

Franklin Township Human Relations Commission Meeting

Minutes of 2/25/26

Present: Gary Rosenthal, Lalitha Mani, John Tibbs, Edna Arguello, Hitchner,
Councilman Charles Onyijiaka, E. Poustchi, Sharon Czebotar, Samina Sattar, Nora
Catiis, Pete Clark, Elangkathir Elamaran, Kamla J. Sharma

Excused: Diya Patel

Absent: John Samba

Guest: Teresa Vivar, Executive Director Lazos American Unida

Police: Officer Malcom. Belvin

Meeting called to order at [7:01 PM]

Minutes of December 17th **approved**

Gary Rosenthal was reappointed as 2026 Chairman and Samina Sattar was appointed Vice Chairman via Motions

Guest Report: Presentation will be given by Teresa Vivar. She is working to give space for Mexican, indigenous youth in this area. She does programming to support the indigenous and Mexican community in the area. Her organization tries to expand resources, as well as preserve Hispanic and Indigenous culture. She is here today because the mission of the HRC aligns perfectly with the initiative that they are proposing. We have workers that speak indigenous languages, as well as a large part

of the township that speak a language other than English. We have already celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month, but she hopes to move forward. She hopes to expand collaborative cultural initiatives such as art exhibitions, dance performances, and more. Her organization also works with the Mexican consulate in New Brunswick in order to expand upon her mission, as well as other consulates in the area. They have also been offering translation services for free. One of their goals is to offer a year-round safe space for others to interact and share with each other to learn about each other's cultures. They are not asking for a new construction, but just the opportunity to receive an empty space to keep the conversation going, where the Hispanic and Indigenous community in the township can expand upon ideas and collaborate with each other. Their goal is to be a collaborator, not a burden for the township. Currently, there is no dedicated year-round municipal space specifically focused on Hispanic and Indigenous arts and cultural preservation. Some examples of spaces that can be used are unused municipal offices, storage buildings suitable for renovation, and underutilized community rooms. Lazos America Unida also looks forward to connecting with the 250 celebration happening in the township right now, as the land that Franklin Township was built upon is former Native American land. Lazos America Unida hopes to highlight the rich indigenous culture that Franklin contains, connecting it to Hispanic Indigenous traditions and art. 18-20% people in Franklin Township identify as Hispanic or Latino .

Police Report: Officer Belvin reporting that there is a big career fair happening at Kean University in Union County, where they recruit a lot of people. There will be agencies from all over the state at this fair. FTPD will have a presence at this fair, looking to hire college students who are seeking a career in law enforcement. It's amazing that FTPD looks to hire those who were born and raised in Franklin Township, as well. It is important to have a diverse police department, and that is something that

FTPDP prides itself upon. The snow patrol has been brought back with new Director Fredericks in charge. The plowing has been great, but the issue is parking. The snow plowers cannot plow the road unless cars are moved and not occupying parking spaces. During the last snowstorms, many notices were issued and towing occurred. There are proper instructions regarding the parking ordinances on our township website. The FTPDP is following DPW by taking in cars and towing if they are impeding the snow plows in the township. The difference between this snowstorm and last snowstorm is ice. During the last snowstorm, ice was a huge problem compared to the most recent snowstorm. Even though they plowed the road, it didn't look like they did due to the ice on the road.

Other Business: Chairman reported that our new Township council liaison this year is Charles Onyijieka, replacing Dr. Alex Kharazi. Linda Montgomery Williams due to other commitments and newly appointed Township Council member Shubhendu Singh, unfortunately had to resign from the commission. We welcome a new commissioner, Lalitha Mani, to the commission. Nora, Edna, and Peter were still working on a revised HRC brochure, and the high school is also getting involved in making the brochure happen. The presentation for the Hometown Heroes banner project is still underway and a work-in-progress. After Bob LeCourt came in and spoke to the HRC regarding the 250 celebrations, the HRC is looking for a way to get involved with these celebrations. The indigenous groups that were already met with already have family and educational programs; it's just a matter of bringing these groups to Franklin Township. The HRC needs to look for ways to sponsor these groups and invite them for the Franklin 250 celebrations. Samina and Edna are looking towards putting together a family-friendly, educational event and propose it to the 250 committee. The Mayor is also very involved with the 250 committee. There is a new pastor at St. Matthias Church. He will be make a presentation at our April HRC meeting. Pete

reminded us that Franklin Public Schools will have a Diversity Night at SGS on May 1, and the HRC will have a table at this event. Our next meeting will be on March 25th. Librarian Keri Sullivan will be presenting, talking about new books to be circulated in the Township exploring various perspectives and cultures.

Meeting adjourned at **7:40 PM**

Respectfully Submitted,

Junior Commissioner Elangkathir Elamaran