

**MINUTES
CITY OF DEKALB
Human Relations Commission
March 3, 2020**

The Human Relations Committee (HRC) held a regular meeting on March 3, 2020, in the Executive Conference Room at City Hall.

Chair Larry Apperson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

A. ROLL CALL

The following members of the HRC were present: Larry Apperson (Chair), David Barrow, Nadine Franklin, Joe Gastiger, Norden Gilbert, Lisa King, and Tyrus Wright.

Other City officials/staff present: Mayor Jerry Smith, Assistant City Manager Raymond Munch, and Management Intern Adam Grubbs.

B. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA – ADDITIONS / DELETIONS

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Gastiger and seconded by Barrow. Motion was approved by voice vote

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion to approve the minutes of January 7, 2020 was made by Gilbert and seconded by Gastiger. Minutes were approved by voice vote.

D. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chair Apperson called for public comment.

Many residents from the community were present during public participation and spoke about the Elonte McDowell incident that had happened in August. Sarah Slavenas began the public participation portion by stating that the DeKalb Police Officer applied deadly force to McDowell, and he needs to be fired. She continued saying that people of color in our community fear police, and that the DeKalb officer escalated the situation. She also mentioned that there is no justice for people of color in DeKalb and was asking leaders of the commission to act. She was not condemning all officers, she specifically praised officers Christensen and Mott.

Anna Wilhelmi then spoke saying that McDowell could have died from the choke hold because it is a lethal hold. She finished saying that the officers involved should not have taken these actions against an unarmed man. Mark Charvat mentioned that the city council has been absent in these discussions, and that the HRC and the DeKalb Police need to address these issues. It seems as if leadership have forgotten about this problem, but it still needs to be addressed. He also addressed how the map app on the police website was not working. He stated citizens are demanding access to this map feature on the police website.

Steven Kapitan noted there was a difference in response between the Dekalb police and the Sheriff's Office. The sheriff said there were no violations, but the DeKalb police did not agree and turned the investigation over to the State. Kapitan talked about the video McDowell recorded, and stated that it seemed to be only one sided, showing only the negatives of the situation. He said the facts are that McDowell had marijuana in the car, he was challenging them, and when the police dog showed up,

McDowell panicked, and turned the phone towards the cop car with the dog to film them. He further stated that the officer thought he was going to flee which was a presumption, not an observation. There was no video of the embrace initially, all you could see was the officers embracing McDowell. He ended with saying the HRC should consider reviewing the video. Earnell Brown spoke next stating the most important thing for him is the future. This incident has already happened, what measures can be put in place to ensure this type of incident does not happen again. All it takes is one such action for community relationship to be ruined. Is there any way that the Annie Glidden North (AGN) Taskforce can be tied into this? He noted that the AGN plan is a great plan but there is no funding. He recalled his own experience with DeKalb police stating that they were racial profiling him. He ended by saying the AGN plan is great for changes, but it is not addressing the individuals selling drugs in these areas. There is more crime but no solution. How can we improve the neighborhood without removing people and limiting crime, and lastly, police need to be trained in non-lethal methods and de-escalation methods.

Rukisha Crawford then spoke saying she is tired of dialogue and she is ready for action, she is ready for the community to come together. NIU is scared to integrate into the community because of being targeted by the police. Bessie Chronopoulos agreed with everything everyone had said to this point. She went further by saying it is 2020 but they are still talking about racial issues. We have moved forward as a community, but we need to do a lot more. There needs to be more dialogue and transparency but leadership and residents. She was not familiar with the incident, she believes it was somewhat dealt with, but that it was maybe not enough. She continued by saying that police need to be trained better to deal with these situations. She stated we need to face problems together as a community, and we need to tap into the community to find people to improve these issues. She finished by saying Charvat was correct about the map on the police website and how that was an issue with many residents that it was not working properly. Brown asked how community members can be involved in the AGN Taskforce? Gastiger answered that the plan in place currently is to repair Welsh Park. The Taskforce needs community input to help how they can make it a destination for our entire community. If Brown wants to be a part of it Gastiger could set it up. There are other projects that need help by residents in AGN. Transportation in this neighborhood has improved. But there are many things that can be done by residents to improve these projects. Gastiger continued saying that we need to make it so that AGN feels trust but when they want to make improvements, the city council says there is no funding.

Barrow noted that Dan Kenney's grow facility will help change the neighborhood. Dan is working very hard to acquire the funds. He would like to see more energy put into some of these other projects by residents in the city and county. We need to create a place where the whole community feels drawn to be a part of it. If Brown wants to be involved with social justice, he should get in touch with Kenney. Wilhelmi noted that in order to build community trust, residents need to trust police, officers need more appropriate training for these situations. Gastiger responded by saying the training is ongoing, but it is not as fast as it could be. Actions have been made to address these problems, but it is not comprehensive and a major problem for training is the limited police staffing. Slavenas noted that more people of color are using social services compared to Caucasian individuals. She also stated that the officer that choked McDowell should have been charged with a felony, but the punishment was minimal. The DeKalb police are supposed to be professional, but they are not, and someone needs to take a stand because it seems Petragallo can't do it. Somebody needs to make sure justice is served.

Gastiger pointed out that there is the individual behavior and there is an institutional culture, there needs to be a way to change that. Slavenas suggested if the police are going to arrest African Americans, then why not send an African American police officer? Kapitan commented that there may not have been enough advance notice for police to do this. Slavenas countered by saying if African American police officers are too sparse in DeKalb, then that's a problem. Charvat then asked if the police department shows representation of the community? Brown interjected by stating this is not the issue. Historically black police are worse on black people. It doesn't matter what color of the officer, but the culture of the police department. Change needs to be changed through the city manager. Charvat then asked where the

alderman of the commission was. Brown stated the most important issue is the city leadership. How can the HRC impact city council because that is where the real change comes from. Chronopoulos inserted that we need to take it one step further, change must come from the people. Residents need to hold elected officials accountable but also residents need to support elected officials. Another part of the problem is the housing issue. The city needs to better utilize the housing currently in place. Crawford interjected there needs to be a plan to get people off housing assistance. Apperson replied saying they are working with the DeKalb Tenant Association to address the housing issue. Mayor Jerry Smith commented at the end of the public participation by stating that there are 14 boards and commissions within the city and he has never seen this type of dialogue before at any of the board or commission meetings and hopes that this will continue to happen. He then said he needed to leave due to other obligations, but he was going to make sure the city council will be informed of these issues and that they would be addressed.

E. OLD BUSINESS

1. Police-Community Relations

Assistant City Manager Raymond Munch spoke on behalf of Interim Police Chief Petragallo, stating that Petragallo sends his regards, but he had another meeting he had to attend. He has been meeting with Joe Mitchell and Nikitha Ballari to continue the dialogue. Ballari appreciates DeKalb Police taking this issue seriously but wants the conversation to continue. There needs to be a community review of policies in place. They need to look at what already exists and see what to have a dialogue about. Ballari and Petragallo will meet next week about policy review. They will also consider joint adoption of the NAACP shared principles.

Munch continued stating that a goal for the police department in 2020 is a pilot program for body cameras. Within the next few weeks body cameras will be worn by a few officers to test out the body cameras. This brand of body camera will be piloted for 90 days. The police department will then receive new cameras to pilot to gauge which cameras the department prefers. The goal is to have a permanent solution for the body cameras by 2021. The police department is currently looking into the costs and the amount of data they will need to store.

Munch ended Petragallo's announcements with the citizen police academy. He stated that the police department will invite residents once or twice a week and show them how police work, policies, and procedures are operated. DeKalb ran the citizen police academy many years ago, but it was abandoned probably because of staffing and cost, but now that is not so much an issue. They will be taking applicants for this program. Petragallo will be at next meeting.

Gastier stated that the public participation that evening voiced that the penalty of the officer in the McDowell incident was lenient, what authority does Petragallo have in the decision of the punishment made? Munch answered that it is a union issue. Disciplinary action is set in police officers union contract. City management must investigate similar cases and examine what the proper punishment may be for comparable situations and cities. Gastiger reiterated community members voiced that the punishment was too lenient. Barrow mentioned the tasing of McDowell and asked who does this fall on? Munch answered DeKalb County. Barrow then asked if this matter is out of our jurisdiction, and Munch answered yes. Barrow then asked how does a split investigation work? Munch answered that the county officer was there because the area is known as an area where individuals sell narcotics. He went further and explained that the DeKalb supervisor would have lead over the county officer, but the DeKalb police have no authority to give a punishment. Apperson asserted that it would be a conflict of interest between departments. Kapitan stated that there was no questioning by the sheriff department. There was no verbal consultation, the officer just took the action. Barrow then said that the county officer was within the

regulations. It was deemed a safe way to deescalate the situation through the policies. Charvat then noted that Petragallo reports to the city manager, and the city manager reports to the city council, he then asked if the city council can counter with an alternative punishment? Munch answered that the city council cannot put out a punishment for the officer. Charvat offered that the commission should further look at comparable situations to make a different decision.

Apperson mentioned there needs to be a change in the housing code for property managers. King stated what is sad is that it does not stop, it is continuing. Black lives continue to be impacted by the racism in the community. Racism happens across the country. It is humiliating for black men to feel fear in the community they live in. She will be happy when people can come to terms and come together. There needs to be changes by individuals in the community. Barrow talked about living on N. Sixth St and that it is a mixed neighborhood. One of his neighbors bought property to repair, but the neighbor made the comment that he was protecting the neighborhood from outside people. He said that you still find people in the community that think in this way, that there is still racism in the community. He ended saying that this seems to be a cultural issue. King mentioned that white flight is real.

Apperson stated that they need to communicate these concerns to the police department. He continued saying that maybe he can sit down and chat with Petragallo and summarize the comments. The commission needs to start in an obvious way. As Joe (Gastiger) brought up, it is frustrating that the city council did not approve funding for diversity training. The purpose has been raised again, so maybe now there could be some funding for this training. Residents do not feel empowered in the apartments they live in, they feel scared to address their issues with their landlord. Apperson stated that Jacob from the DeKalb Tenant Association said that tenants need more power for these recurring problems from the property they rent. Even if they do bring these problems up, there is no response from the property manager. Apperson then said this moves into the next agenda item.

2. Municipal Code, Chapter 10, Landlord-Tenant Regulations Review

Apperson began by saying that there are documents to provide residents who are tenants assistance such as the ability to have appliances in their apartments repaired. He also noted that the state policy needs to be improved in these regards. Gilbert recommended making committee for this action Apperson agreed with Gilbert on a committee of two to look over the housing assistance policies. Gilbert agreed to be on the committee. Apperson asked if another member would like to volunteer, but he would do it if no one else wanted to. The small committee would set up a time to begin to examine the policies. Franklin noted that the committee needs to make the housing code clearer.

Gilbert asked about the process of hiring a new police chief. Munch answered that the application process is open. The initial application period will close soon, but the period can be extended. The city manager is directing the hiring process. The hiring process will include some outside involvement, there may also be panel interviews consisting of the public. The public will have a voice in the hiring of the new police chief. Barrow mentioned he was on the hiring panel for Gene Lowry, he continued saying he thinks it is very valuable to have public input.

3. Census Update

Management Intern Adam Grubbs talked about the ways the DeKalb Complete Count Committee is advertising for the Census such as radio, newspaper, social media, ect. He also talked about Census completion events they would be hosting. Munch stated that city staff are hoping everyone receives awareness about the Census. The events will have access to wireless tablets.

Gastiger mentioned that he has been working with a nonprofit organization called The Farmworker and Landscaper Advocacy Project (F.L.A.P.), this organization provides legal help to farm workers and prepares visas for undocumented people. First Congressional United Church of Christ plans on inviting F.L.A.P. to a service in late October.

Chronopoulos mentioned the committee should put someone else on the housing assistance policy committee from the public. She suggested the committee consider putting Brown on the committee, he seems interested in the community, it would be a good experience for him. Apperson responded saying that he had already considered that but was thinking about Jacob from the DeKalb Tenants Association.

Barrow told the committee that his family is in the process of trying to buy a home in Texas He wanted to let everyone know it was a pleasure to work with them and also he will be resigning from the commission. He said he would let the Mayor know.

F. NEW BUSINESS

None.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m. Motion by Barrow, seconded by Gastiger. Motion approved by voice vote.

Adam Grubbs, Management Intern

Minutes approved by the Human Relations Commission on: