

Brookings Human Rights Commission Notes (unapproved)

Wednesday, June 17, 2020

Council Chambers, Brookings City-County Government Building, and Zoom online meeting

Attendance: Meagan Irvine-Miller (chair – in-person); Matt Rhodes (county representative & vice-chair – in-person); Lawrence Novotny, (recorder – in-person); Dan Berg (via Zoom); Marilyn Hildreth (in person); Jason Meusbarger (via Zoom); Erinn Thomas (via Zoom); Kas Williams (SDSU liaison – via Zoom); Casey Bell (city human resources technician – staff liaison – in-person);

Absent: Hanna Holmquist; Kati Hanson; Susan Rotert (city human resources director – staff liaison); Marci Gebers (police liaison); Roger DeGroot (school liaison)

Guests: Brookings Police Chief Dave Erickson; Brookings County Sheriff Marty Stanwick; Fedora Sutton, Justice for Black Lives Matter citizens group; Niemia Trasing, Wise Words in Brookings on Racism Facebook group; Eugene Butler III; Jodelle Greiner, *Brookings Register* reporter; another unidentified individual; City Manager Paul Briseno (via Zoom)

Chair Miller called the meeting to order at 12:04 pm. Bell gave instructions on how the public can participate in the meeting using the online Zoom platform.

HRC members introduced themselves.

Dan Berg was welcomed as the new member to HRC. He is a teacher at Brookings High School and facilitated the organization of a human rights club in the high school several years ago. Berg was the one of the recipient's of the 2018 Youth Ally Award.

Rhodes moved, Hildreth seconded, to adopt the agenda. Motion passed.

Rhodes moved, Hildreth seconded, to approve the minutes of the May 20 meeting. Motion passed.

Background Info

On May 25, George Floyd, an African-American man, was killed while he was handcuffed by a white police officer who knelt on his neck. Protests, including rioting in some cases, have been occurring nationwide since that event. A local group organized a Justice for Black Lives demonstration in Brookings on the evening of June 5. Close to a 1000 people attended the gathering on the Courthouse lawn; marched to the Post Office to listen to Fedora Sutton, marched down Main Street to the police station when they knelt for 8 minutes; marched to the City/County Government Center to listen to a speech from a black woman; marched back to the Courthouse to listen to a speech from a white male minister. The HRC had an info table on the Courthouse lawn and gave out Covid-19 face masks and water. The HRC, along with the Police Department and the City Council had a message in the June 5, 2020 *Brookings Register* supporting the march.

Police Questions

Police Chief Erickson addressed written questions that were submitted to the City regarding policing activities.

Q: *Will the city or city attorney investigate the presence and activity of organized white nationalist groups operating in the Brookings area?*

A: This is an ongoing activity. Their presence is not a crime. Illegal acts will be investigated.

Q1 from Martha Ohnstad: *Are all officers supplied with body cameras? Are they required to turn them on for every stop?*

A: Yes to both

Q2 from Martha Ohnstad: *What does the de-escalation training look like for the Brookings Police Dept? How often is this required? What other training is provided?*

A: Trying to have all officers attend CIT training (this has been interrupted by Covid-19 pandemic). Am utilizing Police One online training. Each officer undergoes 12 critical competencies on an annual basis.

Q3 from Martha Ohnstad: *What is the policy when a police officer uses excessive force?* A: The officer is disciplined if the use of excessive force is over or outside of the action called for.

Q4 from Martha Ohnstad: *How are complaints on officers handled? What is the highest number of complaints one officer has in the Brookings Police and what is the average?* A: A complaint is documented and generally investigated by a supervisor. The department's internal affairs investigator (Marci Gebers) can be involved in the investigation. A report is issued. The complainant can be invited to view the video footage. All but one of the complaints have been to be unfounded.

Q5 from Martha Ohnstad: *Is race data available to the public in regards to calls/stops/arrests?* A: The Brookings Police does not track data. All reports are submitted to the federal government on an annual basis. One would have to ask the feds for this info.

Q6 from Martha Ohnstad: *How does police dept. feel about race relations in Brookings? How do they think they can support the public in making it even better?* A: Believes relations are very good. Always looking for ways to have more interactions.

Q7 from Martha Ohnstad: *How do police feel about allocating some of their resources to social workers, mental health professionals, dependency counselors, etc?* A: Majority of budget is for personnel, rest for operations and equipment. Officers are being called upon more and more to handle mental issues which they are not schooled in. This would be an excellent conversation.

Q1 from Paul Baggett: *What percentage of arrests in Brookings are for drug and alcohol related crimes?* A: Does not have the answer today. Would have to review the data (Erickson received the questions just prior to today's meeting.)

Q2 from Paul Baggett: *Could you put a dollar amount on what might be saved if we were to decriminalize alcohol and drug-related offenses?* A: What would be saved in policing would be spent other ways.

Q3 from Paul Baggett: *Would BPD be willing to join other community leaders in a campaign to decriminalize drug and alcohol use, but redirect resources to experts in addiction recovery, mental health, education, and other qualified individuals?* A: Not in favor of decriminalizing, especially DUI and the harmful drugs. There are other things that can be done in the criminal justice system.

Q4 from Paul Baggett: *Our Governor says we are "on" a campaign to defeat meth: What does this look like in Brookings?* A: Brookings States Attorney classifies meth as a violent crime. Am finding that most people are now going outside of Brookings to obtain their drugs.

Other comments by Erickson:

- The BPD is currently working thru and updating their policies. When completed and approved by the City Manager, policies will be available on the BPD's website. Certain response procedures will be redacted from public view.

- The BPD organized a community outreach unit in January that currently consists of 5 officers who have a passion for community policing.
- Both the BPD and the community need to have more engagement with one another.
- Contact him or HRC liaison Marci Gebers if they are more questions.

Comments by Brookings County Sheriff Marty Stanwick:

- The sheriff is an officer of the court – state law designates the sheriff to serve court documents.
- Brookings Sheriff's office is responsible for policing White, Aurora, Elkton and Volga in Brookings County.
- The Sheriff's office also maintains and operates the county jail.
- The office has 8 deputies – all who are on patrol by themselves.
- The office is in the process of reviewing its policies
- With arrests, the deputies are to use persuasion (talking); then applying pressure points if necessary; use chemicals or weapons only as last resort.
- Deputies are undergoing training on mental health.
- Deputies have body cameras.

Miller thanked both Erickson and Stanwick for attending and answering questions. The HRC is looking forward to working with both of them.

Staff Reports:

The deadline for the student position is June 19. Only 1 nomination received so far. It was decided to extend the deadline to August 31 with the hope of obtaining more nominations when the students return in mid-August.

The executive committee is looking on expanding the number of commissioners to allow more diverse involvement from the community. The EC will be developing expectations for members.

Roger DeGroot accepted the position of being the Brookings School's liaison with HRC but was unable to attend today's meeting.

No nominations were received so far for the awards. Deadline is June 30. The press releases seeking nominations will be re-issued.

Brookings Country Radio (102.3) is seeking an interview with the HRC. Chair Miller will do the interview.

Should the pride flags the city owns be displayed during June Pride month or during the Brookings Pride celebration in Sept-Oct? Consensus was to do both. Will flags be displayed on Main Avenue or Fifth Avenue like last year? Briseno said to check with Parks Dept about availability of Main Avenue.

Justice for Black Lives

Comments from Fedora Sutton

- The June 5 march demonstrated strong support from the community.
- She was concerned with the individuals carrying AK-47s on Main Avenue during the march. Who were they? Why were they there? Does the business community believe they have to invite in vigilantes to protect them?
- There needs to be a discussion with businesses about property protection.
- She thanked Erickson and Stanwick for answering the questions.
- The HRC needs to have liaisons with all minority groups in Brookings

- She does not see a liaison for indigenous people.
- The HRC needs to include people of color.

Q: Are there future plans to open up the HRC to the county?

- Rhodes responded that he is the county representative but he or the county has not looked at the issues
- The county has a Hispanic population.
- Hildreth stated that both Erickson and Stanwick have worked closely with the Brookings Multi-Cultural Center and Bienvenidos a Brookings.

Williams stated that we need to get people to understand what the message means that all lives matter.

The HRC was invited to have an info table at this Friday's (June 19) Juneteenth celebration in Pioneer Park starting at 5 pm. Novotny volunteered to staff the table.

Action Item: The HRC will work on organizing small group meetings with marginalized groups and will look at additional liaisons.

Other

Work group updates and Community Common Read were postponed to next meeting.

Hildreth sent an e-mail to HRC on June 16 from Willette Capers who offered to conduct a 1-day bystander intervention training workshop for a \$1000. Consensus was to look into doing this on a Saturday in September with the decision being made at the July meeting. HRC should look for groups to partner with on this training which will be opened up to the community.

Next meeting Scheduled for Wednesday, July 15.

Adjourn: Meeting adjourned at 1:26 pm.

Submitted by *Lawrence Novotny*, recorder