**CITY OF BROOKHAVEN**

**SOCIAL JUSTICE, RACE AND EQUITY COMMISSION**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**February 22, 2021 Virtual Meeting (Regular Meeting) 7:00 PM**

**https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82715712270   
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1. **IPHONE ONE-TAP**

Meeting ID: 827 1571 2270

One tap mobile

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1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Six absent and thirty members present. See roster below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Attendee Name** | **Title** | **Status** | **Arrival** |
| John Funny | Chairman | Present |  |
| David Alexander |  | Present |  |
| Zaki Anwer |  | Present |  |
| Shahrukh Arif |  | Present |  |
| German Berrera |  | Absent |  |
| Rudy Baserra |  | Absent |  |
| Charlene Bowden |  | Present |  |
| Davis Burnett |  | Excused absence |  |
| Vena Cain |  | Present |  |
| Karen Cariello |  | Present |  |
| Loren Collins |  | Present |  |
| Chris Corces-Zimmerman |  | Present |  |
| Amy Corn |  | Present |  |
| Ruben Cruz |  | Present |  |
| Jose Hardy |  | Present |  |
| Josh Hearshen |  | Excused absence |  |
| Jermiah Hinson |  | Present |  |
| Danita Knight |  | Present |  |
| Tywana Minor |  | Present |  |
| James Moses |  | Present |  |
| Catherine Murithi-Wohl |  | Present |  |
| William Naglich |  | Present |  |
| Kirk Nelson |  | Present |  |
| Janis Niesse |  | Present |  |
| Melissa Owen |  | Present |  |
| Matthew Paetzhold |  | Absent |  |
| Marco Palma |  | Present |  |
| Aixa Pascual |  | Present |  |
| Tiffany Russell |  | Present |  |
| William Thomas |  | Absent |  |
| Conni Todd |  | Present |  |
| Anibal Torres |  | Present |  |
| Kathy Wells |  | Present |  |
| Beth Wendl |  | Excused Absence |  |
| Thomas Woodward |  | Present |  |
| Monique Wright Hudson |  | Present |  |

1. **BUSINESS ITEMS** 
   1. **Welcome remarks from Chairman Funny**Commissioner Funny made remarks of the importance of Black History month which takes place during the month of February.
   2. **Approval of the meeting minutes**

Approval of the January 21, 2021 Social Justice, Race and Equity Commission Virtual Meeting (Regular Meeting) minutes.

**RESULTS: APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**

**MOVER:** James Moses

**SECONDER:** DavidAlexander

**AYES:** Alexander, Anwer, Arif, Bowden, Cain, Cariello, Collins, Corces-Zimmerman, Corn, Cruz, Hardy, Hinson, Knight, Minor, Moses, Murithi-Wohl, Naglich, Nelson, Niesse, Owen, Palma, Pascual, Russell, Thomas, Todd, Torres, Wells, Woodward, Hudson

* 1. **Approval of the agenda**

Approval of the February 18, 2021 Social Justice, Race and Equity Commission Virtual Meeting (Regular Meeting) Agenda.

**RESULTS: APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**

**MOVER:** Amy Corn

**SECONDER:** Anibal Torres

**AYES:** Alexander, Anwer, Arif, Bowden, Cain, Cariello, Collins, Corces-Zimmerman, Corn, Cruz, Hardy, Hinson, Knight, Minor, Moses, Murithi-Wohl, Naglich, Nelson, Niesse, Owen, Palma, Pascual, Russell, Thomas, Todd, Torres, Wells, Woodward, Hudson

1. **COMMISSION CHARGE**

Chairman Funny reviewed the Commission’s charge as established when the Commission was approved in 2020.

The Commission is charged with:

1. Review of Brookhaven City Charter, Vision and Mission
2. Recommendations for improvements to Brookhaven policies and protocols to guide:
   1. Hiring and Retention
   2. Procurement and Contracting
3. Recommendations and best practices to guide Brookhaven Police Department policies, actions and accountability regarding continuum of force
4. Proposal to ensure continues, robust citizen participation related to social justice, race and equity
5. Examples of innovative policy statements across aligned, connected issues
6. **INTRODUCTION OF SUB-COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS**

Chairman Funny announced the sub-committee co-chairs who include:

* Mission and Vision Sub-Committee Co-Chairs: Commissioners Tiffany Russell and Aixa Pascual
* Hiring and Retention Sub-Committee Co-Chairs: Commissioner Tywana Minor, and a second commissioner to be named soon.
* Procurement and Contracting Sub-Committee Co-Chairs: Commissioners James Moses and Alexander Thomas
* Policing and Continuum Use of Force Sub-Committee Co-Chairs: Commissioners Shahrukh Arif and Monique Hudson

Each sub-committee co-chair will receive an orientation. Commission members will be assigned to serve in one of the sub-committees. They will be able to state their preference in a post meeting survey.

1. **MOMENT OF INPIRATION/REFLECTION**  
   The moment of inspiration was presented by Commissioner Tom Woodward who shared his personal story of coming to the realization during his early childhood that people of other races are not always treated equally.
2. **“HOW DID WE GET HERE?”- HISTORY OF RACE AND EQUITY IN AMERICA**Lesley Grady of Chrysalis Lab prompted commissioners to reflect on the first time they became aware of race and their emotions during that time. She stated that in the commissioner survey (results were presented during the January 21, 2021 meeting) indicated that 30% of commissioners have experienced incidents of race and/or racism in Brookhaven, and nearly 60% have witnessed incidents of racism.   
     
   Commissioners shared their experiences on the Zoom chat. See below:   
   From James Moses:I was six and I felt confussed.

From Cate Wohl: in college Dissappointed

From Shahrukh Arif: first/second grade - confused

From Tom Woodward: the doctor's office I spoke about; confusion

From Jeremiah Hinson: summer camp at age 5, confusion

From Monique Hudson: 6 and angry

From Charlene Bowden: I became aware in middle school. I was in awe/amazement

From Tiffany Russell: pride

From Danita & Billy Knight: embarrassment

From John Funny: Middle school - unattached

From Aixa Pascual: when I came to the US for college at 18-- awareness that race existed and that it was a marker for college admission

From Marco Palma: Elementary School - Sadness and Isolation

From Conni Todd: Dad pulled over by police for no apparent reason; sadness and concern…fear

From Zaki Arifulla: college / self awareness

From Amy Corn: Middle school - confused and curious

From Tywana: Don't recall my age but didn't understand why I was being called names.

Karen Cariello: In grade school when we studied civil war. Profoundly disturbed by cruelty, inhumanity. Felt like we’d been lied to about country being free.

From Chris J Corces-Zimmerman: ashamed

From Ruben Cruz: 4th grade just arrived from Cuba. fear and confusion

From Christian Sigman: Second grade, I moved to an Indian reservation. I was mainly confused, but my parents were concerned and pulled my brother and I out of the Indian school and drove us to another…non-Indian… school 20 miles away.

From Janis Niesse: I had a black friend in 3rd grade--positive

From Vena Kim: grade school - confusion

From Jose Hardy: 3rd grade - confused, curious

From Will Naglich: young child confusion and concern

From Rev. David Alexander: First grade - some confusion and disturbed

From Alex Thomas: I was five years old. Noticed how my grandma and extended family lived on the "other side of the tracks" in small town - Curious

From Kathy Wells: I first became aware of race when I was sent to Jim Cherry Elementary School in Brookhaven. My class was the second class to integrate this school. My emotions were high and my disappointments were plentiful .. I was at the top of my class at Lynwood Park Elem. but there I was considered an at risk student.   
From Kirk Nelson:Roots the miniseries - Pride and Shame - Kunta Kinte

From Rev. David Alexander: Also felt shame, as I did not think I had “culture” or race - just “white”

From Julissa Canas: When I first moved to the US in second grade and saw people of all different races. It gave me awareness that the world was much bigger than I expected as an 8 year old, but I was also confused.

From Kirk Nelson: pain and pride

From Shameta Harrell: 3rd grade. Confusion

1. **HISTORY OF BROOKHAVEN**

Mindy Kao of Chrysalis Lab presented an overview of historic Lynwood Park Community.

Lynwood Park was established in the 1920’s during the height of the Jim Crow and legalized segregation era, as a the first African-American suburb to be developed in DeKalb County. During the early 1900’s African Americans communities faced intense discrimination in the south driving migration of 6 million African Americans to northern states. Those who remained in the south endured constant oppression and extreme discrimination.

A common facet of Jim Crow laws was a lack of basic public services such as education, as was the case in Lynwood Park. In 1942 a one room schoolhouse was built on donated property on May Avenue with labor, supplies and money provided by the community. Years later, the community purchased a 4-acre lot on Osborn Drive and deed the land to the DeKalb County School System. Thus, Lynwood Park School was built, which would serve elementary to high school age African American students from all over north DeKalb, including students who would come by bus from Doraville and Chamblee. Lynwood Park School closed on 1968 after students were integrated intro Cross Key High School. Today the building remains, owned by the City of Brookhaven, and is used as a community recreation center.

Lynwood Park looks and feel different than the African American enclave it was during the 1900’s. Gentrification and redevelopment have since transformed the neighborhood to a dramatic shift in demographics and housing stock. Nevertheless, current and former residents celebrate the neighborhood at the annual Lynwood Park Community Day celebration, and continuously advocate for recognition and remembrance of the community’s past.

To ensure the recognition of the historical significance of the Lynwood Park community, the Brookhaven City Council approved the historic designation of Lynwood Park in October 2020. This was the first of such designation by the City. This designation will result in the placement of historical markers and commemorative plaques and other monuments to inform all who visit the deep historical importance of the Lynwood Park Community.

1. **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Lesley Grady reminded Commission members of the glossary of terms available on the SJREC website for their reference as the Commission moves into their work and discussions.

The glossary is available here: <https://www.brookhavenga.gov/sjrec/page/glossary-terms>

Grady informed Commission members of the following terms that will be used:

* **Race:** Race is a made-up social construct, and not an actual biological fact.
* **Whiteness:** Whiteness itself refers to the specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate white people over people of color. This definition counters the dominant representation of racism in mainstream education as isolated in discrete behaviors that some individuals may or may not demonstrate, and goes beyond naming specific privileges (McIntosh, 1988). Whites are theorized as actively shaped, affected, defined, and elevated through their racialization and the individual and collective consciousness formed within it. Whiteness is thus conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone). Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people.
* **Implicit bias:** Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals’ attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals’ stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is often used to measure implicit biases with regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other topics.
* **Racism:** race prejudice and social and institutional power; a system of advantage based on race; a system of oppression based on race; a white supremacy system
* **Individual racism:** Individual racism refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can be deliberate, or the individual may act to perpetuate or support racism without knowing that is what he or she is doing.
* **Cultural racism:** Cultural racism refers to representations, messages and stories conveying the idea that behaviors and values associated with white people or “whiteness” are automatically “better” or more “normal” than those associated with other racially defined groups. Cultural racism shows up in advertising, movies, history books, definitions of patriotism, and in policies and laws. Cultural racism is also a powerful force in maintaining systems of internalized supremacy and internalized racism. It does that by influencing collective beliefs about what constitutes appropriate behavior, what is seen as beautiful, and the value placed on various forms of expression. All of these cultural norms and values in the U.S. have explicitly or implicitly racialized ideals and assumptions (for example, what “nude” means as a color, which facial features and body types are considered beautiful, which child-rearing practices are considered appropriate.)
* **Systemic/structural racism:** The normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal – that routinely advantage Whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of White domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of society including its history, culture, politics, economics, and entire social fabric. Structural racism is more difficult to locate in a particular institution because it involves the reinforcing effects of multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present, continually reproducing old and producing new forms of racism. Structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism emerge from structural racism.

1. **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION AND SHARING**

Lesley Grady posed the question “how did we get here?” as the topic of the conversation. She referred to the homework given to Commissioner prior to the meeting. The homework included [The Origins of Race in the USA](https://www.pbs.org/video/the-origin-of-race-in-the-usa-wbm41s/) by PBS which reviews the concept of race as an evolving physical, social, political and economic tool for those with power. Also, the article [A Better, Stronger America: Together](https://www.kettering.org/sites/default/files/matthews-a_better_stronger_america-_together.pdf) by David Mathews of the Kettering Foundation, which emphasizes the importance of coming together and recognizing our power as citizens to engage, to change, and improve our democracy.

Grady then introduced the book *Castle: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson to build on the concepts brought forward by the homework assignments.

Wilkerson is noted journalist author, is also the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in journalism. In her book *Castle*, Wilkerson refers to America having a caste system, defined a rigid and arbitrary system to keep the right grouping apart distinct from one another. Grady then played a recording of an excerpt of the book and asked Commissioners to reflect on the excerpt as it relates to their prior homework and the earlier topic of the meeting of how they came to terms with their race. The recording is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVxAlmAPHec>

After the recording was played, the Commission members were placed into five breakout rooms for 30 minutes, with one member of the Chrysalis Lab team present in each room to facilitate conversation. The groups were posed the following two questions:

* Do you think a racial caste system exists in Brookhaven? Why or why not?
* How do we ensure that the recommendations that emerge from SJREC acknowledge issues of racial caste?

**Small group discussion summaries**

After the members were brought back to the main room and one member from each group gave a summary of the discussion.

**Group 1**

Facilitator: Kim Anderson

Members: Alexander Thomas, Amy Corn, Danita Knight, James Moses, Jose Hardy, Karen Cariello, Melissa Owen

**Summary**

Commissioner Karen Cariello summarized the group discussion in which members were in agreement that a racial caste system exists in Brookhaven. She added cited as examples Lynwood Park’s history and the presentation by Mike Carnathan from the Atlanta Regional Commission given on the January, 21 meeting. Additionally, Cariello referenced the Texas blackouts and expressed the groups worry of the impact of similar event in Brookhaven could have on vulnerable areas and communities. As well as the need for awareness of these issues in the most vulnerable communities.

Cariello stated the group believes the goal of providing the same quality of life for everyone. Furthermore, she emphasized on the importance of the Commission’s review of documents used by commission, boards and agencies to prevent implicit bias issues. Cariello also address how we may be defining economic development differently for vulnerable communities through a lens of racial equality for all.

Finally, Cariello emphasized the importance of receiving public input from residents, yet also identify partners and community representatives to speak on behalf of the community’s interests.

**Recording:** <https://youtu.be/RUtB102NrJ4>

**Group 2**Facilitator: Mindy Kao

Members: Conni Todd, Jeremiah Hinson, Marco Palma, Ruben Cruz, Shahrukh Arif, Thomas Woodward, Tywana Minor

**Summary**

Commissioner Conni Todd summarized the group discussion in which members were in agreement that a racial caste system exists in Brookhaven. She added the group had a discussion on equality and lack thereof regarding housing and education in Brookhaven. Also, Todd stated the group’s belief that there exist inequities in the policing and court system and cited that approximately 75% of traffic violation in Brookhaven are given to Hispanic residents.

Furthermore, the group spent time discussing the fact that diversity is invited, and inclusion is intended to be welcomed, however, counterproductive expectations of assimilation remain.

The group also discussed dominant culture setting the norm. As well as the possibility of the Commission setting their own norms as opposed to the norms of the dominant culture. Lastly, they discussed vetting recommendation that they develop with the input of the broader community.

**Recording:** <https://youtu.be/8AADhY0BlTw>

**Group 3**

Facilitator: Lesley Grady

Members: Anibal Torres, Chris Corces-Zimmerman, John Funny, Kathy Wells, Kirk Nelson, Loren Collins, William Naglich

**Summary**

Commissioner Kathy Wells summarized the group discussion in which members were in agreement that a racial caste system exists in Brookhaven. She added the group had a discussion on inequities that are obvious as one travels from Peachtree Road to Buford Highway. The caste system is very pronounced in the Buford Highway corridor as the majority of Brookhaven arrest are of Hispanic individuals.

Wells added the Commission should work to support businesses on Buford Highway and encourage residents of north Brookhaven to also support those businesses and have an experience of diversity.

Furthermore, Wells stated the current lack of fairness especially in education referring to the presentation by Mike Carnathan from the Atlanta Regional Commission given on the January, 21 meeting.

Wells brough forward ideas for activities such as a diverse Taste of Brookhaven and do tours of different areas of Brookhaven.

Lastly, Wells said the groups discussed the importance of public input. During the discussion, a member stated that in other for people to experience change they must be made to feel uncomfortable as learning can sometime be uncomfortable. Ideas from the Commission should be brought to the public.

**Recording:** <https://youtu.be/jgCfMOKX6HQ>

**Group 4**

Facilitator: Staci Lynch

Members: Christian Sigman, Janis Niesse, Monique Wright Hudson, Valerie Lemmie, Zaki Anwer

**Summary**

Commissioner Monique Hudson summarized the group discussion in which members were in agreement that a racial caste system exists in Brookhaven. She added the group discussed racial separation. Residents of different races live in different parts of the City; each community within the city is not always cohesive or diverse. The Hispanic/Latino population is concentrated along Buford Highway, there are pockets of Asian and Black residents in the City, which is related to affordability issues.

Hudson referred to the presentation by Mike Carnathan from the Atlanta Regional Commission given on the January, 21 meeting, to discuss affordable housing issues on Buford Highway. Rent prices along the corridor have increased approximately 40% over the last several years. The City of Brookhaven passed an ordinance related to affordable housing, yet there have not been developments that apply since the adoption of the ordinance.

Additionally, the group discussed the importance of public input and the need for accountability that recommendations out forward by the Commission are followed through. Creating a sense of community was also emphasized, especially among the different houses of worship present within Brookhaven.

**Recording:** The recording for this breakout session is not available due to technical issues. However, a transcript of the group’s discussion is available at: <https://www.brookhavenga.gov/sjrec/page/sjrec-meetings>

**Group 5**

Facilitator: Stephen Causby

Members: Aixa Pascual, Catherine Murithi-Wohl, Charlene Bowden, David Alexander, Shameta Harrell, Tiffany Russell, Vena Cain

**Summary**

Commissioner David Alexander summarized the group discussion in which members were in agreement that a racial caste system exists in Brookhaven. He added the group had a discussion on data from the presentation by Mike Carnathan from the Atlanta Regional Commission given on the January, 21 meeting. The group brough up questions regarding data of the traffic patterns in Brookhaven shown in the presentation.

The group discussed the lack of a middle school within Brookhaven and the pressure that may put on families from different racial and identity groups. Also, the group discussed the wealth gap and property taxes rising due to developments.

Furthermore, the group discussed the history of the nearby gold club as a former plantation. During that time, residents of Lynwood Park worked at the golf course, amplifying the caste system.

To ensure the recommendations of the commission go forward, Alexander stated that conversations discussing these issues need to continue, especially when they are hard. Alexander addressed the importance of continual education on these issues, and that recommendations should be connected to data. Finally, a social justice and equity template for the City’s use should be provided to be considered when making policy, planning and in hiring practices.

**Recording:** <https://youtu.be/rvfQb-KRjLM>

**Transcripts**

Transcripts for each of the group discussions are available on the SJREC Meeting page at: <https://www.brookhavenga.gov/sjrec/page/sjrec-meetings>

1. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Public Comment was announced by Chairman Funny.

Gabriela Velascos of Buford Highway commented via Facebook.  
“I would like to know what happens with the way to get to Montclair elementary school.[**https://www.facebook.com/1935614300003933/posts/3056890487876303/?d=n**](https://www.facebook.com/1935614300003933/posts/3056890487876303/?d=n)”

1. **FLOOR DISCUSSION**

Kim Anderson from Chrysalis Lab opened up the floor for discussion among the Commission.

Commissioner Danita Knight stated the importance for partnerships with businesses and community leaders to hold entities accountable to live up the standards discussed during the meeting.

Commissioner James Moses brought forward the need to communicate information not just digitally but in traditional mediums, such as utilizing AM and Fm radio stations.

Commissioner Jeremiah Hinson stated his agreement with Commissioner Knight. Hinson added the Commission should consider engaging organizations who do social work in Brookhaven to bring alongside the processes and consider their viewpoint.

Chairman Funny added the Commission will take part of a spearers bureau to speak about the purpose and goals of the commission and gather input. Funny also announced staff will develop a print newsletter in both English and Spanish to mail to residents, which will serve as a. method of communication and engagement. The Commission will also have community dialogue sessions that are currently being planned.

Commissioner Kathy Wells shared that she is an alumna of Oglethorpe University. The University was not diverse during the time she attended, but now has just announced a Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Wells stated the need to tap into community leaders to reach the community.

Chairman Funny announced Commissioner Rene Alvarez’s departure due to taking a new job. In his replacement Dean Williams of Oglethorpe University will take the vacancy in the Commission.

1. **COMMISSION ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Stephen Causby of Chrysalis Lab introduced two different engagement opportunities for Commissioners to be involved outside of official meetings. Interest in the two opportunities will be measured via a post meeting survey sent to Commissioners. If there is enough interest in one or both of the engagement opportunities, Chrysalis Lab will work to organize them. These engagement opportunities will be able made available to the public.

**Book Club**

In order for members of the Commission to continue learning, sharing and connecting a book club can be established. Participation is voluntary and meetings will take place every six weeks. The first book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird* Sings by Maya Angelou, is selected but the following may be suggested, chosen or led by the group. Ground rules will be set up to provide a foundation for respectful and insightful discussion.

**Buddy Quads**

Buddy quads are groups of people who take walks or explore different part of the community together with the purpose to connect outside of official meeting times in meaningful ways. Participation is voluntary and each quad will consist of approximately four people. The quads will be sent prompts or activities by staff. Members will be allowed to invite others in the Brookhaven community to join in the quads in a safe format.

1. **CLOSING**

The video [Are you racist? ‘No’ isn’t good enough answer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jm5DWa2bpbs) by Marlon James and The Guardian was presented to the Commission.

1. **ADJURMENT**

Chairman Funny called for a motion for the adjournment of the meeting. Commissioner Danita Knight motioned for the adjournment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Charlene Bowden. The motion was unanimously approved.

**Recording of meeting**

To view the full recording of the Feb. 18 SJREC regular businesses meeting use the following link: <https://youtu.be/Gj2v0byGqHU>

APPROVED

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John J. Funny, Chair

ATTEST:

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Julissa Canas

Public Engagement Specialist