here next month to announce more services which will be provided to the community, and invited everyone at the meeting tonight to attend. This will be on January eighth at 7:30 pm. She also wanted to address the fact that she knows that the focus will be on children. She is experienced in this field and wants to call out the older adults. Based on state trends, opioid use is going down in every age group other than those 50+. This is shocking but there are many reasons as to why individuals of that age may be using opioids. On the bench mentioned previously, there was a QR code which linked to alternatives to opioids, such as physical therapy. She advocated for more programs as such. She also stated that the food bank helped give out Naloxone which was a great way to spread awareness against opioid use. When looking at the list of pharmacies it is mostly chains and very little small businesses. Unfortunately, it is important to note that this program has been unsuccessful due to various factors. As a result, these programs need to be promoted and advertised. Another issue she wanted to discuss is the opioid fatality review. This is a confidential group that is a social autopsy. After someone has passed due to an overdose, a medical examiner provides a report on the autopsy. The review looks to gather as much information as possible in order to determine what precipitated this event. One major reason is due to incarceration, and due to relapses. These vulnerable periods are deadly to those suffering or those who previously suffered from drug abuse. Direction Maeweather asked for a proposal on how to spend the opioid settlement fund money. She stated that it would be not possible to sustain an office or building in order to cater to the requests of all the residents. What the township needs to hear is various ideas to use this money. It needs to be something that can be sustainable over time, as it is essential to note that the money will be going down

throughout the time period from now to 2038. She asked once again, what can these funds be sustainably used for. Director Maeweather addressed the complicated manner of this issue but she had dealt with the effects of drug abuse in her family. She stated that a large amount of drug-related deaths are among the youth of the community. She knows that members of the community may want a plethora of other involvements with this cash, but supporting the youth is vital for the community's future. She stated that the police department only looks to get people healthy with no charges or arrests. She, instead, wants to help those who suffer from these drug abuse issues. She stated an alternative to arrest could be a promise of rehabilitation. Donalisie stated that it is essential to gather all the information regarding what is out there, and find the gaps in the distribution of resources. She stated that multiple age groups are affected by drug addiction, even senior citizens. Without identifying all the resources that are available, it would not be possible to solve the issue posed. Another man stated that if the township is solely focusing on the money, they are focusing only on one "door". So, identifying the existing resources that Franklin has is a great way to address the opioid issue. Director Maeweather said that it would be ideal to not have the variety of contractors but rather one big hospital or setting. She stated that if it was a unified process, it would be much easier. However, it is inevitable for the various contractors to want money. The speaker talked about the hotspots in which overdoses are occurring and people are dying. So, it may be helpful to specifically target those areas and give individuals in those areas additional resources. Director Maeweather once again stated that the reason for this meeting is not to end an entire social issue, but to discuss what to do with this money over the years. The Mayor restated that this meeting is for the money's use for Franklin. One of the committees of the FTYC is the Substance Abuse Committee. If the township wants to target youth ages 12-18, the FTYC is a great way to address the issue posed due to the volume of youth who attend its events. It is reinstated that what the township is looking for is if there is something that they can do with the funds, that can prevent people from becoming addicted or helping people who are already addicted to substances. It is stated that it is not sustainable to hire a substance abuse council due to the lack of money coming in. Collaborating with nonprofits and other agencies are excellent ideas but they will not help the township spend the money. The Youth Council advisor Councilwoman Francios said that this money could be put to good use to create various events to advertise drug safety.

**Other Business:**

The 2025 HRC meetings ( January 22, February 26, March 26, April 23, June 25, July 23, August 27, September 24, October 22, December 24) in large conference room were confirmed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 PM

The next meeting will be on January 22nd.