

Princeton Human Services Commission Minutes
Monthly Meeting
February 17th, 2016
Monument Hall - East Meeting Room
One Monument Drive, Princeton, NJ 08540

Present:

Board Members:
Ross Wishnick, Chairman
Leticia Fraga, Vice chair
Elizabeth Bidwell Bates
John Heilner
Larry Spruill
Thomas Parker
Laura Encinas
Robert Hackett
Stacy Mann
Heather Howard, Council
member

Staff

Elisa Neira, MSW
Gary De Blasio
Michael Soto

Liaison & Guests

Nick Sutter, Chief of Police
Ryan Lilienthal, immigration
lawyer

I. Open Public Meeting Statement and Call To Order

At 7:00 PM, Chairman Ross Wishnick called the meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission (HSC) to order by reading: "This is to affirm that the regularly scheduled meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission has been duly notified and is being conducted in compliance with all provisions of the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act." Chairman Wishnick introduced and welcomed the guests in attendance.

II. Public Comment/Guests

Nick Sutter, Chief of Police, had originally been invited to talk about immigration but considering the recent high profile incident involving a Princeton University professor; Chief Sutter made a statement and answered questions related to the incident.

Chief Sutter started by thanking the Commission for its support of the Police Department. He highlighted the importance for the Police Department to learn from this unfortunate incident and turn it into something positive that helps to start conversations across the community.

Chief Sutter said that it had received national attention and indicated the degree to which the community was polarized on this topic. Especially in Princeton he has received feedback from different sides of the issue and he has seen how far apart the two are in terms of perceptions regarding what the Police does in general. Chief Sutter believes that the Police Department needs to work more to change the perception that the community has of the Department.

Mr. Whisnick pointed out that this is a good opportunity to start conversations about these issues around the community. Chief Sutter thinks that the incident also highlighted much broader issues about what is happening nationally and that while the Police Department has to be part of the conversations but cannot control it or drive it. There are different types of conversations that he could identify from this incident ranging from: a system conversation, conversations about law enforcement, community, and town and university relations.

Chief Sutter said that according to the feedback that he has received, he sees that a possible next step could be organizing a forum, facilitating conversations with a range of parties including the university and the clergy. Mr. Parker agreed that the key is communication, conversation, dialogue and transparency. Chief Sutter feels that the Police Department may now need to do more listening since there is no need to argue. He understands that it is all about perceptions and that it would be good if they could change the perception of the local Police Department.

Mr. Whisnick asked about the negative feedback that the Police Department received after the incident. Chief Sutter said the majority of the negative feedback that they received was before the video came out, some of the feedback expressed that the Police was racially biased, treating people different based on race, that this had been a racially driven interaction.

Mr. Hackett asked how the perception about the Police Department has shifted over the past couple decades. Chief Sutter said the he has been working in Princeton for 21 years (previously with the former Borough) and throughout his career the Town has experienced some very bad times. His opinion is that in the last 5 years there has been significant progress but he recognizes that he is biased. Ms. Howard stated that since Chief Sutter took the lead there has been a big improvement in the Department.

The Commission discussed the risk of racial profiling when the Police Officer uses discretion and does not follow procedures. Policy is written to avoid different treatment but also eliminates the opportunity to use discretion. Ms. Howard explained that the Princeton Police Department is accredited, which means that there is an outside body that reviews their policy and that limits the use of discretion.

Ms. Mann suggested that in the event a public forum were organized, it would be good if the Police Department could share data that helps people to feel confident that Princeton Police is not racially biased.

It was also discussed whether the state policy could be changed and whether people with unpaid tickets need to have a warrant issued. There are other methods that could be used to enforce payment.

Ms. Fraga invited the Police Department to participate in the Civil Rights Commission work once it is established, as part of a Police and Community Relations Sub-Committee. Ms. Fraga shared her past experience from another Civil Rights commission and suggested that the role for this Sub-Committee be 1) to serve as liaison between the community and Police, 2) to serve as an advocate for programs, ideas and methods to improve relationships between the community and the Police Department. Ms. Fraga highlighted that it is not

necessary to wait until the Civil Rights Commission is established and she believes that the Princeton Human Services Commission could start begin playing this role. Chief Sutter said that it is a great idea and that he thinks that he should rotate the officers in different commissions so they can learn more about the community.

Chief Sutter, thanked the Human Services Commission for inviting him to speak.

III. Director's Report

Ms. Neira asked if there were any questions about the report, observing no responses the Commission moved to the next topic.

IV. Human Services Committee Reports

Send Hunger Packing (SHUPP)

There have been discussions about the next fundraising event that will be held in September. Mr. Whisnick informed the Board that Shannon Mason, Head of Mercer Street Friends, has resigned.

Soup Kitchen at First Baptist Church

Ms. Bates said that the Soup Kitchen at the First Baptist Church is having trouble getting enough food from TASK. It has run out of food for three weeks. The program is growing and they are starting a larger outreach program. Ms. Bates said that they are serving more than 50 meals per week but have had to turned people away because there are not enough meals.

Civil Rights

Ms. Neira gave an update about the Civil Rights Commission progress. She said that the objectives were sent to administration. Administration will be in touch with the civil rights committee members when they are ready to meet. They plan to meet with a smaller group for an initial round of discussion and then will open it up to a larger group. Ms. Fraga asked to be part of the smaller group.

Ms. Fraga reported that a parent came to Human Services asking for assistance in dealing with a school matter he had not been able to resolve. According to him, his son's 7th grade who is in an advance math class, often complained that his math teacher was not meeting expectations and made many mistakes when teaching. The parents have been asking the school since the beginning of the academic year to change their son to another class; nevertheless it has not been possible. Ms. Fraga and Ms. Liliana Morenilla facilitated a meeting between the school and the parent to see what could be done, if anything. The school advised the parent that a transfer was not possible as he was in the highest math level and that they have taken steps to make classroom observation and an action plan for the teacher. Ms. Morenilla reached out to Princeton Tutoring and they offered to provide a

once a week tutoring class for him free of charge. The perception of the family at the beginning was that the school due to discriminatory reasons did not address the issue but after they had the meeting with the school they understood the reasons for their son not being able to transfer out of this class, unless he transferred to a lower level math class.

Immigration

Fox News ran a news piece criticizing the work that the Princeton Human Services Commission is doing about immigration, especially with the Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids. Mr. Ryan Lilienthal said that the best response is to state that the Commission is advocating for defending Constitutional rights.

Mr. Lilienthal said that the Commission is doing a good job in educating individuals on Constitutional Rights. He also pointed out that he has been asked questions about what constitutes a valid warrant and which identification the individual should show in the event he/she is stopped by ICE. He reached out to Andre Segura and Ari Shalom both from American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) for clarification.

Warrants

Mr. Segura said that ICE rarely has a real warrant, instead they have an i200 or i295, but these are not valid as a warrant. These documents have no legal significance and do not permit entry.

A warrant needs to be signed by a judge and the original should be showed. For the next 'Know Your Rights' event a sample warrant should be shown to the audience. These items are on the ACLU website. There are different types of warrants, for people and for searching a house. Usually warrants are for people but allow entry into a home. Entry to a house could be achieved by a warrant or if the individual provides consent (voluntarily, knowingly, willingly) although since the law also indicates that consent can be given implicitly, this results in a grey area for interpretation.

Identification

Mr. Shalom said by email that permanent residents should show their identification, whereas individuals with no legal status should remain silent and ask for their attorney. Mr. Shalom said that people do not need to provide name and ID unless required by state law and suspected of a crime. New Jersey has no law that local police require someone to provide name or ID. At this moment it is unclear if this also applies for Federal officers.

Mr. Lilienthal recommended inviting someone from ACLU to speak further on the matter, all the eligible members voted in favor.

V. Adjournment

Mr. Hackett seconded Ms. Mann's motion to adjourn. With no further business to discuss, all voted in favor of this action. The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.